

## *A Christmas Buying Guide for a Horse Crazy Loved One*

Buying presents at Christmas can be a stressful enough without all the extras and options that are in stores. Buying horsey items can be even more challenging, especially if you are someone that isn't 'horsey' yourself. Here are a few key tips for buying horsey items for your loved one:

- 1) **Colour:** Every horse and rider has a designated colour. This colour has nothing to do with the horse itself, but instead is a colour chosen by the rider/owner for all of their items. Common colours are green, blue, and burgundy. It is important to get items within this colour because otherwise the wrong colour item may end up not being used at all... or just a temporary fix until the item in the 'correct' colour is obtained. The only exception to this rule is some brands have a signature pattern that can sneak under the radar and be accepted by most horse lovers. An example would be the traditional beige plaid of a Bakers brand item... although be careful to get the right colour trim!
- 2) **Quality:** Horse stuff gets dropped, stepped on, scuffed, bitten, worn, and who knows what else! Durability and quality matter. Leather that is too stiff will crack more easily and can be a safety concern, but too soft leather can wear really easily. Really soft leather is nice for bridles and halters, but saddles should have an 'in between' – buffalo leather is a great compromise between durability and softness. Blankets come in different durability strengths too... the higher the number the better, so a 600D isn't going to be as good as a 1200D, but typically anything over 600D is workable. Be sure to check the quality of the items you are buying.
- 3) **Practicality:** That white super soft fleece girth may have seemed like a good idea, but at the barn it will get dirty in no time- best to opt for the version with the removable lining that can be cleaned more easily. Items that are easy to clean are important. Practicality also refers to the usefulness of an item. Getting items that you know will get a lot of use, and that your loved one doesn't already have is the best bet. New boots, half chaps, blankets, leather halters, riding pants (winter riding pants can be a great investment!), and polos tend to be good items as gifts because they wear out and break and tend to need to be replaced each year. Items like saddles, bridles, bits, girths, saddle pads, items for shipping horses, and brushes tend to last many years unless the horse or rider require a new one for proper fit or a change in needs (ex. horse needs a lighter bit, or lets say if the rider switched disciplines and now needs a dressage saddle).
- 4) **Brand:** There are many items in the horsey world where brand names don't matter. There are also many items where brands do matter. Oster is well known for their clippers. Bakers for their blankets, rider clothing, and garment/tack bags.

Top saddle brands include Devoucoux, Antares, Barnsby, Stubben, Pessoa, and Crosby (for jumping saddles). Horseware makes a line of blankets with the Ireland symbol that are a huge hit. Ariat for their paddock boots. These brands have a reputation for being durable, safe, and of high quality, all of which are important when dealing with such big and powerful animals. Brand names for items like polos, saddle pads, martingales, stirrups, and bits are less important because these items seem to be quite similar in quality across different brands. Remember that higher prices don't always mean better quality, so check with the staff, or bring a knowledgeable friend to help you pick out quality items that will last and be safe.

- 5) **Sizing:** Getting the right size is very important for a number of items. Getting the wrong size can be a safety issue or can cause harm to the horse. For example getting a blanket for a horse that is slightly too big or too small can cause really big shoulder rubs on the horse. Getting boots for a horse or rider that are too small or too big can be painful and/or dangerous.

Hot items this year are the new Oster brushes, the Horseware blankets, 'Lick Its' (a treat for horses), Charles Owen helmets, shaped girths, and sheepskin gel pads.

It's also a good idea to get the 'little' items that generally need replacing each year and are great stocking stuffers like stirrup rubbers, riding gloves, braiding/banding supplies (if the rider shows), grooming products like shampoos and detangler, tack conditioner, and the rubber elastic/leather for safety stirrups. Other small stocking stuffers that tend to get good use are helmet covers, treats for the horse, or a winter head band.

Overall, when you are horsey item shopping, know the colour, buy quality, keep it practical, and be sure to get the right size!

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