

Buying a Retired Racehorse



IRISH HORSE RACING GUIDES



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Buying a Retired Racehorse in Ireland

Former racehorses can go on to be brilliant eventers, show jumpers, hunters and hacks. Here is what to expect, how to buy responsibly, and where to find help in Ireland.

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At a glance

TYPICAL RETRAINING TIME

At least 6 to 9 months (Irish Horse Welfare Trust)

CHANGE OF OWNERSHIP

Must be registered with Weatherbys within 30 days of purchase

PASSPORT AUTHORITY FOR THOROUGHBREDS

Weatherbys (Ireland)

TREO EILE

Not-for-profit rehoming platform, established 2020

IRISH HORSE WELFARE TRUST

Charity CHY14634, based in Co. Wicklow

Every year a great many thoroughbreds finish their racing careers, and many of them have years of useful, happy life ahead. With the right retraining, former racehorses go on to compete in eventing, show jumping, dressage and polo, or simply become lovely hacks and hunters. Buying one can be hugely rewarding, but it is not the same as buying a horse that has already been produced for riding club life.

This guide covers what to expect, how to buy responsibly, and where to find support in Ireland. When you are ready to look at horses, browse the listings on our retired racehorse marketplace.

1 What a racehorse has (and has not) learned

A horse straight out of training is fit, used to routine and handled every day by professionals. It is also used to a very particular life: fed high-energy rations, ridden short and fast on the gallops, and rarely asked to hack out alone, stand quietly at a gate or work in an outline.

That is why retraining matters. The Irish Horse Welfare Trust (IHWT) says it takes a **minimum of six to nine months** to retrain and re-school an ex-racehorse, and longer for some individuals. Its own programme starts with vet, dentist and chiropractor checks and a change of diet, then moves on through long-reining and lunging to ridden work, mixing flatwork with hacks.

Note

The IHWT is clear that ex-racehorses are **not suitable for novice riders**: they need experienced handling and plenty of care and attention. Be honest with yourself about your experience and your support network before you buy.

2 Flat or jumps?

Where a horse raced tells you something about it. A Flat horse has never been asked to jump in a race, so jumping will be new. National Hunt horses have raced over hurdles or fences, or in bumpers on the way to jumping, and most are geldings. Neither is better; they simply suit different riders and goals. Our National Hunt vs Flat explainer covers the differences.

3 Where to find a retired racehorse

Retraining and rehoming charities

- **Irish Horse Welfare Trust.** Based at Woodenbridge, near Arklow in Co. Wicklow, the IHWT runs an ex-racehorse retraining and rehoming programme established in 2001, part-funded by Horse Racing Ireland and the Irish Racehorse Trainers Association. Trainers can refer suitable horses to it, and retrained horses are rehomed to experienced homes. It has helped more than 1,500 horses and ponies over more than 20 years.

- **Treo Eile.** Founded in 2020, Treo Eile (Irish for "another direction") is a not-for-profit that helps trainers and owners rehome and retrain thoroughbreds when their racing careers end. Its website lists horses for rehoming and a directory of retrainers, and it supports ex-racehorse classes at shows and events.

Direct from trainers and owners

Many trainers prefer to find a good home for a retiring horse privately. It is worth asking, especially if you know people in racing. Our marketplace brings those horses together in one place.

Retrainers

Professional retrainers buy horses out of training, put in the months of groundwork, and sell them on as riding horses. You will usually pay more, but you get a horse that has already started its new career.

4 Before you buy: a checklist

Get a pre-purchase vetting

Always have a vet examine the horse before you commit. The standard pre-purchase examination used in Ireland follows guidance supported by the Veterinary Council of Ireland and Veterinary Ireland, and is carried out in five stages:

1. A full initial examination, including heart and eyes
2. Walking and trotting, with flexion tests if the vet judges them appropriate
3. Strenuous exercise, lunged or ridden, while the vet listens to the horse's breathing
4. A rest period with re-examination of the heart
5. A second walk and trot to check for lameness after exercise

You can ask for extras such as X-rays, tendon scans or an endoscopy. For a horse that has raced, tell the vet what you plan to do with it so they can focus on what matters.

Ask about the horse's history

Ask how many times the horse ran, why it is retiring, any injuries or time off, stable manners, and how it behaves in traffic, in the horsebox and with the farrier. A trainer who has had the horse for a while will usually be very open.

Check the passport and do the paperwork

Every thoroughbred in Ireland is registered with **Weatherbys**, which issues its passport. When you buy, the seller must hand over the passport, and you must register the **change of ownership with Weatherbys within 30 days**. It is a legal requirement. When a trainer or owner permanently retires a horse from racing, they record the next keeper's details as well, which supports traceability through the horse's life.

Plan the costs

Beyond the purchase price, budget for livery or grazing, feed, farrier, vet and dental care, insurance, tack that fits (racing saddles will not do), and lessons or professional help during retraining.

5 Welfare comes first

Horse Racing Ireland runs a welfare programme covering care throughout a thoroughbred's life, and organisations such as Treo Eile work with HRI, Weatherbys and the Department of Agriculture on traceability after racing. As a buyer, the most important thing you can do is buy a horse you can genuinely look after, and be honest if things are not working out so the horse can move on to the right home.

If a horse is not suited to riding, some charities rehome horses as companions, and the IHWT regularly lists companion horses as well as riding prospects.

6 Ready to look?

Browse retired racehorses on our marketplace. If you would like to understand the racing side first, read about how ownership and syndicates work, or see who looks after these horses in our guide to working in Irish racing.

Questions people ask

Are retired racehorses suitable for beginners?

Generally not. The Irish Horse Welfare Trust says ex-racehorses are not suitable for novice riders and need experienced handling, lots of care and at least six to nine months of retraining.

What paperwork do I need when buying an ex-racehorse?

The seller should hand over the horse's passport, and you must register the change of ownership with Weatherbys, the passport authority for thoroughbreds in Ireland, within 30 days of purchase.

Should I get a retired racehorse vetted?

Yes. A five-stage pre-purchase examination by a vet is strongly advised, and you can add X-rays, tendon scans or endoscopy. Tell the vet what you plan to do with the horse.

Which Irish organisations rehome ex-racehorses?

The Irish Horse Welfare Trust runs a retraining and rehoming programme part-funded by Horse Racing Ireland, and Treo Eile is a not-for-profit platform that connects retiring racehorses with retrainers and new homes.

Sources

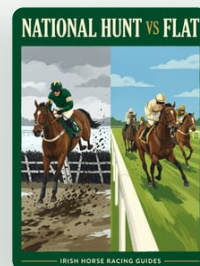
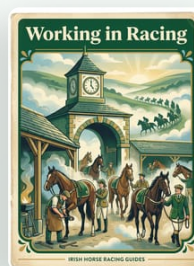
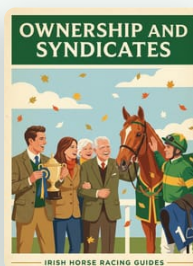
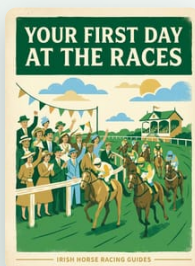
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Last reviewed 30 September 2026. Dates and details change, so check with the racecourse before you travel.



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