



How To Sell Your Horse

By Brett Shear-Heyman

Courtney riding Cassie's Shot at the Preliminary level.

Cooper spoke of selling horses with confidence as she shared her expertise. The success, according to Cooper, starts with good advertising. She was not just speaking about good exposure and volume in advertising, but more importantly realism and honesty. "When writing an ad, for the Internet, be direct about what your horse is and is not," Cooper said. While potential is exciting and important, advertise your horse for exactly what its talents are at that time, but if you think your horse has upper level potential, don't be afraid to say so.

In order to accurately assess your horse for his personal ad, Cooper suggests tapping into community resources. "Get another person to watch and evaluate your horse so you are not misguided when writing your ad," she said. It could be a respected friend, instructor or other professional.

Many sellers make videos and use photographs to help advertise their horses and while they are useful tools, Cooper has advice: If you make a video, it need not be ten minutes long and more often than not you can post it on websites like Youtube or on your sales site. "I have dealt with customers who wanted the conformation shot, the walking towards and away from the camera, etc, but unless the horse is extremely expensive or the customer is coming from a very long way

Buying and selling horses is a complicated aspect of the industry that every member of the community experiences at some point. There are agents, buyers, sellers, owners, investors, riders and parents involved; all of whom have different interests. But despite all the frustrations there are successes; and those are the stories to be told, and methods to live by when it comes to selling your horse. Since moving to southeastern Pennsylvania in 1996, Courtney Cooper, an upper level event rider, has carved out a niche for herself in the industry by specializing in consignment and making successful horse and rider matches. Having sold almost 200 horses in the past 6 years, Cooper has many tips and words of wisdom to share from her experiences.

away, that is extensive and often unnecessary," she said. Make a short video with a minimum of flat work. Show lead changes each direction, if that is something you advertise as a skill, and the same goes for jumping or dressage talents. Show what you advertise in a brief exercise. Most importantly Cooper stressed the need for releases from professional photographers and videographers, as well as a need for quality. "Poor quality is more of a liability than an asset."

When a potential buyer contacts you about your horse, Cooper's methods of realistic advertising do not stop. "I like to find out what they are looking for in terms of the basics; age, sex, experience, price, size and potential," Cooper said. While the buyer knows what they are looking for, you know your horses best. Your ad may have given them enough information to make a call or send an email, but Cooper said there is usually more to it than that. "It is important to answer their questions about your horse but make sure you ask your questions as well," she said. "You may be able to save a lot of time and frustration if you can identify a mismatch before someone makes the trip to come see your horse."

Beyond identifying whether the horse is a potential match or not, Cooper mentioned the need for direct contact with a few important individ-

uals. If there is a professional involved Cooper likes to deal with them directly, even if they were not the first contact. "A lot of the time the professional will have a very good and sometimes very different idea of the kind of horse they want for their customer." Cooper said.

If the potential for sale is still present after these conversations, Cooper has guidelines for setting up the trial. Whether the customers have a GPS system, offer to Mapquest your address, or say they know where you live, give them directions. "For my address, Mapquest sends them the wrong way and it puts people in a bad mood when they get lost," she said. "Make sure you are doing everything to get them to your farm safely." Cooper suggests exchanging cell phone numbers and keeping in contact along the way. If they are coming from far away, have some hotel suggestions ready for them.

When the customers are finally coming, Cooper, and every successful sales professional, have a litany of essential tasks for you to complete. Make your barn clean and tidy. The law of first impressions applies, Cooper said, and it has an impact. Not only should the barn be clean, she



said, but the ring should be dragged and jumps or equipment organized or neatly set for the horse you are showing. If your horse is just starting out over fences, don't have the jumps set at 3'6" and then have to adjust them while the customer waits.

Of course, above all, the horse should be turned out properly. "This means he should be washed, dry, clipped, trimmed and mane pulled," she

said. "His saddle pad should be clean and well fitted, the bridle clean and his feet painted." Proper turnout also applies to you, Cooper said. You do not need to go overboard and wear your show clothes but clean clothes without overwhelming graphics, for example, are most professional.

Now that you and your horse are ready to go, Cooper offered several reminders for the actual trial. Have the customers sign a liability release. Even if it is just a copy of the state law, she said. Also, she suggested you ask for an emergency contact, especially if the customer is alone.

Show the horse in his personal bridle. Cooper advises you to be aware that your horse may go differently for other riders. This is another opportunity Cooper suggested for you to utilize your community again. "Have someone else ride your horse before the trial to see how he goes for someone different." If a tack change is needed, then you are aware and can prepare for it before the customers come.

"Talk to the customer about what bridle the

horse goes in." Cooper said. "If he has two bridles, one for flat and one for jumping for example, ask which they want to see." As for the saddle, "I don't mind if they use their own saddle, as long as it fits." But always have an appropriate, and clean, saddle ready to use.

Cooper emphasized the need to preparedness. "Have your ring ready, jumps set, and most importantly, horse prepared," she said. School the course or exercise a day or so before hand because you are undoubtedly going to be nervous, and you want to accurately represent your horse. "I usually ask what they want to see, and if it is reasonable I do it."

If the customers are satisfied with what you show them, Cooper then suggests you ask the customers one last time, if this is still a good horse for them. Some customers will know just from watching if they're going to like the horse or not. Don't be discouraged if they decide not to ride. "There is no need for anyone to sit on a horse just because they made the drive," Cooper said.

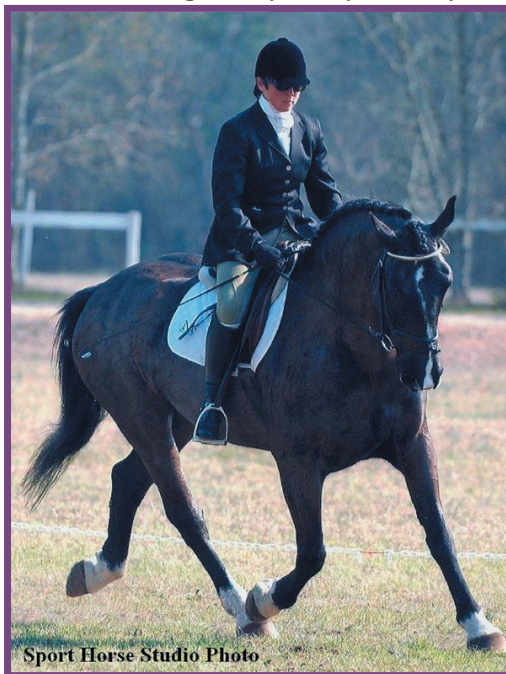
Continued...

If the customer decides to hop on, great! Be sure not to rush them as they adjust themselves and settle into the horse. While your horse might be warmed up, the rider needs time to get comfortable. Trying strange horses can be nerve wracking for many people, so the last thing you want to do is pressure them to do something they are uncomfortable with. Be ready to offer advice and support if asked, but Cooper finds that "the horses have to sell themselves."

If you find this too much to handle, or have not had much success after a period of time, then you should perhaps consider having a professional sell your horse for you. There are people out there who do this for a living and have the contacts and resources to make the process easier for you. Make sure you check their references and the exact services that they offer for what you are paying.

Some horses are easier to sell than others, and not every horse is meant for every rider. A successful match will often make itself, but can take some time to find. Your horse might sell himself to the first person that comes to try him, or the fifteenth person. The better and more honestly you represent your horse, the more likely you are the find that good match.

For more information about Courtney and C Square Farm (Nottingham, Pennsylvania), visit her web site www.csquarefarm.com.



BCE