

# Arthur: A Holistic Journey



A sorry state: late Feb 2008

Arthur is a 14-year-old TB and ex-racehorse. His owner, Else, called me after her vet recommended some gentle bodywork to help the horse overcome the effects of a recent injury to his hind leg.

Arthur had fallen in the paddock after clipping a front hoof and pulling the shoe. Subsequently, he had remained lame and had been frequently lying down showing discomfort similar to colic symptoms, although he didn't have colic. Tests had shown the presence of soft tissue injury, but the vet could identify no specific area requiring intervention. It is to his credit that he was prepared to recommend a form of holistic bodywork as the next step.

The horse was in a pretty sorry state when I first met him. He was in poor condition with a very dull coat, plus rainscald and greasy heel. The spinal processes were alarmingly pronounced due to weight loss and muscle wastage. His pelvis looked dreadful and he was tight through the shoulders. As a sporadic windsucker, he also had a high level of tension in his throat and neck. Poor farriery, with low heels and long toes, had compounded the problems. In short, he was uncomfortable all over.

During the hands-on bodywork, it quickly became apparent that the primary pain was located throughout his off hindquarter, particularly in the femoral biceps and through to the stifle area. There was also significant pain in the oblique muscles behind the ribcage and it's possible that this spasm was creating pressure on the large intestine, causing the colic-like pain. More pain extended along his back on the off side. For good measure, he also had pain around the throat and in his right TMJ. Poor Arthur remained calm but detached during the session, clearly unwilling to engage with the painful experience of his own body.

Between the first and second session, Arthur received a visit from our excellent local equine dentist. A tooth with an abscess below, undetected by a previous dentist, was removed. The infection would have caused considerable pain, contributing to Arthur's poor condition.

On my second visit, the horse looked more relaxed through the body than previously. Else reported that Arthur was no longer showing the colic-like symptoms and had stopped twisting that near hind for the first time in years. During the session, he showed no pain whatsoever in his off hindquarter, so it was time to add some limb mobilisation and stretching added to the mix. This would help to restore his awareness of his own range of motion. I was also able to do some more work on the shoulders that had been compensating for the ongoing issues behind.



Sweaty from his rug but improving big-time: mid-March 2008



A little way to go but looking like a horse again:  
mid-May 2008

Although still very quiet, Arthur was far more involved with the bodywork and relaxed completely in the first few minutes.

Else was now on a mission to improve every aspect of her horse's care, including his diet and hoofcare. A natural trimmer came to restore some balance to Arthur's feet on the same day as the third Equine Touch session. Despite the presence of a fresh cut to the right fore pastern, Arthur remained soft through the body, with just a small degree of residual pain. His soft tissue condition was so much improved that even a fresh injury failed to induce any problems.

Arthur and Else have gone from strength to strength. His hooves are improving and this rebalancing is supporting some effective, lasting improvements to his posture. A later chiropractic check has confirmed that Arthur is, from that point of view, free of problems. Next comes a saddle refit. Else gives her own version of the changes in her horse.

*"I think he has put on about 80kg since he had his tooth extracted. There are no ribs showing, his neck has doubled in size and his top line, shoulders and rump have all changed significantly. Some nights when I go to leave the flat yard after a work out, he pulls the reins out of my hands and turns around to go back and do more work – despite the fact that it is so dark we can't see anything! He is a fantastic horse and is so happy to be back in work, which is great. He is also a lot more forward moving now – I think he must be feeling pretty good!"*

*"The other thing I have noticed with him is that after rain he is usually covered in nearly full body rain scald and has greasy heel to the point that his entire legs used to swell up and he would be totally bald where the scald was. Since the treatment he has not had a single bout of either of these conditions."*

All credit must go to Else, who has been on a steep (and expensive) learning curve. Results have now shown how a comprehensive approach – nutrition, dentistry, bodywork, hoof care, tack – can bring about dramatic improvements that can turn round a horse's life.

*Jane Clothier is an Equine Touch instructor and practitioner based on the Mid North Coast of NSW. Having emigrated from the UK in 2007, she is now running courses in the Equine Touch throughout NSW and practicing in the Coffs Harbour area. More case studies involving horses she has met since her arrival (and since the easing of the lockdown) will follow in future issues.*

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