

Lace's Story from Disaster to Recovery



Lace, a part-bred QH mare, was born in June, 2004. Her owner Bev had bred her from her very faithful old mare and was looking forward to a long partnership together. However, when the filly was just five months old, Bev damaged her back badly in a fall from another young horse. Reluctantly, she made the heart-breaking decision to sell Lace, as she felt physically unable to cope with a youngster at that point. Unfortunately, the sale did not work out as expected. Six months later, Bev realised that the filly was losing weight rapidly and that her new owner was asking her to do upwards of 10kms work every day. Things did not seem right, so Bev bought Lace back. After six months of rest to get condition back on the horse, Bev started groundwork in anticipation of riding. At this point, the first disaster struck: Lace managed to fall over a gate into a sheep pen, where she staked herself on top of a steel post. The result was an open wound on the belly, a cut across a coronet band and lacerations to her legs. The vet was called, the damage was treated and the horse was rested for a further three months.

In November 2007, the time came to start working again. Bev recommenced with the groundwork and at last their relationship flourished. A single call from the house was all it took to bring Lace cantering across the 10-acre paddock. Then one day, after it had been raining, something spooked Lace in the paddock and disaster struck once more. She reacted, slipped in the mud and executed a complete somersault. Upon reaching her, Bev discovered nothing much more than a couple of grazes and a sore near hind, which seemed to come right after a few minutes' walking.

All seemed well, until they rode at a local Natural Horsemanship gathering the following week. That afternoon, Bev noticed a large lump rising on Lace's off stifle. It had grown to



Lace before her first session

the size of a tennis ball by the time the vet got to see it. The news was not good. Bev remembers his exact words: "My god, she's made a mess of herself." During that fall, Lace had torn the femoral bicep to the extent that the vet could have put his clenched fist into the hole. The lump Bev had first noticed was the accumulation of fluid over the injury site. Surprisingly, the vet's advice was to keep riding her. Bev sought a second veterinary opinion, this time the options were rest or surgery, but no riding. Scared and uncertain of what to do, she turned Lace out again.

By the time I visited the horse, several months later in February 2008, Lace's stifle was locking periodically. The leg was also dropping out from beneath when she turned to the right. Bev was in despair – the prescribed rest wasn't working for her horse.



Injury after the first session



Lace's injury at its worst

tissue where the muscle had repaired itself. Lace herself was no longer worried about me touching the area. The vet was called out for a further check. Bev reports that he felt the muscle and asked Lace to back up. With his hand on the stifle, he was unable to detect any locking and he even had trouble locating the hole that he had placed his fist against previously – the hole no longer existed, having been replaced by scar tissue. Astonished at the degree to which Lace had recovered, he declared her fit to ride.

Lace has recently been restarted and, after more than a year of trauma, Bev is at last establishing a ridden relationship with her beloved filly. "We proved them all wrong," she says. "She didn't need surgery and she didn't need putting down and I didn't have to get rid of her." Lace is now back in work and coming along nicely.

"All the vets wanted to do was x-ray and cut her open and cut the ligament inside the stifle to release it," she remembers. "I didn't want that as I've heard too many horror stories about it not working. Everyone else was saying 'she's no good, get rid of her' I was sick of hearing that too." In fairness to the vets, they had no other course of action to resort to at that point. Obviously, I knew far less than them about this kind of injury and all I could offer Bev was an open approach: "Let's just try it and see." Even if the injury failed to heal, the bodywork would make the horse feel better and more able to cope with the problem.

So we tried it. I found Lace to be a very sweet little horse, confident but not pushy. She was tight throughout her body, probably as a result of the earlier accident as well as the more recent one. Indeed, it was no doubt the soft tissue trauma

caused by the first accident that made the consequences of the second incident so severe – not to mention the excessive work she had experienced at such a physically immature age, which would have left her body overstressed with plenty of soft tissue spasm. Naturally, Lace was worried about my hands going near the injury site, which was unsurprising after so many examinations. I worked quietly with an audience of Bev and her friends, who took before and after photographs in the hope of seeing a change. As all Equine Touch practitioners are trained to do, I worked across the horse's whole body first, before returning to the specific site. Afterwards, Bev swore that the lump had reduced, but it was hard to tell, as being so close to the stifle it changed appearance depending on the position of her leg.

Three days later, Bev emailed me: "I can't believe the difference in her. She looks fantastic and her coat has darkened. Her itch has improved and her body shape is, well, just different. The best thing though is that I've just seen her lying down. That's the first time in six months that I've seen her do that." It was still too soon to tell whether the injury was improving, but the news that Lace was confident enough in her ability to get up to now lie down was good news in itself. Over the course of eight months, I visited Lace four times, this being the best we could manage with nearly three hours travelling between us. In the meantime, Bev took a Level 1 course in the Equine Touch herself and worked on the horse in between visits, following my suggestion of 'little and often', which I felt best suited a longer term recovery for this

kind of problem.

It was on my third visit that I found Lace's improvement to be very obvious: not only was the bump much smaller, but with palpation it was possible to feel a long ridge of scar

by Jane Clothier. Equine Touch