

Re-home Responsibly

Making the decision to re-home your ¹horse can be difficult, but the sooner you look into the re-homing options, the better the chances are of securing a positive outcome for you and your horse.

Selling

If your horse is fit and healthy, this may be the most suitable option for you both. There are many responsible people looking to buy a horse, but it is essential to be open and honest about your horse in order to get the best home. Once you have sold your horse, you will have no control over its future, so you need to be comfortable that you have re-homed to the right person.

Most buyers are searching for a straightforward, healthy horse. If you are looking to re-home a horse which is elderly, and/or has behavioural, recurrent health or lameness problems, you should think very carefully, as these horses are at an increased risk of receiving sub-standard care or being passed on from home to home.

Always word adverts carefully, avoiding phrases such as 'reduced for quick sale' or 'free to a good home' as this is unlikely to attract genuine buyers. In order to secure a good home for your horse, it is advisable to:

- Find out as much as possible about the person's level of horse knowledge and previous experience, even before arranging a visit;
- Make sure the person visits your horse in their current environment and does everything they wish to do with them at home;
- Ask for references, perhaps from their vet, farrier or livery yard manager. Follow up the references with a phone call for peace of mind;
- Visit the home beforehand and check its suitability or arrange to drop the horse off.
- Loan prior to selling – this provides a period where both parties can assess whether the decision is right for everyone. It is advisable to have a signed agreement.

Loaning

This can work well if it is carefully arranged. It is important to remember that although another person will be caring for your horse, as the owner, you retain a legal responsibility. There are inevitably risks involved in asking another person to take on caring for your horse, but these risks can be reduced with careful planning. In addition to the practical re-homing steps advised under the selling section, it is also advisable to:

- Look for a local home, as it will be easier to keep in touch with your horse and the loanee;
- Always put a written loan agreement in place to define exactly what is expected of each party, including regular visits. The agreement should be signed by both parties and a copy kept by each;
- Ensure you have a contingency plan should the loan home wish to return your horse. This could happen at any time and you must be prepared to take your horse back or secure another home.

¹ for the purpose of this document all horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids will be referred to as horse

Companion homes

In some cases it may be possible to find a suitable home for a non-ridden companion, but fewer people are willing to take on the expense of a horse they cannot ride. People who are looking for a companion generally seek a horse that is straightforward and requires minimal management and expense. You also need to consider whether this is the right thing for your horse. For example, older horses may find a new home unsettling and stressful, having a negative impact on the horse's welfare. The loaning tips outlined above should still be applied.

Commercial retirement homes

These are generally full livery yards, which cater specifically for elderly or retired horses and can be an expensive option depending upon how the horses are managed. Make sure you research and visit any establishment before placing your horse in their care. It is advisable to have a formal agreement signed by both parties outlining how the arrangement will work.

Equine welfare charities

Most charities are unable to take horses from private owners due to the high number of rescue and neglect cases. Each charity has its own criteria for accepting horses, and most would expect you to sign over ownership to the organisation. Although there are very few spaces at charities, they will be more than happy to discuss options available to you in more detail. Some charities offer rehoming services that involve the horse staying with you and not coming into charity care; they will then work on matching the horse with a suitable owner and home.

When looking for a suitable charity, visit the National Equine Welfare Council website newc.co.uk. Member charities meet NEWC's Standards for Equine-Keeping Organisations, meaning they follow guidelines to ensure the needs of all their horses are met. If you are fortunate enough to be offered a place with a charity, it is important to research and visit the organisation that has made the offer before accepting.

Euthanasia

In some cases, re-homing isn't a responsible or realistic option for the horse. In this situation, having the horse put to sleep may be the kindest thing to do if you can no longer meet their needs. Considering the horse's quality of life is an important factor at this stage, and sometimes the stress of moving, changing routine, etc, can have a big impact on their health and welfare if they are elderly or have health or behavioural issues.

Understandably, many people feel guilty considering this option. However, it is one of the most responsible decisions an owner can make when they cannot safeguard their horse's future. It is important to recognise that euthanasia is not a welfare issue as long as the horse is humanely destroyed; it shouldn't be thought of only as a last resort. It is often better to put a horse down in familiar surroundings rather than to re-home unwisely and have them fall into the wrong hands. Speak to a vet, or one of the NEWC member charities who have dedicated bereavement services and advice which could help support you before, during and after such a difficult situation. More information on end-of-life matters can be found here: nfsc.co.uk/equine-endoflife.

This leaflet has been produced by the member organisations of the
National Equine Welfare Council.

For further advice, please contact the NEWC office at info@newc.co.uk or visit newc.co.uk for details of your local NEWC member.