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Prepurchase Exams—Addressing Old Injuries

By Stuart Brown, DVM; Martha Rodgers, VMD; and three-day eventer Buck Davidson

Q. I'm trying to sell a mare that's had a bone chip removed and whose soundness has not been affected. But when I talk to someone and say, "You know, she does have an old racing injury, but she's not unsound," I'm having a hard time. People who try the horse and are about to do a prepurchase exam hear "old racing injury," and they run. They don't want to have anything to do with it. But the horse has the brains, demeanor, and trainability, so how do I talk to these incoming buyers?

A. Rodgers: Most veterinarians really are pretty practical people. We have to be. Definitely mention the past bone chip to the buyer, but then say, "You might want to talk to your veterinarian if you're interested in the horse, and find out what they think the impact is." The soundness is always going to be No. 1. If a horse is sound, we forgive a lot more. If the horse is unsound, then right away that's going to make us pull back.

Brown: We place a different degree of significance on bone pathology in racehorses. We know dorsal P1 (long pastern bone) chips lead to unsoundness problems in the Thoroughbred. You should improve (a horse's prognosis) by removing that lesion. With the advent of the repository systems (at Thoroughbred sales), there are now 36 X rays on every yearling that goes through the sale. We see lots and lots of horses that have had those things addressed, whether they've had OCD (osteocondritis dissecans) lesions removed or fragments or small bone chips removed. We've drawn from experience that those horses stay sounder for longer when you address these issues.

Your question really has to do with the sophistication of buyers. You're going to find people who have different levels of sophistication relative to their experiences. And that's just part of it.

Davidson: In a situation like this, the first and most important thing is to give the buyer all the information. There are plenty of people out there that had a gray mare once and they're not going to have a gray mare again. There's nothing you can do about that. So be honest with them, and the horse's record is going to speak for itself. If it has this injury and you've had the horse for four years and it's going four-star (eventing) and the buyer wants to go novice, it's no big deal. If you've had it for two weeks and the first week it was lame but it's sound now, then you might have a bigger issue. Just talk to the person honestly and say, "Hey, this is what I've done with it, and these are the things we do to make sure it doesn't rear its ugly head."

If the horse has been in work for a period of time and hasn't had any issues, for me as a buyer I wouldn't worry about it. As the seller I think you can really harp on what the horse has done, how it's been good for so long, and what you've done (to manage it).