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Dedication

Audrey: To my parents, John and Haydee, for always encouraging my love for horses.

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Welcome to the second edition of Horses For Dummies, the one and only book you need to get started in the hobby of horses.

Why do you need a book on horses? If you want to ride, can’t you just climb up on a horse and hit the trail? What’s so complicated about letting a horse carry you around on his back, anyway?

The truth of the matter is that as simple as riding may seem, it’s anything but. Here’s why: With most other hobbies, your main component is something rather undynamic. For example, the racket and ball you use to play tennis, or the clubs and balls you require for golf. Without human energy to put these pieces into motion, they’re nothing but unfeeling, unmoving, inanimate objects.

Horseback riding, on the other hand, relies crucially on something that is hardly passive in the process: the horse. Horses have the ability to operate on their own — they don’t need a human to set them in motion. This fact is not only true of the equine body, but it’s especially true of the equine mind.

So why do you need this book? Because we can help you understand the horse and how it functions, both physically and mentally. Because we can show you how to communicate what you want to a horse so he’ll do your bidding. And because we can show you how to care for this amazing creature, which, by the way, needs much more maintenance than your average set of golf clubs!

After you’re comfortable with the basics of horsemanship, you’ll likely be hooked on horses for good. Then you’ll be hungry to explore the world of horses in even greater depth. But to get acquainted with things equine, you’ve come to the right place. Whether you’re contemplating riding a horse for the first time in your life, thinking about adding riding to your list of hobbies, or wondering how to care for your first horse, we’re certain this book will be a great help you.
About This Book

We’ve designed the second edition of *Horses For Dummies* to be a useful reference for beginning horse people. You can turn to any section of the book that interests you and begin reading at that point — and not feel lost. You don’t have to remember what you read yesterday, and you don’t have to read chapters or sections in order. Just find something that interests you, read it, do it, and put the book back on your shelf. We don’t expect you to read it from cover to cover.

If *Horses For Dummies* were a building, it would be a department store that you can enter on whatever floor you like. You don’t have to walk past that smelly perfume counter to get to the housewares section on the third floor. You just walk into the housewares section.

Of course, you can feel free to read this book from cover to cover to avoid missing one pearl of horse wisdom (or horse sense) that we’ve painstakingly compiled for you. You won’t hear us say nay to that!

We’ve worked long and hard to bring you what we think is the consummate beginner’s reference book on horses, and we hope that you find it as fun to read as we found it to write. We also hope that you take all of our advice and thank us for the rest of eternity for all the equine wisdom we’ve brought you.

Seriously, though, we’ve found great joy, comfort, and fulfillment in our personal involvement with horses, and we hope for you the same kind of experience. We’re certain that once you dive deep into the ocean of horseness, you’ll never try to make it to shore.

Conventions Used in This Book

In this book, we refer to horses with the male pronoun (he, his, and him). We understand that horses aren’t all male, and we don’t prefer male horses to female horses particularly (coauthor Audrey Pavia is actually partial to mares). This convention is merely for readability’s sake. We don’t call horses “it” (not our horses!), and using both sexes (“his or her,” “he or she,” and so on) makes the text hard to read. So we flipped a coin: It came up heads — he.

We also include the following conventions to help you navigate this book:

- **Italic** text highlights defined terms.
- **Boldfaced** text highlights keywords in bulleted lists and the action part of numbered steps.
- **Monofont** text highlights a Web address.
What You’re Not to Read

From time to time in this book, we tell you stuff that may be nice to know, but isn’t essential to understanding the topic. In these cases, we place the text in a gray box that we call a sidebar. Don’t feel like you have to read these, but they’re usually kind of interesting, nonetheless.

Foolish Assumptions

In this book, we assume that you know a horse when you see one. That’s really about all we assume. Well, we do assume that you’re interested in these magnificent creatures and that you want to treat them kindly. You may be considering buying a horse or learning how to ride one, or perhaps you’re currently a horse owner and/or rider and would like to find out more about these wonderful animals.

We also assume that you’re no dummy. You may not be an expert in the horse field, but you’re not one to go around pretending that you are. You know that the best way to find out about things is to read up, ask questions of those who’ve been around the block, and keep your eyes open. We think you’re pretty smart; after all, you bought this book, didn’t you?

How This Book Is Organized

The second edition of *Horses For Dummies* is made up of five parts. That’s a lot of parts, but you need a lot of information to get started with horses. The following sections look at each of these parts and what they cover.

**Part 1: Beginning with Horse Basics**

To fit in with the horsy crowd, you need to know equine basics. You need to know head from tail, a trot from a canter, a star from a blaze, and withers from a fetlock. You also need to have a good idea of how the horse sees the world, and humankind.

In Part I, we give you some background on the human/horse relationship over time and show you the parts of the horse and how to evaluate them. We also get into specific details about horse colors, markings, and gaits, and spend quite a bit of time helping you understand equine behavior — something you absolutely have to know if you’re going to spend any amount of time around horses. We finish Part I with a chapter devoted to the various breeds of horses.
Part II: Selecting a Horse and the Stuff that Goes with Him

Buying a horse can be a daunting experience, especially if you don’t know what you’re doing. The wrong decision can mean an unpleasant and costly situation — one that will sour you on horses for good.

If you’re thinking about buying a horse, Part II is the place for you. In this part, we help you decide whether horse ownership is really for you at this time in your life, or whether leasing or taking lessons are better options. If you’re certain you’re ready to commit to horse ownership, then read here about age and gender differences before you buy. Our details on where and how to buy your horse should prove pretty helpful, too.

A horse isn’t the only thing you need to be able to ride. If you plan to own your own horse, you’ll have to get yourself some tack, grooming equipment, riding apparel, and, oh yeah, a place to keep the animal. Go to Part II for the lowdown on all this stuff and more.

If you aren’t ready to buy a horse yet but just want to ride, you still need to take a look at Chapter 6. The information on tack, grooming equipment, and riding apparel is relevant to anyone who rides a horse.

Part III: Taking Care of Your Horse

If you’ve made the commitment to horse ownership — or are planning to — Part III is very important to you. In these chapters, we give you all the basic information you need to take care of your horse. That includes advice on grooming, providing preventative veterinary care, recognizing common ailments, and figuring out exactly what to do with your horse when it’s time to part.

Part III is not only for those who own their own horse; the information here on grooming and recognizing common health problems also is important to anyone interested in horse care.

Part IV: Handling Your Horse with Ease

The payoff for all the hard work you’re doing with your horse comes in Part IV: riding! Here, we give you details on how to handle your horse while you’re on the ground and in the saddle. We show you how to put on the saddle and bridle, how to mount and dismount, and how to hold the reins. And we give you a rundown of the different riding disciplines and alert you to the various safety issues concerning horses and riding. We also break down the different
types of equine competitions, and detail the myriad fun, noncompetitive activities out there for those who ride.

**Part V: The Part of Tens**

In the Part of Tens, we tackle two very different subjects: equine myths and horse movies. In the equine myths chapter, we strive to debunk various untruths about horses that have pervaded our culture in recent decades. In the movies chapter, we take a look at ten of the best horse movies ever made.

**Appendix**

The horse world is filled with clubs and associations that can help you learn even more about horses than what you’ve gleaned from this book. The appendix provides contact information for a number of these organizations, including their Web sites. We’ve also added a section on recommended reading, where you can delve even deeper into some of the horsy subjects touched upon in this book, and other sections on equipment and publications.

**Icons Used in This Book**

As with all the other books in the *For Dummies* series, this book has little icons in the margins that call your attention to specific types of information. Here’s an explanation of what each of those icons means:

- **Protocol**
  Procedures in the horse world may not seem to make much sense at times, yet they’re written in stone and people always follow them. This icon indicates these types of procedures.

- **Remember**
  This icon appears frequently throughout this book. That’s because when it comes to horses, you need to do plenty of remembering. We’ve placed this icon next to information that we think is important and shouldn’t be missed or forgotten.

- **Tip**
  This icon alerts you to helpful hints regarding horses, pertaining to their care and handling. If you read the information so highlighted in this book, you’ll find your life around horses much easier.

- **Warning**
  When you see this symbol, beware! It indicates something serious to watch out for.
Where to Go from Here

Go wherever you want. You can start at Chapter 1 and read all the way through to the appendix if you want. Or, you can skip here and skip there. Or you can go for a ride.

If you’re going to do the skipping around thing, though, can we at least ask you to do us a favor? Before you start jumping from place to place, take a few moments to read through Chapter 2, which gives you insights into the equine mind. These issues are what every potential horseperson should know.

Go ahead! Start hoofin’ it!
Part I
Beginning with Horse Basics

The 5th Wave
By Rich Tennant

Gil encouraged his son’s interest in Quarter Horses
In this part . . .

In the chapters of Part I, you find the basic information you need to know about horses. We show you how to tell whether a horse is well put-together, how to measure a horse, and how to identify the parts, colors, and markings of horses. We also explain in great detail how the equine mind works and give you pointers on how to communicate effectively with horses. To top it off, we give you the scoop on a variety of popular horse breeds and help you decide how to pick the best one for you.
Chapter 1

Welcome to the World of Horses

In This Chapter

► Understanding the complete horse
► Checking out different breeds
► Finding the best horse for you
► Discovering the realities of horse ownership
► Riding safety and sanely

It’s hard to find a person alive and breathing who doesn’t have a strong reaction to horses. Most people love their power and grace; some find them soulful and irresistible; others find them scary and intimidating. Regardless of whether their response to horses is positive or negative, most people can’t help but have an opinion about these dramatic creatures.

What is it about horses that elicits such intense reactions in people? The more thoughtful among equiphiles have pondered this for ages. Perhaps their combination of power and grace is what intrigues people. Or their sheer mass and speed may attract others. Some — such as Audrey Pavia, your humble, nonvet coauthor — believe the close connection between the human and equine races is an expression of genetic memory. After all, without the horse, many of our human ancestors would not have survived.

Although people no longer need horses to transport them from place to place, plow their fields, and carry them into war, they still need to understand them. Those of us who have chosen to live with these beautiful animals have an obligation to care for them properly and enjoy them for all they are worth. In this chapter, we introduce you to the wonderful world of horses.

Looking at a Horse’s Build and Mind

You need to understand a horse’s body and brain to appreciate what he is all about. In horses, the same as with other creatures, the two are closely linked. Horse people are obsessed with their horses’ bodies because a horse’s physical structure determines not only his appearance but also his ability to function with a rider.
Horse people have a lingo all their own when describing horses, and knowing this terminology is important for communicating effectively on the topic of horses. Each part of the horse’s body has a name to describe it. Knowing the parts of the horse helps you understand and be understood by your horse’s veterinarian, farrier (horseshoer), and horsy friends. People in the equine world also use specific language to describe a horse’s measurements, colors, markings, and movements.

Chapter 2 has a diagram showing the parts of the horse. Before you embark on your new hobby, take a look at this diagram and memorize it. You’ll be glad you did.

The horse’s mind is just as important as his body because the brain controls everything the body does. When you’re riding a horse, this reality becomes evident very quickly. Primitive ancestors of today’s horses were seen as potential meals by a great many predators, and today’s domestic horse has retained that information in his DNA. The consequence is that horses can be flighty, especially when they find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings or faced with an object or situation that makes them uncertain. The motto of just about every horse out there is “Run first, ask questions later.” Knowing that motto is extremely important if you choose to sit on the back of one of these half-ton animals.

Training and experience can override much of the horse’s instincts to flee perceived danger, which is why it’s so important to ride a horse that has had both — especially when you’re a newcomer to horses. It’s also imperative that you learn how to ride before you embark on any horseback sojourns, regardless of whether it’s on a local trail or through the mountains of Mongolia. Knowing how to handle a horse can mean the difference between a wonderful, relaxing experience and one you’ll spend your lifetime trying to forget.

To find out more about how the horse thinks, see Chapter 2.

Checking Out Various Horse Breeds

Horses, like dogs, come in a wide variety of breeds. Some breeds have existed for centuries, while others were developed only during the last 20 years or so. Each breed has its own characteristics that make it unique, leaving horse people with a healthy selection of breeds to admire. Knowing a thing or two about the various breeds of horses helps you choose the right horse when the time comes for you to join the ranks of horse owners.
Although most horse breeds were developed in Europe and other parts of the world, a number of breeds are uniquely American. Among these is the world’s most populous breed, the American Quarter Horse. In the nearly 70 years since this versatile breed officially was established in the U.S., it has spread to a number of other nations. The second most popular breed in the U.S. is the Paint Horse. A spinoff of the Quarter Horse, the colorful Paint’s popularity has shot up to high numbers in the past 15 years.

Other breeds in the top 10 include the Appaloosa, Arabian, Miniature Horse, Morgan, Saddlebred, Standardbred, Tennessee Walking Horse, and Thoroughbred. Each breed has a distinct history and appearance and appeals to a vast number of horse lovers.

For more details on the top 10 breeds, see Chapter 3. That same chapter also provides information on some lesser-kept breeds such as the Peruvian Paso, the Friesian, the warmblood, and draft-horse and pony breeds.

Making a Match with the Perfect Horse

The choice you make in a horse to ride can make a huge difference in whether you come to love this hobby or dislike it. Choosing a horse is much like choosing a mate: If you pick the wrong one, you won’t be happy.

Asking a few questions before you buy

Before you embark on the tremendous responsibility of horse ownership, make certain owning a horse is really what you want. Ask yourself some questions before you take the plunge:

- Why do I want a horse?
- Do I have the time and money for a horse?
- How do I want to ride (English, Western, shows, on trail), and how do I want to learn the riding style of my choice?
- Who will take care of the horse on a daily basis?
- Might leasing be a better option than buying?

For more guidance on what to ask yourself and on other issues to consider before buying a horse, see Chapter 4.
Locating the right horse for you

The single most crucial aspect to finding the right horse is getting the help of someone with experience. Without expert help, as a novice horse person, you’re likely to make the wrong decisions about which horse is best suited for you.

Ideally, the person who helps you with your decision will be a horse trainer, someone who makes a living riding, training, and evaluating horses. If you can’t find a horse trainer to help you, a riding instructor, an equine veterinarian, a farrier, or someone with years of horse experience under his or her belt is your best bet.

You’ll find available horses in any number of outlets, including:

- Classified ads from individuals in equine publications
- On the Internet
- Through trainers and breeders
- Via horse adoption groups

For more details about shopping for a horse, see Chapter 5.

Purchasing horse supplies

After you purchase your own horse, you’ll need all the accoutrements to go with him. There is no shortage of stuff out there that you can buy for your horse. For starters, you’ll need these basics:

- Saddle and pad
- Bridle (the headgear used on a horse during riding)
- Halter and lead rope (which provide control when you’re working with your horse on the ground)
- Grooming supplies

You’ll also need some stuff for yourself:

- Riding boots or shoes
- Riding pants and shirt
- A helmet (if you’re smart and want to continue to be that way)

All these items can be purchased in your local tack and feed store, through mail-order catalogs or over the Internet, among other options. For more details on these and other items for you and your horse, see Chapter 6.