



## **How to Determine Your Riding Level Experience**

**By Gerrie Barnes**

Approximately 60% of first time horse owners sell their horses after their first year. Why does this happen after investing a considerable amount of time and money? There are many reasons. One of the biggest reasons is the horse/rider mismatch.

This mismatch can come from buying a horse whose personality does not complement the rider's personality. A mismatch can also occur when the rider over-estimates his/her skill level and gets a horse that is more than the rider can handle.

Some people over-estimate their level of riding from an inflated sense of self. Most riders simply don't know how to estimate their riding level.

The American Quarter Horse Association suggests three levels of horsemanship skills:

*Beginning/Novice Level:* Limited knowledge of horses and riding in general.

*Intermediate Level:* An understanding of riding and knowledge of a chosen discipline.

*Advanced Level:* Considerable knowledge of horses and is competitive at a chosen discipline.

Another method to estimate your riding skill level is by the amount of time you have ridden. When calculating these riding hours, the hours must be disciplined riding hours; not just time in the saddle where the rider is not paying attention to the horse or equitation (the skill of riding).

*Beginning/Novice Level:* 0 – 300 hours.

If you ride 3 times per week for 1 hour per ride, this equals 156 hours per year. Therefore, it takes approximately 2 years of regular riding to train your muscles and your reflexes to graduate to the intermediate level.

*Intermediate Level:* 300 – 800 hours.

Riding 3 times per week for 1 hour per ride, you would reach 800 hours in approximately 5 years.

*Advanced Level:* Beyond 800 hours.

If you are at a beginning/novice level you want a well-broke, well-trained horse that has existing skills in your chosen discipline.

If you are at the intermediate level you have more flexibility in your choice of horse. You should have the knowledge and experience to anticipate horse instincts and behaviors. You may be able to handle a horse with less maturity or less experience.

If you are at the advance level you have the most flexibility in your choice of horse. You may be able to take a young horse or a horse with little experience and train that horse in basic riding skills and/or to a specific discipline.

Err on the side of caution (and safety) when estimating your skill level. Knowing your skill level assists you in determining the horse that is right for you.

Remember, that hours in the saddle alone do not determine the riding level. There are some riders who have ridden all their lives who are still beginning level riders because they have not made the effort to understand horse instincts and behaviors and have not advanced their balance, timing, and riding skills.

**Basic Tip:** *You can rent videos and books on general riding skills and specific riding disciplines at the library. Some tack stores also rent horse-related videos.*