



Pre Purchase Exam – 5 stage Vetting

The 5 stage vetting examination consists of 5 stages detailed below set by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and the British Veterinary Association where the horse is examined both at rest and at work and the examination usually lasts for between 2 and 3 hours. A basic 2 stage vetting varies but generally consists of examination along the lines of stages 1 and 2 only of the 5 stage vetting.

Stage 1 - Preliminary Stable Examination

The first stage of the vetting is a preliminary examination with the horse stabled and any abnormal behaviour, signs of unsuitable temperament, etc will be noted. The vet will also note the general condition of the horse and then move onto examining the horse's heart, lungs and eyes.

The vet will then examine the horse outside whilst stood on a level surface to ensure that the horse's weight is distributed evenly and that it stands straight. The vet will examine the horse all over to check the eyes, nostrils, lymph glands, muscular development, spine and limbs and also to check for wounds, swellings, growths, scars, heat, etc.

Once the vet has checked the horse over thoroughly the vet will view the horse at walk on a firm, flat surface to check that the horse shows regularity, suppleness and shows no sign of pain when moving.

Stage 2 - In Hand Examination

During Stage 2 the vet will require that the horse is trotted up on a flat, hard surface viewing the horse from behind, in front and from the side. The vet will look for regular, straight movement without restriction or any indication of lameness or pain.

The vet will also view the horse being turned and moved backwards to further assess the movement of the limbs. The vet may also carry out a flexion test - where each limb is lifted and held for a period of time before being released with the horse immediately being trotted and the vet views whether there is any abnormality in movement as a result of this flexion. The flexion test can be useful in assessing the seriousness of problems already identified and can also expose lameness problems not otherwise found. However, flexion tests can cause lameness in sound horses if applied too vigorously and so any doubt over the results of this part of the test should be discussed fully with the vet once vetting is completed as some unsoundness after a flexion test may not necessarily mean the horse will not be suitable for the intended use.



Stage 3 - Strenuous Exercise

The vet will then watch the horse carrying out strenuous exercise in order to note the horse's respiration and heart rate. The exercise will be carried out on the lunge, or in special circumstances, under saddle. The horse will be required to walk, trot and canter with the vet listening for abnormal sounds and at the end of the exercise the vet will examine the heart and lungs.

Stage 4 - Rest Period

After completing Stage 3 of the vetting the horse will be rested for up to 30 minutes when the heart and lungs will be examined again and blood tests taken if desired.

Stage 5 - Trotting Up and Foot Examination

The horse will be trotted up again in order to note that it continues to move soundly after completing stage 3.

The Vetting Results

The results will record any abnormalities and signs of ill-health and will record their significance based on the use the horse is intended for. In some cases there may be areas in which a problem or potential problem has been identified. However, if the horse is particularly desirable it may be that further tests may be beneficial to establish the seriousness of the problem identified and whether they can easily be treated before deciding whether to buy the horse or not.

It is not the responsibility of the vet to make the decision as to whether to purchase the horse or not, but to provide a professional opinion of the health of the horse with the intended use borne in mind. If there is any doubt as to the suitability of the horse for its intended purpose based on its health it is important to discuss these fully with the vet so that an informed decision on whether to purchase the horse or not can be made.