

Love your livery yard

Looking for a new home for your horse? Take a look at what to consider before choosing a yard

Moving house and filing for divorce are said to be two of the most stressful life events, and you'll simultaneously suffer forms of both should your livery yard let you – or your horse – down. When it comes to yards, accommodation and being accommodating don't always go hand-in-hand because no two owners will have the same needs. There are no standard requirements and everyone's priorities are different. So, it's really important to find a yard that best aligns with you and your horse's needs. Here's how.

What do you need?

It's important to think about what you need from a livery arrangement and try to be realistic about exactly what you're able to commit to. Basic types of livery include...

- **DIY** A field and possibly a stable is provided on a rental basis
- **assisted DIY** As with DIY, but with staff on hand to provide basic care for your horse for an additional fee, such as turning out, bringing in, mucking out, feeding and changing rugs
- **part** This might include all basic care being taken care of morning/evening only, or it could include everything except riding. Some yards offer five- or seven-day options
- **full** All care is provided 24/7 for your horse according to the yard regime, usually including exercise if needed
- **training, schooling or competition** Usually on a full livery basis, with the added advantage of your horse being trained, schooled or competed on your behalf
- **rehabilitation or retirement** Services and included care can vary, but are usually tailored to specific care plans for older, injured or recuperating equines
- **working** Usually on a full livery basis with a portion of your horse's exercise provided by use in a riding establishment, such as a riding school or trekking centre

Our expert



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Take your pick

There's a seasonal surge in demand for livery spaces from the start of spring to the end of autumn, generally triggered by people moving to find better grazing and facilities – but if you're looking for a longer-term solution, you need to ask what the yard can provide year-round.

Ask questions for every scenario you might encounter, for example...

- are outside instructors allowed?

- what happens if you can't visit or look after your horse?
- is there a system in place to ensure your horse isn't left alone in the field?
- what happens if you need to set off very early to a competition – is that allowed, and would you need to feed all the other horses?
- can friends and family visit, or look after your horse if you go away?
- are dogs allowed on the yard?

Give it some thought

With so much to think about – and a laundry list of questions to ask your potential yard manager, don't forget the legalities and logistics of a new yard. From storing your horse's passport to biosecurity protocols, there's more to your horse's care than keeping him warm and fed. Let's take a look at the bigger questions you'll need to ask...



The boss

Anyone, regardless of their experience or qualifications, can open a livery yard – it's a completely unregulated industry. So it's essential to satisfy yourself that the yard gives the right responses about basic equine care and management. This is especially important if they offer services beyond basic DIY.

Finding a yard that has approved status by a professional body, such as the Association of British Riding Schools (ABRS+) or the British Horse Society (BHS), can reassure you that these requirements have been checked and the yard is trading legally and competently.

Get it in writing

A livery contract will outline exactly what's expected from both parties, what services or responsibilities are covered and when you'll be expected to pay for additional services or provisions. It also clarifies the situation should there be a dispute, making a potentially difficult and stressful situation easier.

The line between professionalism and familiarity is easily blurred, meaning both sides can create friendships and

forget the livery is a business. It's easy to fall into the habit of sending a 'can you just...?' text request – often at the last minute – thinking your yard owner will do you a favour, which can lead to an awkward exchange when the livery bill arrives at the end of the month. A contract will help to keep these sorts of confusion to a minimum.

More and more yards are requesting security deposits. Offering livery services isn't a get-rich-quick career,

and margins are very tight, meaning a livery who leaves with outstanding debt can put a yard owner into significant financial difficulty. Your contract should stipulate the criteria for your deposit to be returned to you, and circumstances where it might not be refunded in full.

Don't be afraid to ask questions about a contract – it's important you understand exactly what services will be provided and what your responsibilities as an owner are, too.

WEB EXTRA

There's a lot to think about when moving yard. We've compiled a checklist of questions to ask potential yards – download it at bit.ly/LIVERY_YARD_CHECKLIST

Safe and sound

Biosecurity's all about protecting health and welfare, so it's not unusual for yards to require all horses on the premises to be vaccinated or to have a parasite management programme – in fact, you should expect it. Usually, the yard manager will want to know your horse's vaccination status and that you have a parasite management programme in place, and some will require a negative strangles test, too.

One of the benefits of Covid-19 has been a better understanding of biosecurity. While at one time an owner might have balked at being asked to have their horse tested for strangles or isolated when entering a new yard, now the majority have put that inconvenience and cost into better perspective as they appreciate the protection it later affords. ➤





Best protected

Your yard owner and all liveryes should have a minimum of third party liability insurance. If the yard offers paid services, this should extend to care, custody and control (CCC) insurance, too. If you have friends or family help care for, or ride, your horse – or have professionals, such as trainers or freelance grooms, come to the yard – then it's important to ensure they're suitably covered. It's not unreasonable for a yard manager to ask for documentation to prove it.

Get it in writing

According to equine identification regulations, there is a legal requirement for a horse's passport to be with him at all times. This means that it should really be kept at the yard he lives at, yet many owners are still reluctant to hand them over, unaware they're breaking the law and risking huge fines for themselves and the yard owner. It's not just the livery contract and passport the yard needs, but also details of the horse's farrier and vet, copies of insurance and vaccinations, the owner's next of kin and any extra contacts who could help in an emergency, or might look after your horse if you're incapacitated.

Sophie and Hebe's story

Sophie and her 10-year-old, 16.1hh mare Hebe are based on Lucinda Fredericks' yard in Wiltshire. Sophie's mum, Jo, says: "We initially came to Lucinda's on a short-term schooling basis, but we benefited so much, we didn't leave!"

The yard's a professional eventing base for former Olympian and Badminton and Burghley winner, Lucinda, and her daughter Ellie. Jo continues: "I guess it could be considered expensive, but horses are costly and for us it's worth committing a little more each month to make the most of their time together".

The yard is also close to Sophie's school. "We can relax knowing Hebe's cared for and can be exercised – even at short notice." The yard's flexibility

assists Hebe, too. Jo explains: "Hebe needs individual care as she'll drop weight easily. This means she needs reduced turnout, bringing in at lunchtime, then use of the walker. We also found she hates being out at night, but the individual care she receives means she's never the only one in. We also have access to Lucinda's experience, plus that of her vet, farrier, dentist, physio and administrative support – all people we wouldn't usually be able to speak to."

There's a safety and social element, too, as Jo says: "When we started and Sophie was just 13, having someone competent around meant she could ride without me watching over her. Now she's older, she loves the social side and joins in training at home and at other venues."



All-important decision

Finding a yard that suits you and your horse can feel like a daunting task, but rest assured that the perfect yard's out there! By consulting your head as well as your heart, and considering

all of these factors, you're more likely to find a suitable, professionally run livery yard that can meet you and your horse's needs, and make for a happy, long-standing arrangement for his care. ■