



THE *Savvy Equestrian*

Pre-Flight Checks

How I know a horse is ready for their first ride

Below is my Pre-Flight Check List that I go through before I ride a horse for the first time.

These are items that I require myself to check off with ALL horses I ride for the first time, regardless of their education level and experience.

Like a pilot, inspecting their airplane from the outside in, the purpose of this checklist is to identify any potential problems before they have the potential to turn catastrophic.

I am not one of those awesome bronc riders who doesn't mind riding through the bucks and accepts it as a normal part of starting horses. I also think that bucking and other defensive behaviors are a direct reflection of how the horse feels in relation to the human and the saddle. A bucking or defensive horse always feels tense and lacks understanding. I don't want a horse to feel tight, scared, fearful or overwhelmed during their first ride. Ultimately, they should feel the polar opposite.

Having said that, sometimes you can do all the Prep Work correctly, and some horses can still get emotional and buck. That isn't necessarily a failure on anyone's part. But, I do everything in my power to set myself and my horse up for success, to minimize this ever happening.

So, here are my Pre-Flight Checks that allow me to know that the horse is ready for their first ride:



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- I can jump up and down all around the horse and the horse stays relaxed.
- I can saddle the horse without them moving, untied.
- When I get up on the mounting block or fence, the horse lines up.
- I can rub on, pat the horses back, making noise and the horse stays relaxed next to the mounting block or me sitting on the fence.
- I can shake a plastic flag around and above the horse, also reaching over the back (changing eyes) and the horse is calm and confident.
- I can ask the horse to walk, trot and canter, he does so calmly and without resistance or explosions.
- I can send the horse over a small jump without the horse getting emotional.
- The horse knows how to follow my energy and quit trotting/cantering/whatevering, when I relax.



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The horse should know to respond lightly, and with understanding, to these cues:

- Lateral Flexion – Trust is good, control is better. This is my emergency stop once Under Saddle.
- Indirect Rein – Disengagement of hindquarters. If you can control the hindquarters, you can control the horse.
- Direct Rein – Changes direction and eyes easily, without resistance or hesitation. Needs to know how to follow a feel or rope on his nose.
- Backing Up – Backs up readily when I bounce the lead rope up and down while standing at horse's side. Prepares horse for backing under saddle, a basic life skill.

This system of **Pre-Flight Checks** has worked well for me, as well as other horsemen. I don't run into bucks on the first ride most of the time because of how thorough I am in helping the horse understand.

I hope you horse lovers find this helpful as you get your youngsters ready.

Ashley Dudas

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