

Is Pony Ownership for You?

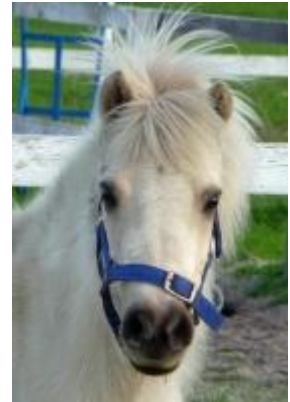
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Second Chance Horse Rescue Inc. actively promotes responsible and compassionate equine ownership practices and care. This fact sheet is provided to assist you with sound and responsible pony ownership information.

Starting from scratch: Is a pony for you?

Ponies can be complicated animals to care for. Owning a pony can be the most rewarding experience for yourself and your child but responsible pony care takes a lot of time, effort and expense out of your week. Owning a pony is a big commitment to take on but for those who enjoy the lifestyle it can become the fondest of memories to look back on. To be a responsible pony owner, you must first ask yourself whether pony ownership is suitable for you and your family. Be honest with yourself and decide with your family whether you are all prepared to make the changes necessary to have a pony in your life.



- Do you have time for a pony? Ponies require grooming, feeding, cleaning up after and exercise every day, and you will also need to schedule lessons on pony care (and riding) as there is so much to know. Most competitions and Pony Clubs take up time on weekends and time to prepare for too. (see Choosing An Instructor)
- Do you have sufficient funds to care for a pony? The purchase price of the pony is always the cheapest part. (see our fact sheet on the expenses involved in owning a horse or pony)
- If the pony is to be for your child/children, you will need to ensure the child is supervised by an experienced adult at all times so that the child can be assisted in learning to read the pony's body language, learn how to act safely around their pony and handle the pony safely.
- Do you have sufficient experience to care for a pony? Ponies are complicated animals to own and it takes years to learn to care for them and handle them safely and correctly. You never stop learning about ponies. (see Experience & Safety)
- Do you have sufficient housing to keep a pony? Ponies require safe fencing, shelter and clean fresh water not to mention a clean safe environment and companionship. (see Housing)



Experience & Safety

It takes a lot of experience to care for and handle ponies safely. All children should be supervised when working around or handling ponies. Ponies often weigh around ten times more than your child, and are flight animals with a strong self preservation instinct so potential for accidents is high without sufficient experience in care and handling. Ponies are also highly intelligent and can be quick to take advantage of an inexperienced or nervous handler to turn a situation to suit themselves.

If you are new to ponies, we advise riding and care lessons before taking the plunge. This also gives you the opportunity to see if pony ownership is something you and your child are really keen on once you've had some first-hand experience caring for one under the eye and guidance of a reputable horse person.

To own a pony safely you need to learn about:

The normal vital signs of ponies and how to take them

- Common illnesses and how to prevent them
- Pony body language and behaviour
- How to safely catch, groom, lead, rug and handle your pony
- How to safely and correctly saddle up and unsaddle your pony
- Keeping a pony healthy including vaccinations, hoof care, dental care, diet and housing

On average it takes approximately 3 years of regular (once weekly) care lessons to learn enough about correct and humane care and handling practices to sufficiently provide for a pony. And don't forget that as you learn, your coordination and confidence will get better, which also makes you safer when handling ponies. If your pony is to be for riding, it is very strongly recommended that regular riding lessons with a reputable and experienced instructor are undertaken first and that once a pony is brought into your family you continue on with these lessons just as regularly. This is to ensure that both pony and rider continue to develop in ability and confidence and to ensure that safe and ethical riding practices are maintained.

How To Choose An Instructor

When choosing an instructor to educate you on riding and care, please consider the following points:

- Is the instructor mature-aged and experienced? Many less than reputable riding facilities employ young teenagers (sometimes as young as 13!) to instruct which may save the school money but puts yourself and your child at risk.
- Do the Instructor's own animals look happy and healthy? Do a visit to your prospective Instructor's facility and see if their horses look healthy, of a good weight, bright in themselves, willing to work and have smooth rounded hooves with no cracks, chips or loose nails in them.
- Are the facilities safe? On your visit check to see that the arena is clean and well maintained, that the fences and gates are secure and that there are no young children running around unsupervised or dogs yapping at the ponies heels etc
- Watch a lesson. Do you feel that you would be comfortable in this lesson, that you or your child would learn and enjoy themselves? Do the students look happy with their lesson and do they look as

though they are being taught to ride well? Do you feel you would get along well with this instructor? Do the ponies look willing and healthy? None appear to be limping or misbehaving badly? (all ponies misbehave at some point but rearing, bucking and bolting is not acceptable behaviour for novice riders to be forced to deal with)

- Does the Instructor teach students on their own horses or must students bring a horse? And if you buy a pony, would you be able to bring it for lessons with this instructor?
- Does the Instructor teach pony care and management also?
- Does the school do extra activities for students such as beach trips, schooling shows and opportunities to watch their farrier or dentist at work?
- Does the school require students to purchase their own safety helmets or are these provided for students to borrow?

Many Riding Schools also run holiday camps and some also do part-leases on the school's ponies where the students can 'own' the horse for a day and are made responsible for its care for that time which is also a good opportunity for you to learn more about what is involved in owning a pony.

Once you have visited a couple of schools you will have a fair idea on which one you would like to attend. Even if your child attends Pony Club, it is best to also have lessons in-between rallies as once a month rallies alone are not enough to sufficiently educate your child on riding and keep them developing in ability and confidence.

Don't forget, even Olympic Riders have regular lessons! It is vital for the safety and confidence of your child, not to mention the welfare and happiness of the equine, even if you buy your own pony, that you continue lessons regardless of experience level or age.

It is too easy to develop poor riding habits without realising and a good coach can assist in preventing small problems from arising and becoming large problems! Most 'problems' with horses are caused by the rider/handler.