

# So You Want to Sell a Horse?

## Top Tips From Courtney Cooper

By Brett Shear-Heyman

**W**hen professional upper-level eventer Courtney Cooper moved to southeastern Pennsylvania in 1996, she carved out a niche for herself in the buying and selling industry by specializing in consignment and making successful horse and rider matches. Having sold almost 200 horses in the past six years, Cooper has developed some practical principles and insightful hints to help impress interested buyers and help those horses find the right rider.

Selling horses can be complicated, but every eventer experiences it at some point. There are agents, buyers, sellers, owners, investors, riders, and parents involved, and all of them may have different interests. But despite many frustrations that can occur, there have been many success stories. “Those are the stories and methods to live by when it comes to selling your horse,” says Cooper.

### Honest Advertising

Success, according to Cooper, starts with advertising with integrity. “When writing an ad, be direct about what your horse is and is not,” Cooper said.

While potential is exciting and important, advertise your horse for what his 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 access 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 doesn't need to be ten minutes long and more often than not you can post it on websites like Youtube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)) 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 away, that is extensive and often unnecessary.” she said.

- Keep videos short 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 and other dressage talents.

- Show what you are advertising in a brief exercise.
- Get releases from professional photographers and videographers, and make sure the quality of image is good. “Poor quality is more of a liability than an asset,” Cooper said.

### Ask Questions To Determine A Good Match

When a potential buyer contacts you about your horse, Cooper's methods of realistic advertising still apply. “I like to find out what they are looking for in terms of the basics; age, sex, experience, price, size, and potential,” she 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 own ques-



tions 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 individuals. If there is a professional involved, Cooper likes to deal with him or her directly, even if that professional was not the first contact.

“A lot of the time professionals will have a very good and sometimes very different idea of the kind of horses they want for their customers.” Cooper said.

## Be Professional And Dress The Part

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 or not, offer to “Mapquest” ([www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com)) your address or 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.”
- Exchange phone numbers and keep in contact along the way. If they are coming from far away, have some hotel suggestions ready for them.
- Make your barn clean and tidy. “The law of first impressions applies,” Cooper says, “and it has an impact.”
- 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.
- 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 dressed.”
- Proper turnout also applies to you, Cooper says. You do not need to go overboard and wear your show clothes but clean clothes without overwhelming graphics, for example, are most professional.

## Prepare Your Tack And Ring For The Trial

Now that you and your horse are looking your best, Cooper offered several reminders for the actual trial.

- Have the customers sign a liability

## Resources For Finding Event Horses



USEA Area website classified ads are great, because you can search by your own Area, and most horses offered are already proven event horses.



Contact event trainers in your Area and find out if they or their clients have anything for sale.



Popular search engines such as *DreamHorse.com*, *Equine.com*, and *warmbloods-for-sale.com* often let you choose criteria that fit your specific needs.

Up for a challenge? Consider adopting an ex-racehorse or buying one from a local trainer: check out CANTER ([www.canterusa.org](http://www.canterusa.org)) and ReRun ([www.rerun.org](http://www.rerun.org)) for some options. Just make sure you have the time and skills to re-start a Thoroughbred, and also the knowledge to pick one out at the track.

release. Even if it is just a copy of the state law, she says. Also, she suggests you ask for an emergency contact, especially if the customer is alone.

- Show the horse in his personal bridle and talk to the customer about what bridle the horse goes in. “If he has two bridles, one for flat and one for jumping for example, ask which they want to see,” Cooper suggested.
- Cooper also cautions that your horse may go differently for other riders. This is another opportunity to have a friend or colleague by your side. “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.
- Always have an appropriate and clean saddle ready to use. “I don’t mind if they use their own saddle,” Cooper said, “as long as it fits.”
- “Have your ring ready, jumps set, and most importantly, horse prepared,” Cooper 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 your customer is satisfied with what she sees and feels, Cooper suggests you ask again, “Does this still feel like a good horse for you?”

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.

## Be Patient

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 “the horses have to sell themselves,” Cooper advised.

If you don’t enjoy the nerves that may come along with selling a horse or have not had much success after a period of time, then you may want to consider having a professional sell your horse for you. People who do this for a living have contacts and resources that may make the process easier for you. But make sure you check their references and are sure about the services that they are offering and what you are paying for.

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. But the more honestly you represent your horse, the more likely you are the find that perfect match. 

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