

Abby's Comeback

A devoted owner pulls out all the stops to save her foundered horse.

BY RONA DISTENFELD

One horrible morning in January 1999, Bonnie Ideal, of Norco, California, found her beloved 16-year-old Appaloosa mare, Abby, lying down, unable or unwilling to get up even to eat.

Ideal called her veterinarian, and while she was waiting she tried everything she could think of to get Abby to get up, to no avail. When the vet arrived, it didn't take long for him to diagnose the problem as extreme laminitis in all four feet.

Ideal was dumbfounded. How could this have happened? Wasn't laminitis caused by too much rich grass or grain? Abby had been living in her arena, a safe enclosed space with nothing to graze on. She was turned out on grass pasture for just a few hours a day, and in January, southern California is not lushly green. Abby got very little grain, and all this was a long-standing routine. What was going on?

Her vet didn't have answers to Ideal's questions. He guessed that Abby's previous shoeing might have triggered the inflammation; for the first time, the farrier had used a silicone material under Abby's usual pads in an effort to cushion her often-sore feet.

However, the simple fact that a slightly overweight, cresty mare like Abby had been lame on and off for some time would have been a red flag to anyone who has had extensive experience with laminitis. The disease can be insidious, with occasional inflammation blooming suddenly into a life-threatening event. But none of the vets who Ideal had consulted about the sporadic lameness had been concerned about laminitis.

Waiting and seeing . . . A mistake with laminitis

In the beginning, Abby relied on her vet to improve Abby's condition. He prescribed a huge dosage of Bute, an anti-inflammatory. He also suggested that they wait until Abby's next scheduled shoeing, three weeks away, before they attempted therapeutic shoeing.

Against her instincts, Ideal followed this plan and Abby did seem to get better for a



Bonnie Ideal and her beloved Appaloosa mare, Abby, went through an entire year of pain and uncertainty to earn the privilege of continuing life together in health.

day or two, but then things got much worse. By February Abby was spending most of her time standing on a slope facing downhill with her tail sticking straight out behind her. She was on 4000 grams of Bute a day, a whopping dosage, with no visible result. She had to be coaxed to eat anything, even a single carrot. When the vet had no explanation for this behavior, Ideal decided it was time to look elsewhere for help.

"I'm a teacher," explains Ideal, "and I teach my students that the height of stupidity is to do the same thing again and again and expect different results. Yet here I had been allowing my horse to be treated with this approach. I felt too powerless and intimidated by the voices of authority to protest when it seemed obvious that they didn't know how to help her. But when it seemed to me that she was in terrible pain and would probably die, I got the courage I needed to take charge and look for a better answer."

Progress in fits and starts

Ideal learned about a group of practitioners in Half Moon Bay, California, who specialized in treating laminitis with a special type

of horseshoe. They guaranteed that these shoes would make Abby sound, but added that Ideal would have pay the airfare for their team to come and see the horse, so they could apply the shoes the first time and train her local farrier how to apply the shoes in the future. Ideal called every farrier in her area, but no one was interested in working under those conditions.

Ideal arranged for some animal massage therapists to work on Abby. Following the massage and acupressure, Abby seemed better for a day or two. She ate, drank, walked around, and regained a bright look in her eyes. But the affect didn't last, and the troubled mare slipped back to her former state quickly.

In March, when Abby was due for another shoeing, Ideal finally found a professional who had extensive experience with treating laminitis, and who agreed to fly in and see Abby. Dr. Mark Silverman, a veterinarian and farrier, of Rancho Santa Fe, California is a proponent of Dr. Ric Redden's treatments for laminitis (see page 12). Best of all, Ideal was also able to find a local farrier who agreed to work with Dr.

Silverman and try to learn to perform the special shoeing.

Dr. Silverman performed a *resection* on Abby's front (slightly worse) feet, drilling a three-inch by half-inch hole into the front of the hooves, to let the damaged cells and waste products of the inflammation escape and to relieve the pressure. He also made Abby special pads, designed to provide support for the coffin bone (or P3), and applied the shoes. The entire process took Dr. Silverman more than four hours to shoe Abby's front feet.

When the work was completed, Abby calmly walked away and started eating grass.

Ideal was overjoyed at the huge difference the shoes made, but within a few days, Abby was worse again.

Calling in a holistic vet

Ideal was spending a lot of time on the phone asking for information to help her equine friend. Right around the time that Dr. Silverman came to shoe Abby, Ideal was referred to holistic veterinarian Madalyn Ward, of the Bear Creek Veterinary Clinic in Austin, Texas. Dr. Ward specializes in homeopathy and chiropractic treatment for equines, and has extensive experience treating laminitis and founder. Ideal set up a phone consultation with Dr. Ward for the week after Dr. Silverman shod the mare.

At Dr. Silverman's suggestion (and with Dr. Ward's approval), Ideal decreased Abby's dosage of Bute until she was off the anti-inflammatory. Abby quickly resumed her previous habit of standing downhill with her tail sticking out. When Ideal described this behavior to Dr. Ward, she was told, "Abby's feet are the least of her worries!"

Dr. Ward explained that Abby was probably standing this way to take pressure off her tendons. Because her system was so full of toxins, her muscles were in constant spasm. The large doses of Bute she had been on for so long just added to the toxicity and abdominal problems.

Under Dr. Ward's guidance, Ideal started Abby on a program of homeopathic remedies and nutritional supplements. Dr. Ward cautioned her that at first Abby might appear to get even worse, but by this time Ideal felt certain that Abby was going to die if she didn't do something radically different, so she promised to stick with the program.

Worse, then better

As Abby began to detoxify in accordance with Dr. Ward's prescriptions, her feet began to hurt her even more. It would take Ideal 20 minutes of patient encouragement

to get the mare to walk 30 feet. When Ideal managed to coax the mare into the pasture, Abby would graze for a few minutes and then lay down until Ideal made her get up.

Even something as simple as turning around was an ordeal. Abby's body was so stiff that she would shake as Ideal tried to get her to turn. Then Ideal called in a local equine chiropractor, Adrienne Moore, DVM, CAC. Dr. Moore's adjustments definitely improved Abby's flexibility.

Formerly an easy-going, mellow horse, Abby had also become so sensitive that even the touch of a soft brush would make her lay her ears back and snap in a clear "leave me alone" gesture. When Ideal reported this symptom to Dr. Ward, the homeopathic veterinarian saw this as a sign of liver toxicity from the high doses of Bute Abby had received and from the toxins she suspected of causing Abby's original systemic imbalance. Dr. Ward prescribed a combination of antioxidants: the homeopathic remedy *Nux Vomica*, and nutritional supplements Super Blue-Green Algae and CoQ10, plus as much as five pounds of carrots a day.

Finally, a big breakthrough

Abby had been on Dr. Ward's program for almost two weeks with no sign of improvement. But at the end of March, Ideal had to leave town. Dr. Ward recommended giving Abby a homeopathic remedy called *Lycopodium* before Ideal left on her trip. Ideal gave Abby's temporary caretaker careful instructions about Abby's program, and left town hoping for the best.

While she was away, Ideal called Abby's caretaker every day without hearing any good news. About a week later, the caretaker called Ideal with *great* news – Abby was eating grass. The next day she was walking around without any prodding!

From then on, things started to really roll forward. In early April, Dr. Ward decided it was time to move Abby to the next stage of treatment, taking her off the homeopathic remedies but continuing the nutritional supplements. Ideal also added vitamin E and garlic to Abby's diet.

In May, Abby had her second round of prescription shoeing, performed this time by the farrier who had assisted Dr. Silverman. Abby also had another chiropractic session with Dr. Moore. When the chiropractic session was over, Abby *trotted* off, tossing her head and obviously feeling great. Ideal wept with joy at the sight.

About this time, Abby developed a new behavioral oddity: she began licking concrete blocks. Concerned, Ideal reported this

to Dr. Ward, who recommended a big dose of the homeopathic remedy Calc Carb. Abby continued to lick the concrete, and added chain link fence, dirt, and gravel to her diet.

Dr. Ward suggested offering Abby a set of free-choice minerals from Advanced Biological Concepts. The company sells a diagnostic set of minerals, including iodine, potassium, sulfur, calcium, copper, salts, etc., each contained in plastic vials similar to small salt licks. As soon as Ideal set out the minerals, Abby went right for the calcium carbonate. Shortly after that, her habit of licking concrete blocks ceased!

In June, Abby was again ready for new shoes. By then, the shape of her feet had changed, so the farrier couldn't reuse the shoes Dr. Silverman had made. He and Ideal decided to try regular shoes and pads.

Abby immediately relapsed. Within a few days Abby was stiff, shaking, and in pain. On Dr. Ward's advice, Ideal increased Abby's dosage of CoQ10, and asked her farrier to look for a source for the special shoes and pads, but he failed to find them.

Once again Ideal felt stymied and desperate. After dozens of calls, she found a new farrier, Darin Baber of Temecula, California, who told her he had a soft spot for foundered horses. To Ideal's great joy, Baber knew Dr. Silverman and had even attended a clinic with Dr. Redden.

Lessons learned

Between the regular use of supplements and special shoeing, and the homeopathic remedies and chiropractic as needed, Ideal has been able to help Abby get better and better; all the pieces to the puzzle are finally in place. By July, she was able to hand-walk Abby on trails and work with her in the arena. Abby was trotting, cantering, and even bucking and playing in the arena.

"Those first months were so hard," comments Ideal. "There were times when I felt so hopeless. I would tell Abby she had to start getting better or I would have to put her down. But she really wanted to live. This whole experience has given me the confidence to question things that don't feel appropriate to me, no matter who is making the recommendations."

As we went to press, Ideal's most recent report on Abby was this: "I never thought about how wonderful the word 'Whoa!' sounded until I got the chance to use it again recently after a long absence. I'm really looking forward to the time when I can actually be back in the saddle again on this wonderful, willing trail horse; it will be incredibly exciting." 🐾