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Volume 10 Issue 2

Spotlight on the Equine Touch

Perplexing Stride Problem: Free Willy

By Jock Ruddock

[Warning: possibly disturbing photos within]

The best lessons regarding horse care are those that are suddenly thrust upon us by accident. It is so easy as an equine body worker to look for the answer to the symptom in the most spectacular places and ignore the sometimes basic simplicity of the cause.

So it was once at an Equine Touch and Beyond Clinic that I was holding in Texas. In this clinic we often have people bring along horses exhibiting some form of problem which the advanced students and practitioners can work with to try to alleviate the horse's discomfort.

In this instance, the horse was a 7-year-old Thoroughbred gelding displaying hindquarter lameness, stiffness, and extremely short steps on both hind legs. Palpation showed no concentrated pain in any specific spot in that the horse did not move away, though he showed concern when the lower back and hind quarter was palpated and worked, and was reluctant to lift the hind legs.

For over an hour the practitioners studied, worked and observed the hind quarter as the horse processed but there was no release of tension in the hind quarters and no difference in the length of stride.

It was then that I noticed that the horse had not "dropped" once during the work, neither had he urinated for the whole time he had been in the stall. Thinking that it could be a urinary tract stone or a urinary bean, I palpated the sheath to try and encourage the penis to drop.

I was stunned with what appeared from the opening. To describe it as an alien would not be beyond imagination. Pressure to the sheath brought about the eruption of a 'black carnation' (Photo 1) measuring over 6" across, which went back inside the sheath for at least another 6". (The sheath lining was heavily encrusted with black gunk, or smegma, formed from secretions of skin oils and sweat mixed with dead skin cells and dirt).



Photo 1

Being of the squeamish sort, I called over one of my practitioners, Lizzie Meyers (Photo 2), to do the honors. So after gloving up, Lizzie began to work. None of us had ever seen the amount of rubbish that came out of this sheath (Photo 3), not to mention the size of the urinary bean (Photo 4) that Lizzie also extracted from the head of the penis.



Photo 2



Photo 3

After having cleaned out the whole genitalia area, an immediate change came over the horse. Within minutes he had softened from top to tail, and on being walked the stride was now exactly as it should be. Ten minutes later he started to stretch himself and drop his penis, and then he urinated, comfortable for probably the first time in years (Photo 5).



Photo 4

On reflection, which is always easy, the whole hind end problem stemmed from the fact that the sheath and penis had never been cleaned or examined for urinary beans. Some simple basic equine maintenance by the owner could have relieved the problem, which was not an obvious one, once again teaching the lesson to all equine body workers never to take anything for granted.



Photo 5

Interesting was the coincidental letter which I received from Sweden only two days before, where I had lectured on urinary tract beans over the summer. The letter shows it is not just horse owners who are unaware of the presence of urinary tract beans, which are a common occurrence.

Hi

Jock,

I don't know if you remember, but at your summer class in Sweden (ET and beyond + Level 2 students) you brought up the subject "beans" in the horse's penis. We all stood looking like question marks and didn't know what you were talking about. Of course you enlightened us poor unaware horse owners.

The other day we had our vet checking the teeth on our horses, and I asked her to look for beans at the same time. She was a bit puzzled but started to look and found a big one at the first horse. She was quite startled. Number two had none, but also number three had a big one. Now she was even more startled!

This vet has a rather big veterinary clinic together with her husband and she explained that she usually looked when taking different kinds of tests on stallions, BUT she was now convinced that she hadn't looked careful enough on the horses before. Two out of three was a surprise to her.

So, I can assure you that in this way you have contributed to the welfare of many horses in Sweden. Because, I can certainly tell you that she will be looking for beans in every gelding from now on.

Best

regards,

Carina in Sweden

The fact is, sheath cleaning is an important factor in the health maintenance of the horse. However it is often neglected other than at a superficial level. While a healthy horse on a well-balanced diet has much less likelihood of developing beans and sheath gunk, these conditions are quite common. The effects from genitalia discomfort can radiate throughout the entire body of the horse, creating compensation symptoms that can affect the overall health and wellbeing of the animal, not to mention range of motion and performance. Distasteful as it may seem to some people, it is a necessity. Regular examination of the sheath and penis is mandatory so that cleaning can be performed as needed (see NHM Volume 6 Issue 2, *Equissentials*, and Volume 1 Issue 4, *Do It Yourself!*). Your vet or equine dentist should always be asked to check the horse for beans while the horse is under sedation.

About the author:

Jock Ruddock pioneered The Equine Touch, and with his veterinarian wife, Ivana Ruddock, has turned the Equine Touch into a discipline that is now recognized and applauded by all who see or use it, including veterinarians throughout Europe. The Equine Touch, a rebalancing, retraining, and some would say healing modality for the horse, is the first non-diagnostic, non-invasive, energy and connective soft-tissue discipline in the world to be awarded national accreditation status in the United Kingdom. Visit www.theequinetouch.com.