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Looking for an Ideal Horse: Rider Preferences

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Abstract:

The aims of the present study were as follows: (1) to identify the particular characteristics of a horse that are important to riders, and (2) to examine which of these properties are significant for different categories of riders. The participants (197; 78.7% females) were surveyed using the Ideal Horse Questionnaire (IHQ), which contains items that are categorized as "physical make-up," "behavior during riding and handling," "training level," and "maintenance." "Behavior during riding and handling" (43.6% of respondents) and "physical make-up" (32.8%) were selected most frequently as the most important category, followed by "training level" (16.9%) and "maintenance" (6.7%). The responses for the questionnaire were subjected to factor analysis (FA). The first four factors of the FA, labeled "ease of handling and maintenance/sociability," "jumping suitability," "dressage suitability," and "challenge" accounted for 13.7%, 11.7%, 8.6%, and 5.9% of the variance, respectively. The highest values on the 0-3 scale were obtained for items related to "ease of handling and maintenance/sociability" (mean $\pm$ SD = 1.97 ± 0.48) and "jumping suitability" (1.86 ± 0.62), followed by "dressage suitability" (1.64 ± 0.41) and "challenge" (1.20 ± 0.62). All participants desired a manageable, healthy and non-problematic horse. Men preferred a horse that was a good jumper and would challenge the rider. People who rarely rode, beginner to intermediate riders, non-competitors and all but show jumpers were not interested in a horse with a high "jumping suitability." Only more experienced riders expected the horse to possess high capabilities and extensive training in dressage. Challenging animals were desirable to men but were avoided by leisure riders. The present study shows that ease of handling and maintenance, along with "jumping suitability," are crucial attributes of a riding horse. Furthermore, various levels of experience and preferred equestrian activity are associated with different horse requirements.

Keywords: [CHARACTERISTICS](#); [EQUITATION](#); [HORSE](#); [PREFERENCES](#); [RIDERS](#)

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