

## Buyer Beware - Part 1

These next pages are dedicated to all the people worldwide who have knowingly been deceived and swindled when they thought they were getting an honest deal. My sympathies go out to “the many” of them. Let us all stand up together on this one and stop the abuse!

### My Story

I have always wanted horses since I was young... was absolutely horse crazy, but living in the city with unsympathetic parents to my obsession made it next to impossible. The haunting never left and when we moved to my current 80 acre property, I purchased our first two horses in 2003. In **June 2004** my daughter discovered on the internet the most magnificent horse that we had ever seen in our lives. It was our dream horse and we had no clues as to what it was, but that did not take us long to find out. So began my never ending love affair with Gypsy Vanners.

Back then there were very few websites, but in **July 2004** I finally came across one in the UK selling gypsy vanners; Andrea Betteridge of Meadow Farms, UK. We spent many weeks discussing the breed and Ms. Betteridge cautioned me about the dishonestly amongst some UK breeders and the American importers.

**September 10 2004** - *BFSHIRE* *Syes do occassionally have some nice stock showing what they don't admit is the size on all which usually means they are small about 13hh like most of the Vines and SD that is showing. I am lucky as living here I really do know the breeding lines and the herd the horse has come out of, so no made up stories from the UK I can assure you.*

**October 10 2004** - *“With gypsy horses there has to be a word of caution, many have been imported from apparently some of the best breeding in the UK with many as offspring of a couple of well known sires, or at least having the name in the pedigree, if this is indeed correct the gene pool is going to be very limited. Luckily it is not possible for a mare to produce 25 offspring in her life, some breeds may be, but highly unlikely. It is a fact that, gypsy's do not keep a horse to old bones, so would never know how many they would produce often the horse has been sold well before the age of 10. One has to question there fore why a mares name appears so often. So double check all the lines and research as far back as you can, check with the seller of the horse and get written confirmation that it is correct. Ask as many questions as needed to verify your horses breeding. Then your careful hunt for a suitable stallion can begin. It is a sad fact that many substandard of unknown breeding leave the UK/Ireland shores only to appear later with a registered passport with known breeding stamped all over it. This will not help the breed and should not be encouraged..”*

**October 20 2004** - *“if you do not know each gypsy's stock properly they will make up the parentage if one is not carefull, hence why I have a huge database of blood lines which I know is true,”*

**November 1 2004** - *“this poor lady has been swamped into BFS or swop words around FBS let you work that one out but it starts Full-----COWS-----POO”*

**January 4 2005** - *“BFS just quoted those other AUs folks \$30.000 for that mare truly' into US then they have to ship to Aus ?????????????? I told them they were mad if they though it was good. not being funny BFS said Truly is big, there chap leading her is only 5.8 check out there site, she can only be 14.1hh 14.2 max”.*

I told her that I only wanted one horse to ride but in the end she persuaded me to bring in a stallion and mares to breed, thereby setting up the first foundation herd down under. I was apprehensive at first, as I had absolutely no experience with horses, except to get continually thrown off the nutter gelding that I had purchased a year ago. Andrea reassured me that there was nothing to breeding, anyone could do it and that she had access to “all” the best gypsies herds to buy from”. First she promised to send us loads of pictures to look at but we received very few.

**September 10 2004** - *“I am looking at horses next wednesday so will take loads of pictures of suitable horses if any catch you eye then I will arrange for them to be washed out and stood up for a picture taking session.”*

Then she promised us she would take off a couple of weeks when we came to the UK to tour all the different herds with us. An idea was born from this and so began the search for top quality gypsy horses as I could not see the sense importing poor quality when the freight/quarantine alone was \$23,00 per horse back in 2004.

## Treasure

In **September 2004** Black Forest Shires posted the first photos of The Lion King on their website and like everyone else we were taken aback by his presence. At this point we had still seen very few mares and I asked Ms. Betteridge if she could procure a mare sired by The Lion King. A few weeks later Ms. Betteridge sent photos of a “ride and drive” in foal mare called Treasure, daughter of The Lion King stating:

**September 20 2004** - *“she has the sweetest of natures and to be honest I have not seen a mare of this quality in the last 2 years”*

Below is the first photos of Treasure that we were sent on **September 20 2004** –



Yet just 3 weeks ago on **August 29 2004** I was sent the below 3 photos of mares she had recently found for other clients in the past, with Tansy of Harkaway Gypsy Horses only being sold in the same year.



Ms. Betteridge then sent another photo of a fantastic mare called Teasel, again owned by Harkaways. You will note that the mare in the background is Tia, now owned by Surrey Springs in Australia, another fabulous mare.

**November 2 2004** – *“not sure if I should show you this mare as she is a good match for Treasure, but will anyway as these don't come upto often”*



In 2005 more photos streamed in of excellent quality mares.



*Left photo* - Sent **July 31 2005** of Lottie, big 15+ mare in foal. **August 4 2005** - *“Lotti is for sale I love that mare she is one of the elite range as you well know they are few and far between, will be promoting her this week when I get a minute”*

*Centre photo* - sent **January 29 2005** - Amber the homozygous tobiano pearl carrier, recently owned by Dragon Fire Gypsy Horses

*Right photo* - Sent **October 27 2005** but taken June 10 2005 on her property of My Sweet Lexus Harmony

And further comments from Ms. Betteridge about how plentiful quality mares were to find and not to forget that there were breeders like Tom Price and Stevie Downs who literally between the two of them owned 100's of excellent quality mares. Last year in 2009, when I wandered through the Tom Price herd, I was thoroughly disgusted that I was kept from this quality.

**January 29 2005** - *“with a breeder up north who has loads of these good quality mares, any way saw some new herds with some spectacular horses in it”*

**October 23 2005** - *“got a superb mare in a couple of weeks ago, this mare came from Neil up north not Bill - got another coming soon off him as well, I do like his horses. as well, the greats like Tansy came from him also got a very rare champagne mare 15hh as well”*

These photos are all exceptional quality mares and they are not far and few between as you can see by comments and photos that were sent to me. Please do not get me wrong as Treasure is a fantastic mare that produces fabulous foals, but we did hum and haw over her in the beginning, as she wasn't quite what we wanted to start with. The deciding factor was the “100% guaranteed out of The Lion King” that Ms. Betteridge gave me.

Ms. Betteridge sent me an info pack about the breed and I ask the following questions:

**October 3 2004** - *Thanks for all the info you sent me the other day. All has been taken in and digested, however you have left me wondering about a couple of things that I read in your info pack. The first is about the size of the horse. It says “but the gypsies have gone out of their way to get the size smaller and smaller, the ultimate gypsy horse between the lads would be one that stands around the 12.3hh to 13hh with all the qualities of the bigger type they used to breed.” “Can you explain this to me as horses like the Lion King wouldn't be considered a true gypsy horse at the size of 15.2.”*

Her reply:

**October 3 2004** - *“YES HE IS CONSIDERED A GOOD GYPSY HORSE it is just the gypsy's started to down breed a few years ago to get a smaller height a trend if you like, this year they are going for the bigger ones again !!!” “Also is Treasure longer in the back like the Irish cob. Again I can not tell.”*

Her reply:

**October 3 2004** - *“Treasure is what is considered the best of the best, Irish cobs which are a different breed to gypsy horses although some are registered as such which is confusing, are quite ugly I think they have a long back and big heads, not as much feather, the pony type sweet head is what the breed is about.”*

First some of the best gypsy horses came from Ireland, for instance The Road Sweeper and it is incredulous to believe that the gypsies have decided to breed bigger this year to match a trend. It took them years to get the size down and to this day they are not breeding them up in size yet. Last year when I spoke with Michael Vine while in the UK, I inquired if he had any mares in the 14.2-15 hand range, the answer was no, most of his stock was under 14 hands, with much of it being in the 13 hand range.

She was asking 7500 pounds for Treasure which was expensive at the time, even Ms. Betteridge admitted that she was dear.

**October 3 2004** - *“hence why she is expensive in comparison as she is of top quality, ie what the gypsy's breed for in type and confirmation colouring and with the added bonus of wonderful silky hair, but as said you need to have the best of best to represent the breed over there,”*

I also questioned her lineage as being far too convenient. However, Ms. Betteridge gave me her assurances that she was from The Lion King.

**September 20 2004** - *“she is a daughter %100 of the Lion King, she is 5 years old, in foal, ride and drive. the foal is going to be awesome as the sire (The Business) is so heavy he makes the Lion king look slim and nothing so that is saying something. her price is £7.500 which provided she is in foal will make her a cheap horse by comparison - she was worth every penny they were asking for her, to be honest if I put her up on line she will be gone.”*

Hence we bought Treasure on her word....in hindsight one of the oldest sales trick in the book. And again she confirmed Treasure's bloodlines to me:

**September 28 2004** - *“sire height of unborn foal 14.3hh, sire of foal- is called The Buisness, out of The Boss, out of The Lob, sire of the mare IS The Lion King, Dam of the mare is Black Bob breeding.”*

A contract on Treasure was then issued to me.

**September 29 2004** - *"I will now issue a contract so you know your new horse is safe with me, it is self explanatory,"*

Ms. Betteridge's website boasted and still does today, the following message:

*"All our horse have the correct training and handling profiles done, this is passed onto you as the client. It is an honest assessment of their training to allow you to import the correct horse for the purpose intended."*

Treasure was suppose to be a ride and drive mare and Ms. Betteridge was fully aware that I wanted a mare to ride and was also fully aware that I was a novice to horses.

**January 1 2005** - *"I can not wait to go for a ride on my beautiful Treasure."*

**May 11 2005** - *"Had an expert ride Seymour's pony today and guess what, both of our horse are not beginners horses and she said we are doing really well considering what we have to deal with. I sure hope Treasure is much nicer to ride.....not such a live wire."*

When she arrived in New Zealand in June 2005, our trainer got bucked off her, she wasn't even broke in let alone a driving mare. She also was incredibly difficult to do her feet when she arrived as she kept kicking out, giving me whiplash at one time. I repeatedly told Ms. Betteridge and was advised by her over the phone to hit her legs with a stick to get her to lift her feet. We all know that trimming a horse's foot requires more than just lifting the foot and in the early days as a novice I was lucky that I did not get seriously injured. One would think that a ride and drive mare would be use to having shoes put on let alone just picking out her feet.

AND in the info pack compiled by her and sent to me back in 2004, there was this information about trimming the gypsy horse's feet.... For obvious reasons I only cringe when I read this today and can only say ...what a load of hog wash!

**October 10 2004 -Feet trimming** - *Because of the very first lesson it ever learned regarding being tied up, handling for whatever reason is easy, trimming feet is done when the toes look long, the horse is tied up short waits patiently you pick its feet up, it cannot rear knows it cannot escape so may try to pull its feet away but after a few seconds stands patiently and will have its feet trimmed, the same can be said for baths or anything else.*

Ms. Betteridge then stated:

**September 30 2004** - *"well we got the mare in harness but to be honest I did not take pictures as she definatly needs more work, she went but not as well as I would have liked so spent about 2 hours drowning her in oil to keep mane, feathers and tail in tact and asked him to take her back guard with life and ring me next week and I will go and review. so now we will have to wait for a week, either way she will definatly be a ride and drive for some one hitting 100 if needed !!"*

Why didn't she herself give Treasure some more training instead of spending 2 hours (?) drowning her in oil. She already had her in harness and she boasted on her website that *"All horses will have a correct training and handling profile done, this is passed onto you as the client"*. Besides, as per her email below breaking to harness was a quick and simple task and Treasure was allegedly a ride and drive mare already.



**October 10 2004** - *Breaking to harness is done with the same calm attitude, the horse is tied up short and the harness is put on him he is left tied until he is more than happy to take the breaching straps and have the harness pulled around on him, once that point is reached which believe it or not takes an amazingly short time, a long line with a tyre or anything that will rattle is attached and off you go. All this once again goes back to the first tying and leading lessons. It takes no time at all then the cart is put on, they jump on and drive them forward and away they go it is as simple as that, usually the only thing that takes the time is the reversal of riding getting used to the blinkers.*

Ten days later I find she has been out to pasture rather than trained for driving or riding and never again was it mentioned that she was any good to drive or ride, basically I believe to this day she was a broodmare straight out of the paddocks.

**October 10 2004** – *“will be going up this week to check on Treasure, she is in a huge field with loads of grass and very little to rub on so she should be ok, but I am checking her over the winter and Bill is oiling her legs weekly so she should be ok.”*

Then again on **October 28 2004** I was sent photos of the field where Treasure was being kept. As you can see there are plenty of scrubby trees and bushes where she can rub out her mane. Here is another statement telling me she is going to look after her with her life.



**September 28 2004** – *“by the way of course I would make sure no more mane is pulled out or feathers burnt off or anything else for that matter I want her to arrive with you ready to walk in a show ring !”* Here is a shot of her when she finally arrived in New Zealand 10 months later. Feather completely burned and chewed out, not much different looking than in the photos above and definitely not show ring condition.



Yet she made this statement below

**September 9 2004** *the gypsy's just deal and turn over money with them they should never go out of the country and be bred from. equally I do worry about the unhandled stock that is also shipped some poor person will be expecting their new horse only to put in field and not be able to catch it for a few weeks.....just like Treasure when we first got her.*

.....Continue on “Buyer Beware Part 2” .....