

LULA'S STORY

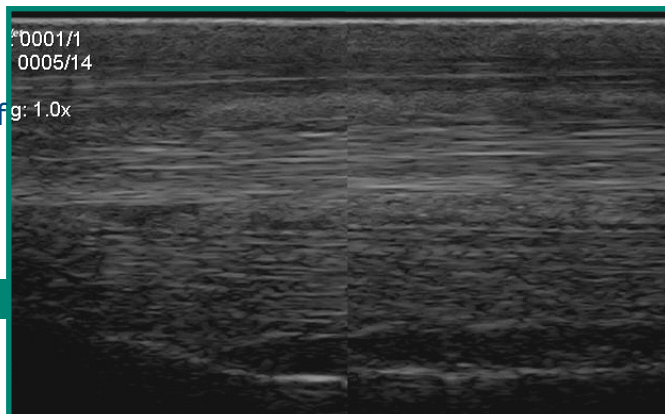
Meet Lula and her owner Eleanor. Lula came to us last October after displaying some very out of character behaviour. When competing at dressage in the Spring Lula reared during the test, which she had never done before and this was Eleanor's first sign that something wasn't quite right. Through the Summer Lula's behaviour became more unpredictable at competitions and at home and Eleanor lost her confidence in their partnership. After checking Lula's teeth, tack and feet to see what was causing these outbursts, she was referred by their vet to Sue Dyson at the AHT, suspecting that there was an underlying pain-related problem.

Assessment and Diagnosis:



Lula was in good bodily condition but had a big crest. She was unshod and had a convex contour of the soles of the front feet at the toe region and was reactive to hoof testers in the toe region. In hand on a firm surface Lula exhibited a pottery forelimb gait, but was much more comfortable on a soft surface. When ridden she showed a reluctance to go forwards and was short stepping in all four limbs; the thoracolumbosacral region was held stiffly. There was saddle slip to the left on the right rein. Bilateral palmar (at the base of the proximal sesamoid bones) nerve blocks of the forelimbs resulted in marked increased step length of both forelimbs, and accentuated the shortness of the hindlimb gait. Distal limb nerve blocks of the left hindlimb did not alter the gait; left hindlimb lameness was abolished by perineural analgesia of the deep branch of the lateral plantar nerve and saddle slip resolved. Right hindlimb lameness became apparent which was also abolished by perineural analgesia of the deep branch of the lateral plantar nerve. The horse moved with much greater swing of the thoracolumbosacral spine and went forward willingly.

Radiographic examination of the front feet revealed an increased ratio of the hoof distal phalanx distance: palmar length of the distal phalanx (27.6% & 26.4% in the left and right forelimbs, respectively), indicative of chronic lamellar pathology. Examination of the hocks and proximal metatarsal regions revealed no abnormality. Ultrasonographic assessment of the tarsal and metatarsal regions revealed evidence of proximal suspensory desmopathy.



Longitudinal ultrasonographic image of the proximal metatarsal region; proximal is to the left. The suspensory ligament has a diffuse decrease in echogenicity & loss of long linear echoes.

Treatment:

Lula was recommended for neurectomy of the deep branch of the lateral plantar nerve and plantar fasciotomy. Sue was confident in Lula being a good candidate for the surgery, assuming that the atypical laminitis could be controlled satisfactorily, saying "Approximately 76% of horses with primary proximal suspensory desmopathy are able to return to full athletic function for a minimum of two years". This would potentially give Eleanor and Lula a much needed positive step toward a better competitive future.

Lula made good post-operative progress. The owners were advocates of bare foot trimming, but were persuaded that Lula would be better if she was shod in front. Eleanor had a strict rehabilitation plan to follow at home, which included a weight control programme for Lula, and extensive physiotherapy to improve core muscle strength. This gave the two of them time to build their relationship again.

Recovery:

A year on, and the pair have gone from strength to strength. Eleanor's mother Mary is thrilled; "We took her rehabilitation slowly and Eleanor spent nearly six months doing much groundwork; re-building the trust she had lost when Lula had been reacting to her discomfort. Our patience has paid off and Lula and Eleanor are enjoying their ridden work together again. They are now both at Hartpury College where Eleanor is studying Equine Science with a particular interest in Rehabilitation and Therapies and Lula is signed up at the therapies centre as a possible demonstration horse! It has been an invaluable learning experience for Eleanor. She is so pleased to have persevered and to be able to trust and enjoy her horse again. Her plan is to have completed a BE80 by the end of next season – fingers crossed!" AHT wish Lula and Eleanor a continued great recovery and all the best for their future competitions. To find out more about our Equine Clinic <http://www.aht.org.uk/cms-display/ahtequine.html>