



Can I have a horse, pleeease!?

Getting a horse or pony can seem quite daunting to the complete beginner. **Jenny Moffett** gives some useful hints and tips.

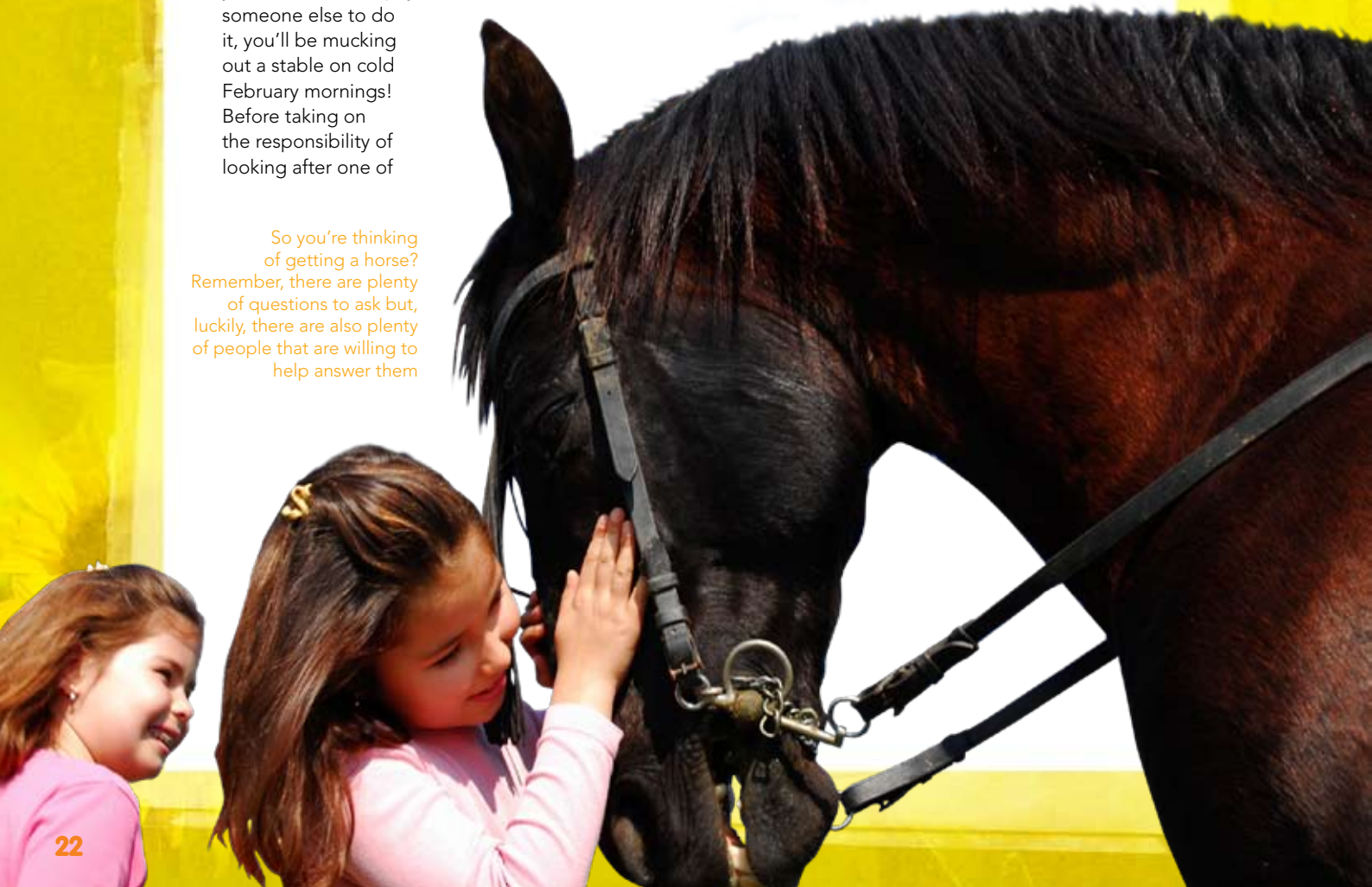
There can't be many parents that haven't heard the plea of "can I have a horse!?" at some stage in their child's life. Perhaps it's a line that you used (or still use!) to torture your own parents with? One thing is for sure, though, is that it's not a question to answer "yes" to lightly. Taking on a horse or a pony requires a substantial level of commitment. Owners not only need enough time and money to look after a horse, they also need a healthy dose of dedication. After all, if you can't afford to pay someone else to do it, you'll be mucking out a stable on cold February mornings! Before taking on the responsibility of looking after one of

our larger four-legged friends, it is wise to check that you're ready, willing and able to meet their needs.

Research

As with most of the big decisions in life, a little research goes a long way. You can glean plenty of the initial information about owning a horse or pony from books and specialist magazines. Things to cover include the feeding, housing

So you're thinking of getting a horse? Remember, there are plenty of questions to ask but, luckily, there are also plenty of people that are willing to help answer them





and day-to-day care of a horse. Also, books can give you advice on riding, grooming and basic veterinary care such as the signs of ill health to watch out for. The internet can also be a useful source of articles and information. Websites like www.horseadvice.com and www.equine-world.co.uk have a variety of articles and forums where you can log on and pose questions to other horse lovers.

Once you have carried out an initial investigation, it's now time to ask a few questions about yourself and your own specific situation. We can break these down into the 'whos?', 'wheres?', 'whens?', 'whats?', 'hows?' and 'whys?':

Who will look after of the horse most of the time? Who will look after the horse if this person is sick or on holiday? Who – including a vet, farrier and groomer – will help you to care for the horse? Who can you ask for advice if you are unsure?

Where will you get your horse from? Where will you keep your horse? Where will you keep him in really bad weather or when you are away? Where will you ride and exercise your horse? Where will you bring your horse if he needs veterinary attention?

When will you find time to spend with your horse – even if you are not feeding or mucking out, he will need regular exercise and company? When will you fit in veterinary visits, especially if you work full-time?

What will you feed your horse? What sort of bedding will you use? What sort of healthcare does he need – injections, worming treatments etc.? What will you need to budget

for each month? What sort of insurance policy do you need for your horse?

How will you look after your horse if your circumstances change?

Why do you want a horse? It's a good idea to ask yourself what you expect to gain from taking on a horse.

Ask for advice

If you know anyone in your area that already has a horse, it's a valuable exercise to sit down and have a chat with them. Often they will have valuable information about the boarding facilities and veterinary practices nearby. Don't be afraid to talk to the professionals too. If you have a riding school or livery stable nearby, they may be able to help you with local information about the prices of food, boarding and veterinary fees. And, even if you don't have a horse or pony, your local equine vet should be able to give you some helpful advice and information.

Potential horse or pony owners, says vet Joe Collins, President of the Federation of European Equine Veterinary Associations, "should look at the levels of knowledge and experience readily



Horse care resources

- Internet**
- www.horseadvice.com
 - www.equine-world.co.uk
 - www.ultimatehorsesite.com
- Books**
- *Complete Horse Riding Manual* by William Micklem (Dorling Kindersley Publishers Ltd)
 - *BHS Complete Horse and Pony Care* by the British Horse Society (Collins)
 - *Horses for Dummies* by Audrey Pavia and Janice Posnikoff (John Wiley & Sons)



available to them – either their own or those of others that they can tap into.” Joe agrees that your local equine vet can be a mine of information on getting and looking after a horse. “Equine practitioners can readily assist a new owner,” he says. “Vets provide support with all aspects of horses’ health and welfare. This can range from an initial opinion as to the suitability of an individual animal, to disease prevention by means of vaccination or worming, from advice on husbandry, housing and feeding, to actual treatment for illness and injury. Many of the problems that new owners experience with horses are preventable: by proper selection of a horse/pony; by careful management of the animal’s environment; by attention to the essentials of horse ownership; and by good advice. Vets are one such source.” Also, it is a good idea to get to know a horse vet in your area before taking ownership of

an animal. If anything does go wrong in those early days, at least you will deal with a friendly face rather than a random name taken from the phone book. “It is very helpful to vet and owner,” explains Joe, “if a relationship has been established before any need arises for assistance with a midnight emergency.”

Financial and legal requirements

Joe has some useful advice for those thinking of getting a horse or pony, as regards the finances. “Not everything is best done the most expensive or sophisticated way [with regard to] feeding, equipment, stabling, transport, farriery etc. Good information, support and planning can make the owning of a horse much more affordable,” he says. “There is no getting away entirely, however, from the need to budget for essential equipment and costs. Keeping horses is much more enjoyable with adequate resources, not only for the horse’s sake but also the pleasure of turning out a well conditioned, well trained, well groomed combination.” There are also legal requirements to take into consideration. “With rare exceptions,” explains Joe, “it is a legal requirement that any horse you own or keep be properly identified. Currently this is by means of the markings in a passport, but soon microchipping is also likely to become compulsory.” Microchips are tiny markers that are injected under the horse’s skin – usually into the neck – that give the horse a unique identity. This type of technology comes into its own when a horse escapes from a field or is stolen – when he is scanned with a barcode reader, his home and owner can be easily traced. “Electronic microchips already represent best practice,” says Joe. “Not only do they allow ownership to be registered and the horse traced if lost or stolen, a database also works to ensure that less scrupulous owners can be held responsible when they seriously neglect their responsibilities to the horses they keep.”

So, when it comes to taking on a horse or pony, there are plenty of tips and advice to take into consideration. Just remind yourself that there are plenty of questions to ask but that, luckily, there are also plenty of people that are willing to help answer them!

KINSEALY PET STORE

- REPTILES 44 Show Enclosers
- FISH 60 show Tanks
- SMALL MAMMALS Outdoor Pens
- BIRDS/PARROTS Outdoor Aviary



Huge range of foods
2kg -15kg
Kennels, carriers,
cushions, vet bed,
wormers,
flea treatments,
shampoos etc

**Gift vouchers
Available**

OPEN HOURS
MON-SAT: 10AM - 6PM
SUN: 12PM - 6PM
THURS: 9AM-7PM
ALSO OPEN
BANK HOLIDAYS
12PM - 6PM

SERVICING ON TANKS & PONDS AVAILABLE

Tel: 8169900 * Fax: 8463540

EMAIL: KINSEALYPETSTORE@YAHOO.COM