

Omar: A Show Career Cut Short



Anyone who works with horses will often, as they notice the horse changing in appearance and demeanour, wish that they had taken photos to record the developments as they happen. Personally speaking, the occasions when I've made the effort and found time to do so have usually been when the horse has displayed very little or very general outward change. It's another version of that law which decrees that the most remarkable moments always happen when nobody is around to witness them! And yes despite this, it has finally happened – I've managed to record a change that is quite remarkable.



Meet Omar, a 7-year-old thoroughbred. He has never raced, having been bred for showing. Yet that career never came to fruition, for at the age of 5 years, Omar suffered a bad injury to his off fore when he caught it in a wire fence and almost sliced off the hoof. After two weeks in plaster, he was left with a lasting injury to his pastern and a hoof that was growing progressively more misshapen. At this point, Omar was gifted to his current owner Kathy. Interested in doing natural horsemanship with him, Kathy rode him just twice before he suffered a further paddock injury, getting both hind legs trapped and cut in another fence.

So, this is the sorry sight that walked off the float when I worked on a group of horses near Casino. Omar walked so awkwardly and stiffly that it was virtually impossible to identify which leg was giving him most trouble. Already compensating for the first injury to his forelegs, the second injury to both hinds had left him with nowhere to go. Poor Omar could only do his best to get around.

In the first two pictures, we can see that he has adopted what could be called a 'pain minimisation' stance. He remains locked in this long after the injuries have healed ('cellular memory' – the body remembers the injury and compensates for it even after recovery). He is leaning forward to take the weight off his hinds, while stretching his head forward and down to ease the weight on his forelegs. Only his undamaged near fore is in anything like a comfortable weight bearing position – and the near shoulder shows tension due to the extra strain this quarter is taking. (By the way, the marks on his face are cream, applied to ease itchy spots.)



The next two pictures show Omar just after that first session of the Equine Touch. Immediately obvious is the postural change: he has brought the hind feet forward under himself more and his hindquarters look altogether more relaxed. The weight bearing is more evenly distributed, although he is not there yet. He has lifted his head and his demeanour has improved generally.

On month later, I visited to give Omar a second session. I had the rather strange experience of driving up to the property and seeing a rich chestnut horse in the paddock



alongside the track. I wondered briefly if Kathy had taken on another horse yet upon asking her, was swiftly told what my eyes could not take in: this was Omar.



These pictures were taken before his second session. In the picture of Omar's near side, we can now see the breeding of a horse whose sire was an extremely successful hack. He looks far more comfortable through the body and softer through the neck. He has even developed some top line, all on his own, despite not having worked. With his ears forward, he looks like a relaxed and contented horse. The picture of his offside shows a slightly different story: there is still tension evident in the right hindquarter and he has returned the off hind to its former position, behind full weight-bearing.



Omar's condition has improved overall. He has had a very small change to his feeding regime, with the addition of a mug of pony nuts per day, but this is not enough to account for such improvement. Relaxed muscles have a rounder profile, but it is not just that either. With a huge amount of tension and strain released through the Equine Touch, his body can move with greater ease. Previously, it had been working against itself, as one injury compensation pattern starting in the forequarters jammed into another originating in the hindquarters.

The most remarkable change, however, is in Omar's colour. Kathy had emailed me within a week of the first session to say that he had become darker, but nothing had prepared me for the extent of this change. Improved circulation, detoxification and delivery of nutrients throughout the body had seen Omar's previous washed-out pale chestnut coat become deep and shining – the right word would be 'burnished'.

(Incidentally, the photos were taken with the same camera and settings in similar weather conditions. Picture 4 shows a change in light when the sun came out – note that Kathy's sunnies are now on! Otherwise, there is little difference.)

There is still work to be done with Omar, as it will take a couple more sessions for the benefits to truly hold. Indeed, this horse is always going to need regular bodywork, along with remedial trimming of his imbalanced feet, in order to live comfortably and do light work. Fortunately, owner Kathy is quite happy to see that he gets exactly that.

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