

LEARNING MADE EASY



3rd Edition

# Horses

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
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of caring for horses

Learn best practices to keep  
your horse safe and healthy

Communicate more  
effectively with your horse

**Audrey Pavia**

Bestselling author of all previous  
editions of *Horses For Dummies*  
with **Janice Posnikoff, DVM**





# Horses

3rd Edition

**by Audrey Pavia  
with Janice Posnikoff, DVM**

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**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand

## Horses For Dummies®<sup>®</sup>, 3rd Edition

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# Introduction

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**W**elcome to the third edition of *Horses For Dummies*, the one and only book you need to get started in the hobby of horses.

Why do you need a book on horses? If you want to ride, can't you just climb up on a horse and hit the trail? What's so complicated about letting a horse carry you around on his back, anyway?

The truth of the matter is that as simple as riding may seem, it's anything but. Here's why: With most other hobbies, your main component is something rather undynamic. For example, the racket and ball you use to play tennis, or the clubs and balls you require for golf. Without human energy to put these pieces into motion, they're nothing but unfeeling, unmoving, inanimate objects.

Horseback riding, on the other hand, relies crucially on something that is hardly passive in the process: the horse. Horses have the ability to operate on their own — they don't need a human to set them in motion. This fact is not only true of the equine body, but it's especially true of the equine mind.

So why *do* you need this book? Because we can help you understand the horse and how it functions, both physically and mentally. Because we can show you how to communicate what you want to a horse so he'll do your bidding. And because we can show you how to care for this amazing creature, which, by the way, needs much more maintenance than your average set of golf clubs!

After you're comfortable with the basics of horsemanship, you'll likely be hooked on horses for good. Then you'll be hungry to explore the world of horses in even greater depth. But to get acquainted with things equine, you've come to the right place. Whether you're contemplating riding a horse for the first time in your life, thinking about adding riding to your list of hobbies, or wondering how to care for your first horse, we're certain this book will be a great help you.

# About This Book

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We've designed the third edition of *Horses For Dummies* to be a useful reference for beginning horse people. You can turn to any section of the book that interests you and begin reading at that point — and not feel lost. You don't have to remember what you read yesterday, and you don't have to read chapters or sections in order. Just find something that interests you, read it, do it, and put the book back on your shelf. We don't expect you to read it from cover to cover.

If *Horses For Dummies* were a building, it would be a department store that you can enter on whatever floor you like. You don't have to walk past that smelly perfume counter to get to the housewares section on the third floor. You just walk into the housewares section.

Of course, you can feel free to read this book from cover to cover to avoid missing one pearl of horse wisdom (or horse sense) that we've painstakingly compiled for you. You won't hear us say nay to that!

We've worked long and hard to bring you what we think is the consummate beginner's reference book on horses, and we hope that you find it as fun to read as we found it to write. We also hope that you take all of our advice and thank us for the rest of eternity for all the equine wisdom we've brought you.

Seriously, though, we've found great joy, comfort, and fulfillment in our personal involvement with horses, and we hope for you the same kind of experience. We're certain that once you dive deep into the ocean of horseness, you'll never try to make it to shore.

By the way, in this book, we refer to horses with the male pronoun (he, his, and him). We understand that horses aren't all male, and we don't prefer male horses to female horses particularly (coauthor Audrey Pavia is actually partial to mares). This convention is merely for readability's sake. We don't call horses "it" (not *our* horses!), and using both sexes ("his or her," "he or she," and so on) makes the text hard to read. So we flipped a coin: It came up heads he.

From time to time in this book, we tell you stuff that may be nice to know, but isn't essential to understanding the topic. In these cases, we place the text in a gray box that we call a sidebar. Don't feel like you have to read these, but they're usually kind of interesting, nonetheless.

# Foolish Assumptions

In this book, we assume that you know a horse when you see one. That's really about all we assume. Well, we do assume that you're interested in these magnificent creatures and that you want to treat them kindly. You may be considering buying a horse or learning how to ride one, or perhaps you're currently a horse owner and/or rider and would like to find out more about these wonderful animals.

We also assume that you're no dummy. You may not be an expert in the horse field, but you're not one to go around pretending that you are. You know that the best way to find out about things is to read up, ask questions of those who've been around the block, and keep your eyes open. We think you're pretty smart; after all, you bought this book, didn't you?

## Icons Used in This Book

As with all the other books in the *For Dummies* series, this book has little icons in the margins that call your attention to specific types of information. Here's an explanation of what each of those icons means:



REMEMBER

This icon appears frequently throughout this book. That's because when it comes to horses, you need to do plenty of remembering. We've placed this icon next to information that we think is important and shouldn't be missed or forgotten.



TIP

This icon alerts you to helpful hints regarding horses, pertaining to their care and handling. If you read the information so highlighted in this book, you'll find your life around horses much easier.



WARNING

When you see this symbol, beware! It indicates something serious to watch out for.

## Beyond the Book

This book comes with a free online Cheat Sheet with lots of useful information that you can access with your smart phone, tablet, or computer. Included on this Cheat Sheet is a huge listing of online equine resources, including breed registries, educational organizations, rescue groups, pet loss hotlines, equine activity organizations, and more. To get the Cheat Sheet, simply go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and type "Horses For Dummies Cheat Sheet" in the Search box.

# Where to Go from Here

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Go wherever you want. You can start at Chapter 1 and read all the way through to the end. Or you can skip here and skip there. Or you can go for a ride.

If you're going to do the skipping around thing, though, can we at least ask you to do us a favor? Before you start jumping from place to place, take a few moments to read through Chapter 2, which gives you insights into the equine mind. These issues are what *every* potential horseperson should know.

Go ahead! Start hoofin' it!

# 1

## **Beginning with Horse Basics**

## **IN THIS PART . . .**

Discovering the basic information you need to know about horses

Understanding how the equine mind works and getting pointers on how to communicate effectively with horses

Getting to know a variety of popular horse breeds and figuring out how to pick the best one for you

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding the complete horse
- » Checking out different breeds
- » Finding the best horse for you
- » Discovering the realities of horse ownership
- » Riding safety and sanely

## Chapter **1**

# Welcome to the World of Horses

It's hard to find a person alive and breathing who doesn't have a strong reaction to horses. Most people love their power and grace; some find them soulful and irresistible; others find them scary and intimidating. Regardless of whether their response to horses is positive or negative, most people can't help but have an opinion about these dramatic creatures.

What is it about horses that elicits such intense reactions in people? The more thoughtful among equiphiles have pondered this for ages. Perhaps their combination of power and grace is what intrigues people. Or their sheer mass and speed may attract others. Some — such as Audrey Pavia, your humble, nonvet coauthor — believe the close connection between the human and equine races is an expression of genetic memory. After all, without the horse, many of our human ancestors would not have survived.

Although people no longer need horses to transport them from place to place, plow their fields, and carry them into war, they still need to understand them. Those of us who have chosen to live with these beautiful animals have an obligation to care for them properly and enjoy them for all they are worth. In this chapter, we introduce you to the wonderful world of horses.

# Looking at a Horse's Build and Mind

You need to understand a horse's body and brain to appreciate what he is all about. In horses, the same as with other creatures, the two are closely linked. Horse people are obsessed with their horses' bodies because a horse's physical structure determines not only his appearance but also his ability to function with a rider.

Horse people have a lingo all their own when describing horses, and knowing this terminology is important for communicating effectively on the topic of horses. Each part of the horse's body has a name to describe it. Knowing the parts of the horse helps you understand and be understood by your horse's veterinarian, farrier (horseshoer), and horsy friends. People in the equine world also use specific language to describe a horse's measurements, colors, markings, and movements.



TIP

Chapter 2 has a diagram showing the parts of the horse. Before you embark on your new hobby, take a look at this diagram and memorize it. You'll be glad you did.

The horse's mind is just as important as his body because the brain controls everything the body does. When you're riding a horse, this reality becomes evident very quickly. Primitive ancestors of today's horses were seen as potential meals by a great many predators, and today's domestic horse has retained that information in his DNA. The consequence is that horses can be flighty, especially when they find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings or faced with an object or situation that makes them uncertain. The motto of just about every horse out there is "Run first, ask questions later." Knowing that motto is extremely important if you choose to sit on the back of one of these half-ton animals.



REMEMBER

Training and experience can override much of the horse's instincts to flee perceived danger, which is why it's so important to ride a horse that has had both — especially when you're a newcomer to horses. It's also imperative that you learn how to ride before you embark on any horseback sojourns, regardless of whether it's on a local trail or through the mountains of Mongolia. Knowing how to handle a horse can mean the difference between a wonderful, relaxing experience and one you'll spend your lifetime trying to forget.

To find out more about how the horse thinks, see Chapter 2.

# Checking Out Various Horse Breeds

Horses, like dogs, come in a wide variety of breeds — more than 300 the world over, in fact. Some breeds have existed for centuries, while others were developed only during the last 20 years or so. Each breed has its own characteristics that make it unique, leaving horse people with a healthy selection of breeds to admire. Knowing a thing or two about the various breeds of horses helps you choose the right horse when the time comes for you to join the ranks of horse owners.

Although most horse breeds were developed in Europe and other parts of the world, a number of breeds are uniquely American. Among these is the world's most populous breed, the American Quarter Horse. In the nearly 70 years since this versatile breed officially was established in the U.S., it has spread to a number of other nations. The second most popular breed in the U.S. is the Paint Horse. A spinoff of the Quarter Horse, the colorful Paint's popularity has shot up to high numbers in the past 15 years.

Other breeds in the top 10 include the Appaloosa, Arabian, Miniature Horse, Morgan, Saddlebred, Standardbred, Tennessee Walking Horse, and Thoroughbred. Each breed has a distinct history and appearance and appeals to a vast number of horse lovers.

For more details on the top 10 breeds, see Chapter 3. That same chapter also provides information on some lesser-kept breeds such as the Peruvian Paso, the Friesian, the warmblood, and draft-horse and pony breeds.

# Making a Match with the Perfect Horse

The choice you make in a horse to ride can make a huge difference in whether you come to love this hobby or dislike it. Choosing a horse is much like choosing a mate: If you pick the wrong one, you won't be happy.

## Asking a few questions before you buy

Before you embark on the tremendous responsibility of horse ownership, make certain owning a horse is really what you want. Ask yourself some questions before you take the plunge:

- » Why do I want a horse?
- » Do I have the time and money for a horse?

- » How do I want to ride (English, Western, shows, on trail), and how do I want to learn the riding style of my choice?
- » Who will take care of the horse on a daily basis?
- » Might leasing be a better option than buying?

For more guidance on what to ask yourself and on other issues to consider before buying a horse, see Chapter 4.

## Locating the right horse for you



REMEMBER

The single most crucial aspect to finding the right horse is getting the help of someone with experience. Without expert help, as a novice horse person, you're likely to make the wrong decisions about which horse is best suited for you.

Ideally, the person who helps you with your decision will be a *horse trainer*, someone who makes a living riding, training, and evaluating horses. If you can't find a horse trainer to help you, a riding instructor, an equine veterinarian, a farrier, or someone with years of horse experience under his or her belt is your best bet.

You'll find available horses in any number of outlets, including:

- » Classified ads from individuals in equine publications
- » On the Internet
- » Through trainers and breeders
- » At horse shows
- » Via horse adoption groups

For more details about shopping for a horse, see Chapter 5.

## Purchasing horse supplies

After you purchase your own horse, you'll need all the accoutrements to go with him. There is no shortage of stuff out there that you can buy for your horse. For starters, you'll need these basics:

- » Saddle and pad
- » Bridle (the headgear used on a horse during riding)

- »» Halter and lead rope (which provide control when you're working with your horse on the ground)
- »» Grooming supplies

You'll also need some stuff for yourself:

- »» Riding boots or shoes
- »» Riding pants and shirt
- »» A helmet (if you're smart and want to continue to be that way)

All these items can be purchased in your local tack and feed store, through mail-order catalogs or over the Internet, among other options. For more details on these and other items for you and your horse, see Chapter 6.

## Housing your horse

Where to keep your horse is a primary concern. If you're like thousands of horse owners around the country who live in an urban or suburban community, a boarding stable is your only option. Choosing the right boarding stable for your horse is important because the place where he's kept will determine his health, his safety, and how much you enjoy of him.

When considering a boarding stable, look for the following:

- »» Safe, sturdy accommodations
- »» Clean, safe surroundings
- »» Security
- »» Water and quality feed
- »» Good care
- »» Health requirements
- »» Riding facilities
- »» Tack storage
- »» Professional demeanor

But if you live on property zoned for horses and have or plan to build horse facilities, the answer is easy: You can keep your horse at home. You have the choice of housing your horse outdoors or indoors. In either case, you need to provide him

with a safe enclosure and shelter from the elements. You're also responsible for feeding him every day and cleaning up after him.



TIP

If you don't have room on your property for a riding arena, you need access to a community arena or one belonging to a neighbor. Finding room to ride is especially important when you're new to horses because you need a place to ride where you feel safe and comfortable before you head out onto the trail.

For more details about boarding your horse or keeping him at home, see Chapter 7.

## Taking Great Care of Your Horse

Cowboys in the movies make horse care look easy. After a long gallop, they jump off their horses and leave them standing in the street while they head to the saloon for some refreshments. In reality, horses need plenty of care to stay happy and healthy, and as a horse owner, you're the one to provide it.

### Handling daily tasks

If you keep your horse at home, you'll be caring for him on a daily basis. Your most important duties include feeding, providing fresh water, and picking up manure.



TIP

If your horse is in a large pasture, he won't need to get out for exercise every day. But if he is confined to a stall or paddock, part of your job will be to ride him, walk him, or provide him with exercise in some other way, preferably on a daily basis.

Chapter 8 provides intricate details on caring for your horse's daily needs.

### Grooming your horse

An important part of horse care is grooming. A well-groomed horse looks good and usually feels good too. Grooming gives you a chance to spend quality time with your horse and keep an eye on his body for any changes that can indicate disease.

Grooming involves both caring for your horse's body and managing his mane and tail. Hoof care is an essential part of grooming that requires you to clean out your horse's feet on a daily basis. In addition, it's a good idea to bathe your horse on a regular basis. You may also want to clip his hair during the winter if you live in a warm climate.

For details about how to groom your horse, see Chapter 9.

## Treating your horse's illnesses

Despite their size and imposing presence, horses are fragile creatures that often become sick or injured. Preventive care is important for horses, and it includes:

- » Routine vaccinations against a variety of equine ailments
- » Deworming to get rid of harmful parasites
- » Regular dental care to ensure that teeth are in good health
- » Proper hoof care
- » Quality feed and fresh water
- » Regular exercise

As a horse owner, your job is being able to recognize signs of illness in your horse and calling a vet immediately whenever your horse is ill. Some signs that you need to call the vet include:

- » Diarrhea
- » Inability to stand
- » Indications of pain in your horse's abdomen, known as colic
- » Labored breathing
- » Limping (known as lameness)
- » Refusal to eat
- » Straining to urinate or defecate
- » Swollen, painful eyes

For more information on preventive care for your horse, see Chapter 10. For details on common equine ailments, see Chapter 11.

## Knowing when to part with your horse

It may be hard to imagine now, but the time may come when you want or need to say goodbye to your horse. You may need to part ways because you've outgrown him and need a mount more suited to your current skill level, because your financial situation has changed and you can no longer afford him, or (worse yet) because he has a terminal illness that can't be cured.



If you need to sell your horse, do it in a way that ensures he will have a good home, and won't end up in the slaughterhouse — a fate that befalls many unwanted horses. Some of your options for your horse include

- » Selling
- » Leasing
- » Donating to a program
- » Gifting to a family member
- » Retiring

If your horse is sick, in pain, and can no longer be helped by veterinary medicine, consider euthanasia. This humane way of ending a horse's life is the kindest thing you can do for your old friend.

For more details on giving up your horse, see Chapter 12.

## Riding Your Horse Safely and Easily

Horse handling is a skill perfected with training and experience. Receiving the right kind of training and instruction from a qualified expert is important for getting the most from the time you spend with horses. After you have some knowledge under your belt, you can safely handle your horse in a variety of situations. Remember that horses are large animals, and it takes some know-how to deal with them.

### Working with your horse from the ground

Before you can ride your horse, you need to handle him from the ground. Given that your horse outweighs you by something like 10 times, it's a good idea to know how to properly deal with him when you're standing at his side.

If you pay close attention to the info we provide about buying a horse in Chapter 5, you can acquire an animal that has what horse people call good ground manners. A horse with good ground manners maintains a proper distance from you — doesn't crowd your space — and respects you as the authority when you're leading him or working around him. In turn, you need to know how to handle your horse