



Change is Coming

for Livery Yards, Managers and Horse Owners

Poor livery offerings, unrealistic pricing and welfare concerns plague horse owners and livery yard managers. For those doing their up most to offer high standards of care, the ever increasing gap between expected costs and fair treatment increases. However, there's light at the end of the tunnel, as organisations and businesses such as ABRS+ and LiveryList join forces to educate, raise awareness and help build a brighter future for all involved. In this month's article LiveryList founder, Cheryl Johns takes a look at all that's important (including why) when running, and selecting a suitable livery yard.



Written by Cheryl Johns, Owner & Founder of LiveryList

DID YOU KNOW...

Even without a written contract, by regularly paying for livery or livery services, there will be a verbal contract in place.

Many horse owners do not realise that the livery industry is entirely unregulated. Anybody whatsoever can open a livery yard and offer livery services regardless of their levels of competence, experience or knowledge. As a result, a substantial difference in the quality of services and facilities provided across the board has formed. Other areas affected include cost, as often there is a marked contrast in amounts charged for usually similar looking yards within the same proximity. The difference means that when a horse owner is looking for livery, it can be quite the minefield. Many horse owners lack awareness of how to undertake the necessary due diligence to ensure the selected premises have the appropriate levels of care and knowledge expected.

Cost

Cost is a common denominator in the decision for many horse owners in selecting a new yard. Unfortunately, an owner may choose a cheaper livery yard without understanding the equine welfare practice at the establishment.

Insurance

In a recent poll carried out by LiveryList, less than 20% of horse owners check that a prospective livery yard holds the necessary insurance for the services that they offer. Therefore, at the very minimum, a livery yard should be able to provide you with a copy of their professional liability insurance. In addition, if they are offering any livery services, they must also hold care, custody and control insurance to cover them for handling horses at a professional level.

Failure for a livery yard to provide you with copies of documentation could mean they do not hold the necessary insurance. If the livery does not have insurance, this may impact claims made against the business should an accident or injury occur.

Livery contracts

Similarly, inexplicably many horse owners actively avoid yards where a livery contract is offered. A livery contract would be seen as best practice to clarify the arrangements for stabling and services between the horse owner and yard owner. It is, after all, a professional business arrangement that you would expect to have documented when you are entrusting the care and welfare of your equine to the yard.

A livery contract should contain at the very least information such as agreed services, agreed fees,

payment arrangements and notice periods. Some yards will offer a more detailed livery contract based upon the services they provide or their clients' expectations.

Many horse owners do not realise that even without a written contract, by regularly paying for livery or livery services, there will be a verbal contract in place that will still determine notice periods and payments due to historical records. Therefore, it is recommended for horse owners to ensure that a yard offers a written livery contract so that both parties are clear as to what is expected from one another. It is possible to request a copy of this when viewing a yard.





In a recent poll carried out by LiveryList, more than 30% of yard owners stated that at best, their yard income only covers running costs, with many stating they subsidise the business out of their pocket.

Trading professionally

Many other factors will determine whether a livery yard is trading professionally in the eyes of the law. These factors could include the payment of business rates, taxes, correctly trained and employed staff, adherence to equine identification laws, health and safety considerations and the ability to meet recommended codes of conduct regarding the care and welfare of equines on the premises. Understandably, the costs for yards that do not trade legally is less, which often enables them to provide cheaper livery to be more attractive to horse owners. However, this often leads to a high turnover of equines on the premises, which can negatively affect client management, equine welfare and increased biosecurity risks.

Cheap livery

Another issue of non-compliant yards that offer cheaper livery is that this reduces the cost expectation for horse owners. Unfortunately, as a result, many horse owners now have an unrealistic view of how much it costs to look after horses in a professional setting. The yards that charge higher prices due to having increased overheads to meet professional standards struggle to compete. To compete with other yards, professional establishments often feel the need to keep costs low. Running businesses in this way can result in an unviable and unsustainable business, meaning that the cheap yards thrive and the professional yards face an ongoing battle.

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more than 30% of yard owners stated that at best, their yard income only covers running costs, with many stating they subsidise the business out of their pocket.

To ensure compliant yards can continue to offer services, awareness of key elements, such as realistic costs and best livery practices, must be raised in the equestrian industry. For example, educating horse owners in understanding how livery services should be run and the questions that should be asked when viewing potential yards for their horse or pony.

As an unregulated aspect of the equestrian industry, it also means that there are no dedicated industry resources or associations for livery yards to turn to when they need support and guidance in the management of their business, equines or clients.

Change is coming

Spurred on by the lack of business support for owners of equestrian establishments during the COVID-19 pandemic and a recognition of an overall lack of support, change is now on its way. The ABRs+ have recently added services and offerings by opening their membership to include livery yards and equestrian centres of any type or size. The change makes available much-needed representation, support and guidance to equestrian premises of all types where there has previously been nothing available. The ABRs+ has already successfully lobbied for funding and support for their member establishments during the pandemic.

The future of Livery Yard Licensing

In 2020, a collection of leading UK welfare organisations and charities published the Britain's Horse Problem report. The Horse Problem report highlights difficulties faced by the UK equine welfare organisations and how thousands of horses are at risk of suffering each year. The report includes recommendations for horse owners, the public, government and enforcement agencies on how to improve the equine welfare system.

One of the critical recommendations within this report was to work towards a system where all commercial equine activities are licensed and subject to regular checks, including livery yards. Initially, it is likely that this will only be a registration system in line with the EU Animal Health Law 2021 so that owners of such premises take accountability for their the animals in their care. However, ultimately thi could lead to a system of licensing with the inclusion of inspections and implementation within the industry and local authorities. With consultations on recommendations likely to take place in coming years, an emphasis has also been put on the education of horse owners and the general public with regards to professional and welfare standards. •

To find out more about LiveryList visit www.liverlylist.co.uk

"While licensing by local authorities exists for establishments that hire out horses and for certain other activities involving equines under The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018, there is no regulation specifically for other commercial activities such as equine breeders, dealers or livery yards. It is perhaps surprising to the public that currently anyone can set up a livery yard without any checks being carried out or licence required. Regulation would ensure these establishments are known to authorities, and there is potential to be held to account, thereby encouraging animals' welfare to meet at least minimum standards."

A quote from Britain's Horse Problem Report- December 2020

Livery List and ABRs+

LiveryList offers extensive resources for livery yard owners and has teamed up with the ABRs+ to develop and support their new livery yard membership. Livery yards can become an ABRs+ Certified or Approved Livery Yard member from just £99 which includes business support, industry guidance, representation and a whole host of other member benefits. To find out more, please visit www.ABRs-info.org

