



**Teigland,  
Franklin,  
& Brokken,  
D.V.M.s**

# From Start to Finish

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## Veterinary Exams at Sales

by Scott A. Hay, D.V.M.



### INTRODUCTION and PHILOSOPHY

It would appear, on the surface, that purchase exams at sales have a pretty clear-cut philosophy. From the veterinarian's viewpoint, the goal might be to find the horse that has perfectly clean x-rays and an absolutely normal throat. Unfortunately, that is rarely how it goes, and here is why.

Horses that have something the interested buyer likes are presented to the veterinarian for examination. The attraction might be how the horse breezed, the way it walked out, the body type, who the horse was related to, future residual potential as breeding stock, etc. It is rare that the horseman has selected this animal simply because it had perfect conformation and they thought it might "vet" without flaws. The hope, at this point, is that it will certainly x-ray and scope clean, but they have selected the horse for other reasons.

Certainly, it is a goal of all horsemen that go to sales to find a horse that will win races, be able to compete in quality competition, and to stay sound. Unfortunately, if you don't have the first two of these things, staying sound isn't as important. The importance of potential talent often supersedes perfectly clean examinations. Don't get me wrong, soundness is important, but I don't know too many clients that would pick soundness over ability.

Therefore, the horseman will often overlook some flaws in a horse that may affect the animal's soundness at some point, to get a horse that they think can run fast and have success on the track. Risks are taken. Individual risk tolerance is a subject that we commonly discuss with our clients. We need to determine what "flaws" are acceptable and which ones are unacceptable. The difficulty is that this varies from client to client. Some want absolutely "perfect" scopes and will accept

a certain degree of radiographic changes on their potential purchase. Others realize that certain subtleties on scoping are often inconsequential and will accept some "imperfection" in this aspect of the exam. Others will bypass conformational deviations from "perfect" to have a horse that breezed fast at the gallop show.

Often a client will ask that we "pass" or "fail" a horse on the results of its examination. Due to the examples above, you can see this is very difficult to do. There are many factors that go into purchasing a horse, and our examination, although very important, is only one of them. A "pass" or "fail" opinion on a prospect may not take into account what is important to you. This is why we usually go to the effort to describe the findings of the exam in detail so that we can properly discuss your potential purchase with you.

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### PHYSICAL EXAMINATION and CONFORMATION

When we are talking about two-year-old sales, our introduction into the process is a pre-sale examination. Many times this will include a pre-sale physical examination of the animal in question. This examination would likely include the following:

1. Conformational evaluation.
2. Observation of the horse when walked.
3. Palpation of all major joints, tendons and ligaments.
4. Auscultation of the heart and lungs.
5. Examination for surgical scars.
6. Gross examination of eyes for potential defects in vision.
7. Palpation of testicles in colts.



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The examination may not be limited to the above tests, but they are the most important, in my opinion.

Clients will often forego the request for a physical examination of their prospect as they have already made observations of the physical wellbeing of the particular animal. It is advisable to have this exam performed, though, as it can identify potentially important findings that may affect the purchase or long-term condition of the animal.

## ENDOSCOPIC EXAMINATION

Scoping horses may be the most controversial part of our examination of the sale horse. It is important to have done, though, particularly *before* the animal is purchased. Some horsemen will rely on the fact that there are Conditions of Sale at most auctions that can protect them from buying a “bad throated” horse. But not all sale conditions are the same, and they don’t protect a buyer from some conditions that they may not want to deal with in a racehorse. Most of our clients real-

### Luis Benitez, DVM

Dr. Luis Benitez grew up in a small farming town in Puerto Rico where he learned about animals by helping to feed his neighbors’ cattle and doing other farm duties. He has always enjoyed the outdoors, especially camping, hiking and horseback riding, and he was very active in church, becoming a director of the Pathfinders Club where he taught teenagers about nature, first aid, camping, wilderness skills and community service.

In 1995, Dr. Benitez graduated from the University of Massachusetts with a degree in Animal Science, and while there, he worked as a stable hand for the university equestrian team. He then moved to West Lafayette, Indiana to attend Purdue University, School of Veterinary Medicine. He interned for 5 months with Hagyard-Davidson-McGee Associates in Lexington, KY and received his veterinary medical degree from Purdue University in 1999.

Dr. Benitez joined Teigland, Franklin & Brokken in June of 1999, starting out at Hialeah Park in Miami, Florida, working alongside Dr. Luis Castro for two years. Since that time, he has worked at Calder Race Track, Gulfstream Park and Delaware Park. In 2004, he became a partner in the practice.

His primary areas of interest are lameness, ocular emergencies and radiology.

Dr. Benitez is a member of the American Association of Equine Practitioners, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Florida Veterinary Medical Association, and the Florida Association of Equine Practitioners.

Outside of work, Luis enjoys surfing, and he and his wife, Nixalyz, are active in their church. They have two beautiful daughters, Erin Madison and Kirsten Brooke.



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ize this fact and are diligent to have potential purchases “scoped” before they buy them.

Sales endoscopy is controversial because many veterinarians cannot absolutely agree on what is normal, what is abnormal but functional, or what is abnormal and detrimental. There has been research in this area to try to determine what is okay, but it is still inconclusive. This is particularly true regarding the potential risk factors for a horse that may suffer from dorsal displacement of the soft palate (DDSP). A resting endoscopic examination at a sale may not be the best way to determine if the horse has risk factors for DDSP, but we can still observe if the horse has certain abnormalities in the larynx that may increase the tendencies for DDSP. These factors often are not protected by the Conditions of Sale; therefore, it is important to have this looked at *before* purchase.

As stated before, many clients don’t like to take chances on how the horse scopes, and they want to purchase horses with throats that are as close to perfect as possible. They desire only small degrees of asynchrony in the larynx. Pre-sale endoscopic examination is the only way to determine the condition of the larynx. Asynchrony is another one of those things that veterinarians have trouble agreeing on. Recently there have been some retrospective studies that show that certain degrees of asynchrony have performed well statistically.

Of course, there are other things that can be discovered by endoscopic examination that would most likely be detrimental to the horse’s performance. Many of these are covered by most Conditions of Sale. However, pre-sale examination is important because you can identify these animals early and remove them from your list of horses before wasting your time buying them only to find out later that they have a returnable problem.

## RADIOGRAPHIC EVALUATION

There are many different methods of radiographic examination of the horse you are trying to purchase. This is usually dictated by whether or not there is a repository at the sale, the value of the horses being selected, the availability of radiographs made by the consignor’s veterinarian, etc.

Several sales have gone to a repository system. The consignor has radiographs taken of their sale prospect, and these x-rays will be placed in the repository for viewing by veterinarians representing buyers. Normally these radiographs consist of a standardized number of views so that one horse’s set is similar to the next.

The timing of when these radiographs were made is important as many of these animals will train and often times have speed work after the set is taken. It is advisable to have your own radiographs made of these horses either before or after purchase as it is not uncommon for chip fractures to occur once the horse

does speed work. However, the radiographs in the repository have value as they can be used for an initial screening tool. Some of these horses may be eliminated from consideration for purchase based on the repository x-rays.

Other sales have either incomplete use of repositories or no repository at all. In those instances, radiographs are often made by the consignor and are available for viewing at their stable. Once again, the timing of these radiographs is important, and we would not recommend relying on these other than as a pre-sale screening tool.

In previous years, if a buyer was interested in several horses, they would often have all of these horses radiographed on a pre-sale basis. As one can see, this could be potentially very costly and time consuming. This is still done today, but with the advent of repositories and consignor-supplied radiographs, it is less common.

Another way to perform a radiographic examination is strictly post-sale. Many sales companies (but not all) will have bone Conditions of Sale that will protect the buyer to some extent if the horse is found to have a bone disease condition that is of concern. Unfortunately, as with scoping conditions, they usually don't cover everything that may be a problem. If you are buying horses and doing post-sale examinations, the potential exists that you may take home a horse that you are uncomfortable with.

Often clients are overwhelmed when we report our observations of a radiographic examination. The findings on survey radiographs can be numerous. It is not within the scope of this article to go through individual lesions and talk about what they might mean to you as a buyer. There can be many findings that are of little or no significance, or there can be a single major finding of great significance. It is our job to sort these out and advise you on what they may mean to your purchase.

## OTHER TESTS AND EXAMINATIONS

The tests and examinations that we most often perform have been stated above. There are other things that we commonly do, though, to insure you of "good" purchase. These include:

1. Review of medication reports in the repository/information center.
2. Ultrasonography of major tendons and ligaments.
3. Pre-sale video screening.
4. Post-sale medication testing.
5. Routine blood work.

*It is our goal at Teigland, Franklin and Brokken to help you find horses that you are comfortable with when you take them home.*

*Buying a horse should be an enjoyable experience so that you can look forward to a successful racing career for your new purchase.*

## Did You Know?

**Our billing cycle cuts off on the 25th of each month. In order for your payment to be applied to your current statement, it must reach us no later than the 25th. Payments received after the cut-off date will be shown on the following month's statement.**

## The Lewellyn Procedure

by Luis A. Castro, D.V.M.

Also known as a Sternothyroideus Tenectomy, the Lewellyn procedure has been used to correct dorsal displacement (flipping) of the soft palate in racehorses for several years. We perform a modification of Dr. Hugh Lewellyn's procedure that involves not only the cutting of the sternothyroideus tendon, but also removal of a portion of the muscle itself.

"Flipping" of the soft palate can occur frequently during a race and can affect performance negatively. By removing this tendon and muscle, the chance for the larynx to move is reduced, and this consequently reduces the opportunity for the soft palate to displace and either partially, or in some instances, fully occlude the airway.



This surgery is done in the stall under general anesthesia and with the horse on its back. The actual procedure takes a few minutes, and the horse is on its feet in 30 - 40 minutes. The horse returns to training two days post-op, and can return to racing two to three weeks later.

We have done almost 2,500 of these procedures since 1994 and have found an increase in performance measured in the Beyer speed figure as averaged over the immediate three races after surgery. Previously published studies have shown increases in performance in 65% to 75% of the cases. Our unpublished data shows post-operative improvement in 82% of the horses.

The bottom line is that this is a procedure that can be done in the stall safely and relatively inexpensively with excellent results, and little, if any, down time for the horse.

# TFB at “The Spa”

As many of you are aware, TFB opened a satellite practice in Saratoga Springs in May 2005. Dr. Luis Castro and Dr. April McCord are on the grounds from May 1st through October 31st to be available to our clients for all your needs, from the day you ship in through the day you ship out. If you need assistance at Belmont Park or at a neighboring farm, they are also available to travel to your location on an appointment basis.

In addition to the day-to-day care of your horses, Drs. Castro and McCord have state-of-the-art equipment to provide you with ultrasonography, digital radiography, shockwave therapy, endoscopy, lameness exams and treatment, purchase exams, and Lewellyn procedures (see article on page 3), among other services. If you are interested in purchasing a yearling at the annual Saratoga Springs sales auction in August, please give us a call to assist you with a veterinary examination of the horses you are considering for purchase.

Drs. Castro and McCord can be reached at the cell phone numbers below:

Dr. Luis Castro            954-732-2005

Dr. April McCord        954-732-6813

## Luis A. Castro, DVM

Luis A. Castro received his DVM degree from the University of Florida in 1988 and joined Teigland, Franklin & Brokken in 1991 after working in an ambulatory practice in Miami-Dade County, Florida. He has been a full partner at TFB since 1996, and currently practices 6 months at Palm Meadows Training Center in Palm Beach County, Florida, and 6 months at Saratoga Racetrack in upstate New York.



His interests include lameness and diagnostic imaging as well as upper respiratory disorders. Dr. Castro has performed more than 2,000 surgical procedures to correct the dorsal displacement of the soft palate (Lewellyn procedure).

Since its inception in 2005, Dr. Castro has served on the Executive Committee of the Florida Association of Equine Practitioners (FAEP), and was the President of this organization in 2006, in addition to being a member of the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). He has also authored several papers that have been published in the American Journal of Veterinary Research.

Dr. Castro was born in Caracas, Venezuela and was raised in Maryland. He is fluent in Spanish and English, enjoys traveling, golf and scuba diving. He and his wife, Sharon, are the proud “persons” to 3 Australian Shepherds - Kona, Hilo and Kai.

## Our Mission Statement

*To offer our clients state-of-the-art equine veterinary medicine and unparalleled customer service while maintaining our tradition of high ethical standards.*

