

Buying a Horse Property



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Very important lifestyle decisions

If you are in the very fortunate position of being able to buy your own horse property you have a lot of decisions to make so that you buy the right property, in the right place, for the right price.

Finally, after endless discussions with your other half and the rest of the family, you have persuaded them that what is needed to make everyone's life complete is a house on acreage out in the country where you can all live in perfect harmony with nature. You imagine yourself on a beautiful horse property, looking out of the window at your horses grazing peacefully on the lovely pasture, your partner, at one with the land on the tractor, your children playing safely in the garden away from busy roads. Just beyond the children, the family dog is playfully rounding up the chickens...

Equine utopia is what most horse owners dream about.



The flip side of this vision is that you look out of the window at your horses on bare, overgrazed pasture, trying to decide if you have the time, energy or motivation to transport one of them somewhere safe to ride (because you nearly had an accident the last time you rode out of your front gate). Your partner is trying in vain to repair the tractor after another long, hard week at work and you are wondering if they will also have the enthusiasm to repair some fences. Your children, who are bored of playing with one another, miss their school mates and are waiting for the family taxi (you) to take them to visit their friends, a long drive away; meanwhile the dog has killed another chicken. It doesn't sound so idyllic now does it?

Most horse owners dream about having their horses at home where they can see them out of the window. But things do not always go to plan! A property needs to be managed sustainably otherwise it will very quickly degrade.



But the good news is that the first vision is very achievable if you take the time and due diligence in choosing the right property, in the right place, for the right price. If you know what to look for and what

to avoid, you will save yourself (and your family) a lot of potential heartache, not to mention expense.

The most common mistakes that people make when buying a horse property include:

- Failing to thoroughly check out access to riding areas, tracks or trails etc. This is very important if you plan to ride off the property.
- Failing to check out the availability of local horse services i.e. equine vets, farriers or trimmers, hay, feed suppliers etc.
- Failing to find out zoning and other regulations for the area in which the property is situated.

Make sure you check out the availability of local horse services in the area that you are thinking of buying. You never know when you may need a vet or other equine professional.



- Failing to thoroughly check out the quality and availability of water supply to the property.
- Failing to check out the local area for potential problems, for example, a commercial chicken farm nearby or a new proposal for a quarry etc.
- Underestimating the effect that living in a rural area will have on the rest of the family, including underestimating the impact of extra travel time to work or school etc.
- Underestimating the time, money and effort required to upkeep a rural property.
- Getting carried away with the horse facilities on a potential property only to find that they are not suitable after purchase.

Some people underestimate how much time, money and effort it will take to upkeep a rural property.



The previous points and many others are covered in this book so that you will be aware of them and will be able to make a much more informed decision. The old saying 'buy in haste, repent at leisure' is very appropriate when buying a horse property, so time spent at this stage is time well spent.

Make sure you think carefully about exactly what sort of property you want/need because changing your mind will not be an option once you have bought it.



Firstly there are some essential questions to ask yourself *and* the rest of the family because there are some very important lifestyle decisions to make. Spend time at this stage thinking about what type of property you want, where you want it to be and what you want to do with it.

Roughly speaking people looking to move to a rural area to keep horses fall into one of three groups:

- Families looking to change to a rural lifestyle. In this case numerous horse facilities may not be too important but proximity to schools and/or the ability to commute to work usually is.
- More serious enthusiasts who are looking to increase their involvement but still work outside the horse industry. This group is probably the largest group and they are usually looking to end up with various horse facilities *and* proximity to schools and/or the ability to commute to work.

You need to think about those requirements necessary for the specific lifestyle you have in mind.



- Professional horse people who know what they need to run a horse business. This group needs specific facilities (or the ability to build them) and may also need staff facilities, access for large vehicles

etc. A further complication may be that some members of the family still need good proximity to schools and/or the ability to commute to work.

The needs of other family members are very important when thinking about moving. A very common scenario is for families to move out to acreage and then return to suburbia in the future because certain family members are not happy living a long way out.

Some of the questions to ask yourself and the family might include the following:

- How far can you and your partner realistically afford to live from your work places (if one or both of you will still be carrying on working) and which regions can you actually afford to live in without making too many compromises in other areas of your lives?
- How far away from suburbia or a town or city will the rest of the family be happy to live? Do the areas that you are considering have access to schools, shops, leisure and entertainment facilities?
- Is a larger area of land or a larger house the priority? If you want both then obviously this will cost more and/or you may need to even live further out in the country.
- How many horses or other animals are you planning to keep? More animals mean more land and again either a larger price tag or a more remote situation.

- What is the acceptable distance from good riding areas and proximity to a pony club and/or adult riding club?

Before you start looking at properties for sale, discuss these issues with your partner and the rest of the family. You can now start to formulate your 'wish list'. Near the end of this book there is a general check list that you can take with you when you go to visit properties for sale; add your personal 'wish list' to this. You should find that you add more points as you go through this book - along with any features that you would class as 'absolutely not'.

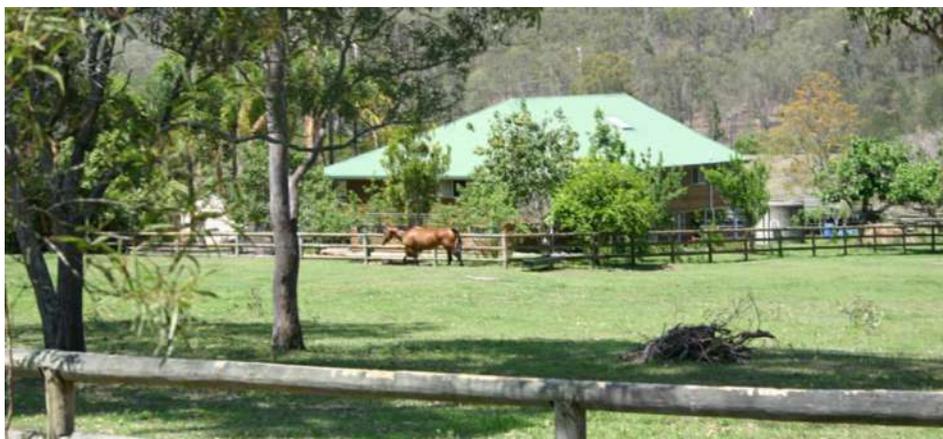
Compromise will become an important word in your vocabulary because invariably there will be compromises to be made on your ideal property. Just which compromises you are prepared to accept will be crucial in enabling you to find a property that ultimately meets your needs, those of your family and your horse pursuits.



Is a horse property a good investment?

Buying a horse property is probably going to be the largest investment you will ever make so you need to be sure it is a good one. Due to a horse property usually costing more than a suburban property it can take longer to sell if you ever decide to move again (there are usually less buyers available for a more expensive property). However, if you buy a good property in the first place there should be good demand, even when the market is moving slowly. It will at least have a competitive advantage compared to properties that have serious flaws. Equestrian pursuits are currently on the rise in most of the developed and developing world so for now at least, there is great demand for horse properties in many countries.

A horse property is usually a very good investment as long as you buy a good property in the first place, or at least one that has potential.



Renting a horse property is also an option for people who want to move to acreage but cannot afford a high price tag. If you are able to afford (or already own) a property in the suburbs consider renting that out and renting a horse property instead (renting a horse property can be *relatively* cheaper than paying a mortgage on it). This way you still keep your foot on the property ladder, without the higher mortgage payments. If you are planning to run a business on or from the property you need to check if there are any tax incentives verses buying (or vice versa).

Only you can decide if buying a horse property will be a good investment for the future. The more research you do before you buy, the more likely you will buy wisely.



Speak to your accountant about this if you are planning to or already run a business from home. There are many advantages to renting before or instead of buying. It gives you and your family a chance to try an area (or indeed a lifestyle) before becoming too committed. The property that you are renting may even come up for

sale during your rental period and if you like it and are ready to buy you are in an ideal position to purchase the property.

Aim to 'buy smart' by buying a property that is going to be relatively easy to run otherwise you will spend all of your precious time on just maintenance rather than doing what you love. In fact some people move *back* to boarding (agisting or keeping at livery) their horses after owning a horse property simply because of the time it takes to maintain a property. So in this example a horse property was not a good investment.

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Finding a horse property

Where can you look to find properties for sale? The offices of realtor/real estate (selling) agents are a good place to start. These agents also advertise in newspapers, on the Internet and even in some equestrian magazines. Private sellers (people who manage the sale of their own property without using an agent) also use these forms of advertising. Scour the advertisements and be creative in your approach.

We once found a fabulous property, for private sale, in a tiny classified advertisement tucked away in a rural newspaper. The advertisement only stated that the property was 'suitable for walkers' when in fact it was 70 acres of good grazing land backing onto a large public forest that had access for horse riders! The owners, being unaware of what horse owners see as high priorities, had not known what to point out as one of the property's best features.

The majority of properties that are for sale are already listed with a selling agent, as most people still prefer to use the services of an agent to sell. These agents act as a 'go between' for a buyer and a seller. Agents range enormously in the level of service that they give. If a property is listed with an agent then bear in mind that he/she is working for the seller (because the seller is paying the agent to sell the property for them). It is sometimes possible to find someone who will find a property for you (they may be called a real estate broker or similar).

Some selling agents provide this service but make sure you (and they) are clear about who they are working for (the buyer or the

seller, otherwise there may be a conflict of interest). This is becoming a more popular concept, and can be invaluable if you are looking for something special (such as a horse property as opposed to a simple suburban house) and especially if you are busy or live far away.

Some selling agents specialise in rural properties and some specialise further by selling only horse properties.



Some agents specialise in rural properties (or even horse properties in particular) and can be a wealth of information. But some agents, particularly those that are based on the urban fringe, do not have a good understanding of the issues involved with acreage properties, most of their experience being with houses in suburbia. These agents may encourage you to look at properties that are far from ideal. This can become frustrating, especially if you have to travel a distance to view properties; however you will build

a picture over time of certain areas and their suitability and also certain agents and how to read between the lines of what they tell you.

As already mentioned earlier some properties are listed for private sale by the owner. Private sales can work well as they have advantages for both buyers and sellers. Because there are no agents' fees involved the price of the property may be slightly lower or more negotiable than a property listed with an agent. As a buyer you are able to speak directly with the seller which is important with an acreage property (see the next section **Viewing a horse property**).

You should also put word out among your friends if they live in the area in which you are planning to buy and ask them to tell their friends. They may hear about a property that is about to come up for sale. Finding a property just before it goes on the market can be a big advantage for both parties.

To reduce your chances of making the wrong decision, have a look at as many horse properties as possible, even before you are ready to buy. For example, look out for open days or auctions on properties for sale in the area in which you are interested in (some selling agents do this and some don't). Just looking at properties is a good way of starting to build a picture of what you like or dislike and it is an ideal opportunity to gather ideas on property designs without wasting the agent's time as they have to be there for open days or auctions anyway. If any of your friends own a horse property aim to have a look at that too.

Whenever looking at a property, look with a constructively critical eye. What do you like or dislike? What would you change or do

differently? When talking to people who already own a horse property, ask them if they have any tips and if there is anything they wish they had known before they bought their property.

Where should you start to look at properties for sale? There are various options.



It is a good idea in this initial phase to drive around an area that you may be interested in, as this gives you a feel for the area. If possible visit local riding and/or pony clubs and chat to people while you are there. Local people are often an invaluable resource when looking for a horse property. One of them may even know of a potential property that is about to come up for sale. Shop owners and in particular local horse feed or farm supply store owners are also usually good people to talk to.

People who already live in an area can give you a lot of information that a sales agent might not be able to. For example try to find out how easy it is to get local contractors and horse

professionals in the area. While you are in the area you can call on local selling agents to give them your details and start to build a picture of what is available and the prices of properties for sale etc.

Prior knowledge about an area helps when an agent contacts you about a property for sale. You will already have an idea about where the property is and you may even have passed by it previously. This approach is obviously less viable if you are buying from far away or overseas. In this case, unless the market is moving quickly, it is usually better to rent a property in the area that you are considering before buying in that area (see the previous section ***Is a horse property a good investment?***).

Spend time driving around and getting to know the area that you are considering. This will pay dividends when it comes to making a decision.



The more properties you see at these early stages the better you will become at spotting plus points and potential problems when you start looking in earnest. When you are ready to buy and you do find a property that is for sale you will be able to make a more rapid and informed decision.

By doing your homework first you will be able to refine your search and reject properties at the early stages if they are unsuitable, eventually buying the right property, in the right place, for the right price.



You need to remember that different people value different things; what makes a good horse property depends on an individual's personal preference or viewpoint and indeed what they do with their horses. For example, a person whose chosen sport is dressage may not mind that a property does not have good riding trails nearby (although some dressage riders quite rightly enjoy taking

their horses on trails). Whereas an endurance rider will need to train their horses over distance and varied terrain therefore will usually only consider a property with access to good riding trails. In other cases, while some people are happy to compromise on the house to have better horse facilities, others are not.

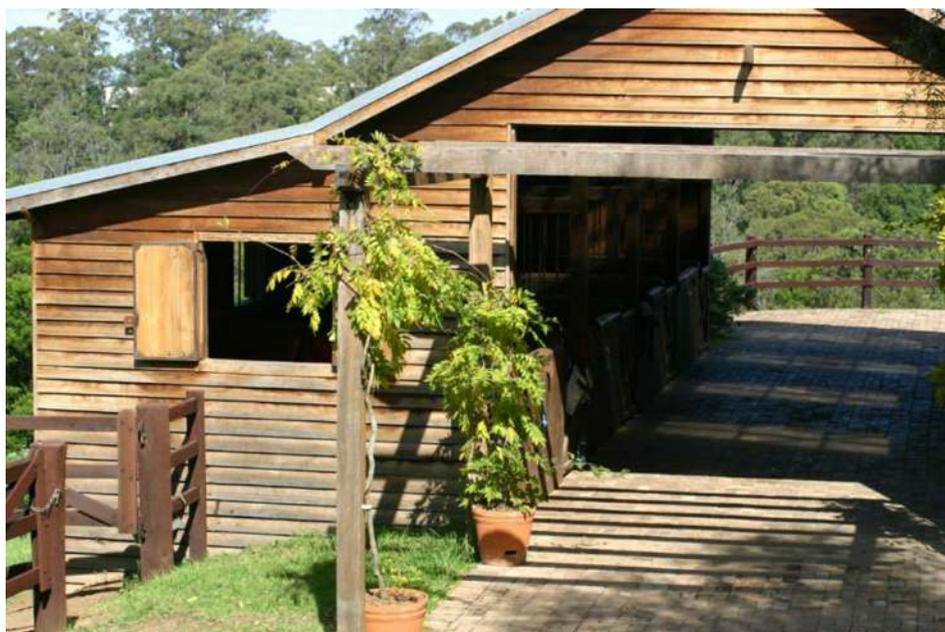
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Viewing a horse property

When you start to look at properties for sale consider getting advice if it is available. This may save you a lot of time, money and effort in the long run. This advice could be in the form of a consultant (quite rare), or even in the form of a more experienced friend; someone who has owned or set up a horse property before. Even advice from a friend who is not 'horsey' can sometimes be useful, especially about some of the more practical aspects of a property, as they are not going to be as influenced by 'nice horse facilities' etc. and may be able to see a property for what it actually is.

Aim to get a second opinion on a property. It is hard not to get carried away by the sight of desirable facilities etc. Even advice from a non-horsey friend can be useful, especially about some of the more practical aspects of a property as they are not going to be as influenced by horse facilities etc.



A horse property can become a sponge for money and time so it is important that you choose wisely before you buy.

When you find a property that you are interested in and might wish to pursue it is important that you arrange to speak to the owner rather than relying on the agent alone to answer your important questions. Keep in mind that the agent is trying to sell a property that they may only have previously seen for an hour or so. A horse property is far more complicated than a simple suburban or town house so you need to ask more questions and only the current owner will be able to answer many of these.

Don't be afraid to make arrangements to revisit a property several times before making a final decision even if, or especially if, you are completely convinced that this is your ideal property.

Take your time if you can before making such an important decision.



The exciting subjects

This section covers the subjects that a horse person is most likely to get excited about. Subjects such as whether to buy an already established horse property or whether to buy a blank canvas. There is so much to think about including property location and size, existing facilities etc.

Your budget

The majority of buyers are looking for roughly the same type of property. Between five to twenty acres of flat to undulating land, good water, a nice house, horse facilities and not too far from a town or city. This makes properties that fit this bill very sought after and therefore relatively expensive.

You need to think carefully about your budget and how this is going to affect your hopes and dreams.



**This is the end of the free section of
Buying a Horse Property**