

By ZOË SMITH

Home sweet home

COULD YOU REHOME A HORSE?

Ted is one of
many World Horse
Welfare ponies
looking for a home

In a survey run by Horse & Hound back in June, over 65% of readers said they would consider rehoming a horse, while 28% said they had already rehomed a horse in the past. It's an encouraging number, especially as charities are reporting a worrying increase in equine welfare cases and the UK horse crisis, which first made headlines back in 2012 and shows little sign of improvement

“ Rehoming a horse is a practical and positive step that horse lovers can take to aid welfare efforts and it can be hugely rewarding. ”

DID YOU KNOW?

Both Kelly Marks and Monty Roberts are patrons of Shy Lowen Sanctuary and Horseworld, and often take part in charity events and fundraisers

In 2017, the RSPCA reported an over 55% increase in horses under their care and their shelters are still at maximum capacity. World Horse Welfare Deputy Chief Executive Tony Tyler says: "We are at saturation point. We've received more calls in the first quarter of 2018 than almost ever before, our farms are all overstocked due to the very high number of horses and ponies in desperate need of help, and the situation is showing little signs of improving." Rehoming a horse is a practical and positive step that horse lovers can take to aid welfare efforts and it can be hugely rewarding. Most importantly, with so many options available from driving ponies to ex-racehorses to promising youngsters, there is a better chance than ever of finding your perfect match.

The benefits of rehoming

Doing a good deed isn't the only reason to consider rehoming. Here are a few of the benefits you might not have considered.

NO HIDDEN AGENDA Unlike purchasing from a dealer whose main incentive for selling a horse is financial, rescue centres have no hidden agenda when it comes to rehoming their horses. They are fully committed to not only finding the right horse for you, but also the right owner for their horses and ponies. After all, charities know all too well the problems that can face horses who don't find the right home. Bernadette Langfield, founder of Shy Lowen Horse and Pony Sanctuary, says: "If somebody genuinely wants to share their life with a horse or horses, then rescue horses from reputable charities are a great way to find your best friend."

AN HONEST ASSESSMENT With access to top-notch veterinary care, behaviourists, trainers, and round-the-clock care, rescue horses are often some of the best looked after horses you'll meet. Most importantly, it's within the charity's interest to tell you of any potential health or behavioural issues up front. World Horse Welfare states: "All of our horses are fully MOT'd and come with health records, microchip and passport. You also get a frank and fair assessment of the ability and temperament of the horse." There are no carefully worded sales adverts here and you won't be left wondering what 'a bit cheeky' or 'playful' really means!

A SAFETY NET Despite your best intentions, life doesn't always go to plan and it can be a great reassurance to know that there is another option if for any reason, you can no longer care for your horse. Most charities rehome on a foster or loan basis and although the aim is typically to rehome the horse for life, there is always a possibility to return the horse should your circumstances change or your child outgrows their pony.

EXPERT HELP AND ADVICE All reputable charities will offer help and advice to their rehomers in times of need, whether it's recommending a suitable healthcare professional or stepping in to lend a hand when you're struggling. Whether you're a first-time horse owner or a seasoned rider, access to this kind of knowledge and experience is invaluable.

SUPPORTING WELFARE EFFORTS

Rehomers contribute enormously to the work that charities do. Not only do you get to give the horse or pony in question a new start and a loving home, but your actions have a knock-on effect. Rehoming a horse leaves a place for another horse to be taken in by the charity and the rehoming fees go back into the charity, ensuring funding for further rehoming projects.



Philip and Stella

DID YOU KNOW?

September is World Horse Welfare's annual 'Rehome a Horse Month'

A REHOMING SUCCESS STORY

IHRT and MCSP Sue Palmer rehomed a pony from Bransby Horses. "Bransby Stella is a 19-year-old black Shetland mare and I swear she's an angel in disguise! We originally got her for my 5-year-old son Philip to ride and handle from the ground. One of his favourite things was leading her around the field and as long as they were going downhill, so he could run fast enough, she would even canter beside him! He rode her in the school, out hacking, at a show and at a Pony Club rally. She brightened our lives.

I was absolutely gutted when in December last year, our circumstances changed and we could no longer keep her, but again Bransby were wonderful to deal with. Thankfully I was able to find her a new home myself, this time a home for life on a farm with children and another elderly Shetland pony. I promised myself many years ago (after working for a dealer for several years) that I would never sell another horse or pony if I could possibly help it. The security of knowing that Stella will never be sold on, that Bransby will always care for her even if her current home can't, is so important to me, I can't find the words to describe it. I suggest to all my clients who are looking for a horse or pony that they contact the charities first."

Continued overleaf >



Photo courtesy of Sarah Weston

“...rescue horses and ponies can be surprisingly versatile.”

What kind of horses are available for rehoming?

There are many misconceptions about rehoming, including that all rescue horses come with difficult behaviour or emotional baggage, or that the only horses available for rehoming are veteran or companion ponies that are unable to be ridden.

Of course, if you're looking for a dressage superstar with impeccable breeding and a string of gold medals under his belt, a rehoming centre might not be your first choice (although even Charlotte Dujardin took on a rescue pony, Santa, from the RSPCA back in 2014), but that doesn't mean there aren't future winners to be found and rescue horses and ponies can be surprisingly versatile.

✓ CHILDREN'S PONIES Opting to rehome a pony can be an excellent choice for a child's pony, especially if you aren't certain to be able to keep the pony after your child has outgrown him.

✓ NON-RIDDEN HORSES Whether due to an injury, poor conformation, or previous hardships, charities often have a large number of horses that are unsuitable for riding. This is an ideal solution if you're a one-horse owner looking for a companion horse or pony, but not being able to ride doesn't mean that your pony's only job will be as a lawnmower! Non-ridden horses might still be suitable for driving, activities such as Horse Agility, or even as therapy horses. Your chosen charity will be able to advise you exactly what your horse is and isn't capable of doing and the Non Ridden Equine Association UK (www.thenonriddenequineassociationuk.org) offers lots of advice and ideas for groundwork and bonding activities.

✓ YOUNGSTERS More and more, charities are taking in a lot of foals, youngsters, and mares in foal. While traditionally charities would ask that a young horse return to the charity to be started, World Horse Welfare now encourages rehomers with suitable experience to continue the youngster's education themselves. Carys from World

Horse Welfare tells me: “We still have lots and lots of youngsters looking for homes where they can continue their education and learn about the world”.

✓ EX-RACEHORSES Rehoming an off-the-track thoroughbred (OTTB) is a popular choice for those seeking a horse with competition potential. OTTBs are often retired young and with suitable retraining many have gone on to be successful in eventing, showjumping, and other disciplines. If you're looking to rehome a racehorse, it's a good idea to contact a charity that specialises in OTRB rehabilitation and retraining – TRC, HEROS and World Horse Welfare are good places to start.

TOP TIP

Bernadette from Shy Lowen stresses the importance of finding the perfect match between horse and owner, saying: “It's a bit like a dating agency!” She advises potential rehomers to be completely honest about what they are looking for. “Sometimes people water down what they want because they think as it is a rescue horse there will be something ‘wrong’ with them. So even though they want a horse for eventing, they'll say they want a happy hacker. We have horses who have potential in various disciplines, so don't be afraid to ask!”

HOW INTELLIGENT HORSEMANSHIP IS HELPING TO RETRAIN RESCUES



Photo courtesy of HorseWorld

Jodi Thomas, Equine Training & Rehoming Coordinator at HorseWorld

“Here at HorseWorld, the team has had, and continues to have, a lot of training in Intelligent Horsemanship. We find IH methods hugely beneficial when building relationships between horses and their trainers, especially when it comes to rescue horses and ponies that perhaps haven't had the best start in life, and often already have bad perceptions of human interaction.

“Every rescue horse and pony which comes here has a different story, and unfortunately, they quite often suffer in numerous ways; subsequent rehabilitation and training is therefore specific to their individual needs. We find that the range of tools available within IH methods can be applied to all cases; as the horse or pony's welfare and well-being improves, IH training allows us to build a solid foundation, before then finding them a loving new home.”

The Rehoming Process

With talk of loan contracts, home visits, and riding assessments, rehoming a horse can sound a bit intimidating, and the thought of being judged on your riding skills or horse care knowledge can make even the most seasoned professionals nervous. To put your mind at ease, here are the answers to your most burning questions.

i HOW DO I START THE REHOMING PROCESS? Many charities now provide details of horses available for rehoming on their websites and allow you to apply online. Alternatively, you can get in touch by phone or email. Expect to be asked questions such as your height/weight (for a ridden horse), your riding level and experience, whether you have previously owned a horse, what kind of horse or pony you are looking for, and what kind of activities you plan to do together. Remember, these questions are to help find a suitable match, not to judge you or test your knowledge. Just answer as honestly as possible.

i WHAT ASSESSMENTS DO I HAVE TO UNDERTAKE? Charities need to feel confident that you can provide a suitable living environment and meet your horse's individual needs. This will typically include a visit to the yard or place where you plan to keep your horse. They may ask you simple questions regarding who will look after the horse on a day-to-day basis. It's not a test, but they want to

TOP TIP

Don't just turn up at a charity or rehoming centre unannounced – it can be unsettling for new rescues to have strangers coming and going. If you want to visit the charity before you consider rehoming, give them a call to arrange a supervised visit or attend one of the charity open days or fundraisers

ensure you understand the time, costs, and responsibilities that go into caring for a horse.

If you're rehoming a ridden horse, you will need to undergo a riding assessment, but again, don't worry – they aren't looking to see if you can ride a Grand Prix dressage test, they are simply looking to see that you and your chosen horse are a safe and suitable match for each other. Other assessments may vary depending on the needs of the horse, for example, HorseWorld states that "Any potential loaner looking to take on a youngster will need to show they are competent by handling them, and also tacking up and doing some ground work with a more established horse".

1 WHEN CAN I TAKE MY HORSE HOME?

World Horse Welfare advises that the rehoming process typically takes around a month, although it may take longer if multiple visits or riding assessments are required, or you are trying multiple horses. Once you've completed all the assessments, you will be required to sign the rehoming agreement, and pay any rehoming or membership fees (this could be anything from £20 to £400, but it will be a fee agreed upon in advance and there won't be any hidden extras). Then you can take your horse or pony to their new home!

1 WHAT AM I RESPONSIBLE FOR?

Most charities rehome on a permanent loan contract, which basically means that the horse still belongs to the charity, while you will be responsible for their day-to-day care, including vet, farrier, worming, and transport fees. Most loan agreements have simple rules in place, for example, that you must keep vaccinations up to date, while some may have specific additions, such as the kinds of activities that a non-ridden pony might take part in. Unless your contract specifically states that the rehoming is temporary (for example, in the case of a youngster returning to the centre for training), your horse will remain with you for life, as long as you uphold your part of the contract.

Shy Lowen's Bernadette explains: "The person is completely responsible for the care and welfare of the horse whilst the agreement is in force. The agreement can be terminated by the person loaning the horse by giving 30 days' notice of their desire to return the horse. The person cannot loan the horse or sell the horse. The agreement would only ever be terminated by Shy Lowen if there were irresolvable concerns for the horse's welfare, and this has only happened occasionally, thankfully."

1 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? Many charities will arrange a follow-up visit or phone call a month or several months in, just to check everything is going to plan and will periodically check in with you. Remember, this is a great chance to get free help and advice on any issues that have arisen, so be honest and upfront about any struggles or questions that you have.

Behind the scenes at SWEP

BY LEANNE ROGER
IHRT BSC



Leanne works with one of the rescue ponies to build confidence and develop new skills

Photo courtesy of Steve Hawken

For the last few months, I've been privileged to work with an equine charity based in Devon. South West Equine Protection (SWEP) have been involved with rescuing, training and rehoming ponies as well as providing breeding management schemes for moorland ponies for many years.

The ponies that end up in the care of SWEP come from a variety of backgrounds and before finding suitable homes, the ponies undergo training in accordance with their personal needs. The work carried out by the Yard Team at SWEP is fantastic. The team consists of a committed group of volunteers and staff, who all have the welfare of the ponies at the heart of everything they do. The ponies are loved and well cared for, and the individual training they receive enables them to have the best chance of finding suitable homes; either as companions or ridden ponies – depending on their individual circumstances.

During my first visit to SWEP, we worked with several ponies and looked at handling techniques before working with a few select ponies on specific issues. One pony I worked with had an issue with picking up her feet. She needed her hooves trimmed, but used to throw herself on the ground and was unwilling to allow her legs to be handled. I did a brief session with this mare, demonstrating the tools and techniques I would use to work with this behaviour and incrementally train acceptance. All credit to the yard team who followed the advice I gave and just a few weeks later, this mare's behaviour was totally different, in a positive way!

On my most recent visit to SWEP, we focused on exercises that will prepare ponies for loading. We used a variety of exercises that encourage ponies to walk over unfamiliar surfaces, walk between narrow spaces, and walk under a 'roof' before combining all the exercises together and eventually going to the lorry to load successfully. We discussed how to work with different types of transport (rear loading, side loading, etc) and how the training needs to be consistent and carried out in a calm manner, praising the ponies for giving everything a try.

I'm thrilled to be invited to work with SWEP; offering advice and training techniques that are being used to change ponies' lives, but the ultimate reward for me is seeing the ponies' behaviour change due to the SWEP team giving each pony the chance they deserve.

If you are interested in offering a home to one of these deserving ponies, contact Becky Treeby, (Equine Welfare Officer) at welfare@swep.org.uk. There are other ways that you can help support the charity including volunteering, fundraising and raising awareness. Anything you can do to help will be greatly appreciated!

OUR RECOMMENDED CHARITIES

There are dozens of reputable charities around the UK, but here are those that I spoke to for this article:

• **SHY LOWEN**
family-run horse and pony sanctuary based in Liverpool www.shylowen.com

• **HORSEWORLD**
the leading equine charity in the southwest www.horseworld.org.uk

• **BRANSBY HORSES**
one of the UK's largest equine welfare charities, based in Lincolnshire bransbyhorses.co.uk

• **WORLD HORSE WELFARE**
The UK's largest rehoming charity, with four Rescue and Rehoming Centres around the country www.worldhorsewelfare.org