

Soundness (*Unsoundness*)

An important part of selecting a horse is the ability to recognize common unsoundnesses and blemishes and faulty conformation that tends to predispose the animal toward unsoundnesses and blemishes. **Is the horse Sound?** Is one of the first questions asked when buying a horse...But the answer is more complex than just yes or no.

Unlike other farm animals, the horse is serviceable only when in motion. Any abnormal deviation in the structure or action of a horse can render it partly or completely useless. Therefore, any defect that affects serviceability is considered an unsoundness, i.e., lameness, blindness, faulty wind, etc. Some horses become unsound at an early age because of coarse, crooked legs, whereas others remain useful for years. As with anything, abusive treatment, excessive use and poor care will render any horse unsound.

So... what is Soundness? **Soundness**, by legal definition, is that a horse is able to be in usual working health; without any permanent disease or injury, for the task in which he is supposed to do. Which means that being "Sound", is subjective to the evaluator and to the task for which the horse is being evaluated. For example: A horse may be unsound for competition, but still sound as a lesson horse or broodmare. Most people equate "soundness" with lack of pain. If a horse can trot freely, willingly and evenly, he is sound however, this is a misconception. For example; a lame horse's foot can be nerve-blocked, and he will trot "soundly" but it does not make him sound? Just because the horse cannot currently feel the pain, does not mean the damage is not there.

So, the question is not, "Is the horse sound" but, rather whether or not the horse is sound for the task you want him to perform.