

Finding a Livery Yard

The information below is a guide for people looking to find a suitable livery yard for their horse.

You may have a new horse, be looking to move your current horse to a more suitable yard or be moving to a new area in which case there are many factors outlined below which you need to take into consideration to help you find the right yard. The most important point is to not only ensure the yard is right for your horses needs, but for yours as well. You should undertake thorough due diligence and the information below can help ensure nothing is overlooked!

Finding a Yard

- **Where to Look** A good place to start is to ask around your local horsey friends, contact local riding clubs or ask your instructor. You could also place an advert in local saddlers or feed shops. Personal recommendations are always a good method of finding a good yard, particularly if the yard owner is known personally to you or an associate.

You could also try searching yards in your local area on online directories- such as LiveryList or local Facebook groups. These will often have details of the yard, photos of facilities and contact details for the yard owner or manager. Consider the distance you are prepared to travel and factor this into your search.

If you know of yards locally, its always better to make first contact via phone or email rather than to turn up and take yourself on a tour of the yard! Many yards do not like people going to enquire about livery for security and biosecurity reasons so its just worth considering this when making initial contact.

- **What Type of Livery** Before searching for a yard, decide what type of livery you are looking for. If you work full time or are away a lot there is no point going to a DIY yard that does not offer assistance, similarly if you like to do your horse yourself there is no point enquiring for full livery. Work out your options and decide also what sort of costs you are prepared to pay per week. An approximation as to livery inclusions and costs for standard packages is as follows. However, yards really are not comparable as each is different however similar they may appear, and likewise the costs may vary:

Grass Livery: £20 – £40 per week

With grass livery you are responsible for the day to day care and exercise of the horse. Often this livery arrangement is on a rental only basis for the grazing. The cost and responsibility for any other services, hay, feed etc lies with the horse owner. Usually the horses live out 24/7 and you do not have access to a stable, electric or other facilities as you may do at a stabled yard.

DIY Livery: £20 - £60 per week

With DIY (Do-It-Yourself) livery you are responsible for the day to day full care and exercise of the horse. Often this livery arrangement is on a rental only basis for stabling and grazing. The cost and responsibility for any other services, hay, feed etc lies with the horse owner. Often you will have access to ridden facilities such as a sand school and jumps inclusive within the livery package but facilities differ from yard to yard.

You do get yards offering 'assisted' DIY livery whereby the main livery is on the basis as described above but the yard offers the services of a yard manager or groom who is able to undertake services upon request- such as mucking out, turning out, exercise- and at an additional cost. This can be particularly useful if you travel a lot or have regular days where you are unable to attend to the horse.

Part Livery: £50 - £120 per week

With part livery the yard is responsible for basic care of the horse- turning out, mucking out, watering, hay and feeding but this can vary yard to yard. Some yards also offer 5 or 7 day part livery meaning the horses can be on a DIY basis at weekends. The horse owner is responsible for exercise of the horse and cost and responsibility for any other services, hay, feed etc although this can also vary.

Full Livery: £80 - £500 per week

With full livery the yard is responsible for all day to day care of the horse. Many give the option of full livery with or without exercise and you usually look at considerably higher charges to include exercise, particularly for competition horses or hunters, or yards with particularly good facilities. Usually feed, hay and bedding are included within the cost of the livery. Occasionally other services may be included as well such as wormers, farriery, clipping and so on.

Working Livery: £30 - £150 per week

With working livery the horse is stables at a riding school which uses the horse for an agreed amount of hours per week for their clients. Usually the yard is responsible for all services as described in full livery and the horse owner's accessibility to ride the horse on non-working days will vary between yards.

Other Livery Types:

Above I have only outlined the most common livery packages. There are also numerous other livery types on offer. From track livery and retirement livery to schooling livery, competition livery and more specific short term packages such as recuperation, holiday or sales livery. These livery types often vary considerably yard to yard as to facilities included, services provided within the package and cost.

- **Be Honest** If you contact the yard owners of any yards that seem suitable, be honest about your horse's behaviour and your experience. Some yards will not tolerate horses with certain vices- such as weaving or crib biting, and other yards do not allow children- so there is no point moving to a yard if any issues like these are likely to be a problem down the line.

If there are any aspects that you specifically need of a yard- such as wanting winter turnout, or needing to have good hacking or an arena- then make sure you ask about this upon first contact with the yard.

- **Choosing the Right Home** Ensure that you do not rush into making a decision in choosing a yard. Ensure that you feel the yard is the right home for you and your horse. There are always livery yard spaces becoming available so do not rush into moving to yard just because it is the best one available at that time- wait a few weeks and something more suitable may come along.

You will often find that you will have to compromise to find the right yard- it is unlikely that any yard will meet all of your needs. You may end up travelling a little further, paying a little more, or not having all of the facilities you require but you need to work out what are the most important aspects for you and be prepared to have to compromise.

- **Do Not Base Your Choice on Cost** It can be very easy to discount yards based on their package costs before you've even enquired, but it is important to understand why yards charge what they do. Whilst there can be an abundance of cheaper yards, it is not to say that all yards are necessarily on a par with the same levels of service, welfare and maintenance despite perhaps appearing to offer similar on paper. Therefore there is no harm in contacting and even viewing the more expensive yards as you may find that for the extra cost, you feel your horse will receive better care.

Viewing of the Yard

- **The First Contact** When first contacting the yard owner it is important first and foremost to query as to whether they have any spaces available. Many yards often do but others run a waiting list system if they are popular, and it is dependent upon your circumstances as to whether you can hold out for a space at the right yard if there is nothing available immediately. Arrange a mutually convenient time between you and the yard owner or manager as to when you can visit to take a look.
- **Observe** You can find out a lot about a yard from how it looks, how it is presented and the way it is maintained. When you arrive at the yard make sure you get a good opportunity to view the yard, the grazing, any riding facilities and anything else you feel is important. Almost as if having a mental checklist in your head:
 - have a look at the current horses and the atmosphere of the yard. Check that all of the horses seem to be kept well and are in good condition. Have a look at the fields to see the state of the grazing and how the horses are behaving in the field, what the fencing is like and so on. Most importantly ask yourself if the horses look happy and if you think that your horse would fit well into the yard. If you have any queries, don't be afraid to ask
 - Do the horses on the yard look as if they are well and in good condition?
 - Are the stables in good condition, light and airy?
 - Is there a hard standing area to tie up for grooming, shoeing, hosing off and so on?
 - How is the grazing, is there plenty of grass for the grazing horses and are the fencing and gates in good order?
 - Do the riding facilities appear to be well maintained and look safe to use (ie good fencing, well maintained arena surface)
 - Is there adequate storage for feed, bedding and tack and do these appear to be secure?
 - Does the yard appear safe with regards to good lighting and security of access to the yard, tack rooms or storage areas?
 - How does the Yard Owner interact with horses, staff or other liveries?
- **Consider Professionalism** An arrangement between livery client and yard owner is a business one. It is important to maintain professionalism. Consider how the yard owner is presented, if they are prepared for your visit and if they seem to have noted any requests or questions you've discussed previously. Assess whether you feel their behaviour and the way they communicate with you is professional, and whether they seem to have the competence and knowledge you would expect from someone in charge of a livery yard. See how they interact with horses on the yard, their staff and any other liveries that may be on the premises. Do not be afraid to ask questions to explore their knowledge, skills and experience both of the yard owner and their staff.
- **Ask Questions** Be prepared to ask a lot of questions, as silly or minor as they may seem. It is important for you to find out as much about the yard, facilities, services and the day-to-day routine of the yard. Some questions you may want to ask could be:

Questions to ask the Yard Owner:

- What services are offered within the livery package and what are the exact responsibilities of the horse owner?
 - Is there a yard manager or groom on site and what is their experience?
 - Is there access to water and electricity on site and is this included in the livery cost?
 - How many horses are in a herd, are they mixed herds and how would your horse be integrated to a new herd?
 - How often are the horses turned out, do they have restricted grazing in the winter and are they turned out 24/7 in the summer?
 - Are there alternatives if the horses are unable to go out such as a horse walker or turnout in the sand school?
 - What facilities are included in the costs- sand school, jumps XC course and what are the rules with regards to these?
 - What is the hacking like, are the roads safe and how far to access off-road riding?
 - Do they provide hay, feed or bedding on site or does this need to be ordered and arranged independently?
 - Is there a worming routine and what worming would your horse require should you move there?
 - Are there other liveries about that you can talk to about their experiences of the yard?
 - Are they able to offer holiday cover and exercise if these are services you may need to use at any point?
 - Do they have a yard farrier or vet and what are the arrangements for this?
 - Does the owner live on-site, is there CCTV and look at accessibility/ visibility of the yard from the road and general security?
 - Do they have adequate insurance (at least 3rd party) to cover all horses and visitors to the yard?
 - Is there an instructor on site and if you have your own are they happy for your instructor to teach you at the yard?
 - Are there any particular rules at the yard with regards to use of facilities, access or any restrictions
- **Ask for Evidence** If you've asked the questions, then there may be some aspects that can be proven to you by the presentation of the required documentation or information. Any good yard owner should have the necessary documentation in place and should be happy to share with you.
 - **Insurance:** All yards are a business and therefore should hold the necessary professional insurance. At the very minimum the yard should hold third party liability and should be happy to show you the certificate. If the yard offers any services, then they should also hold Care, Custody and Control (CCC) insurance to cover them when handling or exercising your horse. If there are staff on the site, you should also ask if these are insured appropriately and could also ask for evidence of this as well whether they are employed or freelance. Anyone working on the yard even irregularly should have the necessary professional cover and the same CCC requirement as the yard itself. You can also enquire of the yard owner ensures all equines on the site are insured. Ideally they should all be for a minimum of third party liability to ensure that in the event of injury or damages from your or another horse to someone else then a claim can be made if necessary.
 - **Livery Contracts:** Livery contracts are becoming more commonplace and are there to protect both the livery yard, and their client. A livery contract helps clarify the services on offer, the agreed charges, payment and notice terms, plus any other specific contractual arrangements. By putting this in writing, both parties can be clear of their responsibility and expectations. In addition, some yards now issue separate Handbooks for their clients to give lots of information on other aspects of the yard that are non-contractual and may be subject to change. This could be the costs for additional services, opening and contact times, biosecurity protocols, guidance on facility access

and use or yard rules. The more that is in writing, the better everyone is informed, and the easier to ensure low turnover and adherence of all parties to this information. A yard owner should be willing to provide you with copies of any such documentation.

- **Health and Safety:** All businesses are required to have a health and safety policy, and ideally a written one that they have on record (this is a legal obligation if they have over 5 employees). You should be satisfied that any yard owner takes the necessary steps to reduce any risks to those on the premises, be this equines, liveries, staff or other visitors. Ideally this should comprise of risk assessments, as well as a fire safety plan which can also be evidenced by the presence of fire extinguishers for example on the yard. There should also be adequate health and safety training for staff, as well as human and equine first aid kits, and a knowledge of first aid and basic veterinary care. Any steps a yard owner takes to ensure health and safety will protect everyone on the site, and enable the necessary action to be taken in the event of an emergency.
- **Horse Passports:** Since October 2018, it is a legal requirement for yard owners to retain the Horse Passport of any equines on the site. The only exception to this is pure grass or DIY livery where no additional services are provided. Otherwise, both the yard owner and the horse owner can be liable to large fines by the authorities. If the yard owner states that a copy of the passport is acceptable, then you need written proof of this from their local authority (local council) otherwise this can still be overruled in the event of an inspection and the original passport not being present. All yard owners also have a legal obligation under the animal identification laws to ensure that all equines have a passport before arriving at the premises. You should be asked by the Yard Owner if your horse is passported. In turn, they should be able to advise you of their storage for Horse Passports (which should be secure and GDPR compliant, yet allowing necessary access to owners for competing, travelling etc).
- **Biosecurity Policy:** Any yard should have the welfare of any equines on the site at the forefront of its mind. A biosecurity policy shows a responsible attitude to the prevention of infectious disease on the yard from new arrivals and cross contamination. All new horses should ideally have an isolation period away from the main yard and herd, or at least have some TPR testing in the first few days of arrival and some yards may even request a health certificate or testing prior to arrival. There should also be a worm management programme, whether this is worming or worm counts. Whilst this may all cost extra, it shows that the yard take welfare seriously, and are taking steps to ensure the good health of all horses on the yard.

Making Arrangements

- **Paying a Deposit** Once you have decided on a yard you may need to pay a deposit to secure your place until you can move your horses there or until a space becomes available. Request a receipt for any deposit that may be paid which makes clear the terms of the deposit. Don't forget that you may need to give notice at your current yard. It is reasonable to a yard owner to hold a deposit for a set period of time – say a couple of weeks- whilst your notice period expires at your current yard. However, some yards have limits on this and after a certain time period may require a retainer to be paid to continue holding the stable until your arrival. This is likely the full amount for grass or DIY livery, and a portion of the amount of any services livery packages. It is therefore important to ensure once a space is confirmed that you are able to move at your earliest convenience, and also important to clarify whether deposits are refundable or not.
- **Arrange Transportation** Arrange a mutually convenient time for you and the yard owner when the horse can be moved to the yard. Try to keep the process as calm as possible for the horse. If there are biosecurity procedures at the yard, you should be made aware of these beforehand to enable you to prepare as necessary and ensure that you take the necessary steps once you arrive at the yard to avoid

cross contamination. It is also best to ensure that all of your equipment, tack and storage items are given a good clean, and ideally disinfection, before arriving at the new yard.

- **Horse Details** Make sure that upon arrival you give the yard owner adequate information about yourself and your horse. Make sure that information is given about your horses routine, worming, feeds and so on. Ensure that any necessary documentation is exchanged- passports, copy of insurance and suchlike. Make sure all equipment, feed bowls, feed bins and so on on are labelled for easy identification. Ensure that you give the yard owner emergency details for yourself, next of kin, and your preferred vet. If you are asked to complete forms for information or instructions by the yard owner, endeavour to do this as soon as possible.
- **Make an Agreement** Ensure that you make a livery agreement with the yard owner. This should be a written contract to specify who is responsible for what aspects of the yard and care of the horse and should include details of any financial agreements. Verbal agreements are acceptable but in event of a contractual or financial dispute, or a query over notice period there is then will be a lack of reference. By putting livery contracts in writing, as per the previous points discussed, this ensures clarity for both parties. If you are also given a Yard Handbook you should ensure that this is read in full and any important points noted. If you are given a copy of a livery contract to check, sign and return it is important to do so as priority as this will ensure that the yard has this on file. A signed copy of the agreement should be retained by both parties.
- **Settle In** Give your horse time to settle in and relax in their new surroundings. Some horses may settle in a day, others may take a few weeks so give it time for your horse to find his feet in its new herd. Similarly try to meet as many other liveries as soon as possible and introduce them to you and your horse. If you have any concerns or queries raise these as soon as possible with the yard owner or manager.

IMPORTANT

This information as provided above is intended to provide guidance and areas for consideration for those intending to enter into such arrangements. Anyone proposing to enter into such a written agreement should take consideration and their own legal advice as to their particular circumstances.