

DRESSAGE, EVENTING, HUNTERS, JUMPERS

VOL. 67

PRACTICAL HORSEMAN

EXTRA

DEVON
HORSE SHOW & COU FAIR

PH'S 2024 TRAINER OF THE YEAR:

LEIGH
BERMAN

Keep Your
Horse's Knees
Healthy

Brought to you by

COSEQUIN®

Joint Health Supplement

FROM THE MAKERS OF
COSEQUIN[®]

CALXEQUIN[®]

DAILY HOOF SUPPORT FOR HORSES



Calxequin[®] with Vitamin E + Selenium

The foundation of a horse's well-being is a strong hoof. **Calxequin[®]** contains key ingredients such as biotin, amino acids, copper, and zinc to support hoof growth, strength, and durability. The inclusion of **vitamin E** and **selenium** provide antioxidant properties and support hoof membrane stabilization.



Scan QR code
to shop

THE REAL DEAL

Hunter/jumper trainer Leigh Berman is named the 2024 Practical Horseman Trainer of the Year for helping riders and their horses find happiness, confidence and success in the ring.

BY ALANA HARRISON



Hunter/jumper trainer Leigh Berman, who owns and operates her Two Bit Farm in Boyerstown, Pennsylvania, was named the 2024 Practical Horseman Trainer of the Year.

It's late on a Friday night and hunter/jumper trainer Leigh Berman is doing her last rounds for the day at her Two Bit Farm in Boyerstown, Pennsylvania. As she checks each of her equine charges to ensure they're safely bedded down, she lingers to dish out extra treats and kind words and sometimes even stops to cuddle one of the sleeping horses.

This individualized attention to detail is also evident in Berman's work with her students. For the past 25 years, the trainer has been supporting her riders for the long run, encouraging them to focus on their journeys with horses as a whole—the ups, downs and in-betweens.

“More than anything Leigh has taught me that understanding how to speak to your horse in his language is key for a successful partnership,” noted student Alana Conrad, who's been riding with Berman for the past five years. “She also gives riders who might not have the budget or chance to be around horses or experience showing the opportunity to succeed in whatever direction they want.”

Actions like these and Berman's far-reaching fidelity to the sport led to her being named the 2024 Practical Horseman Trainer of the Year, with prizes provided by Cosequin®. When the award was announced in late October, the Two Bit Farm family threw a surprise party for the honoree to share and celebrate the good news. “I was

speechless and truly had no idea,” Berman said. “To see all my students together was overwhelming. I am so honored by it.”

In submitting Berman for the Practical Horseman Trainer of the Year honor, her students noted her devotion to helping them achieve their goals and enhance the relationships they share with their horses. Laurie Besson takes lessons with Berman three times a week and said she has an innate ability to understand horses.

“Leigh's love of horses is very heartwarming. She is always there for her riders, but the time and care she gives to the horses isn't always seen,” Besson said. “When we're working or enjoying vacations and holidays, she's there making sure our horses are happy and healthy.”

Berman explains that she simply enjoys being around horses. “They're my friends and they give me a great sense of confidence and calmness at

the same time,” she said. “I love spending time in the barn just playing with them.”

A Trainer for All

With training so highly specialized in equestrian sports, Berman is a rare breed of trainer who opens her program to riders with a wide range of goals. Surrounded by the Blue Mountains of the Appalachian Mountain chain in Pennsylvania's Americana Region, Two Bit Farm welcomes



COURTESY LEIGH BERMAN

▲ At her Two Bit Farm, Berman welcomes beginners, intermediate and advanced riders, as well as weekend pleasure riders, and she provides equal attention to students of all levels.

beginners, intermediate and advanced riders, as well as weekend pleasure riders.

Berman started her career as an amateur and won numerous awards aboard her off-the-track Thoroughbred Catch 22, who she found at the New Holland Horse Auction. As a professional, she spent years showing and training at top-ranked competitions in both hunters and jumpers and was featured on the cover of *Practical Horseman* in 1995 for an article about her and Catch 22.

Berman started her career as an amateur and won numerous awards aboard her off-the-track Thoroughbred Catch 22, who she found at the New Holland Horse Auction. As a professional, she spent years showing and training at top-ranked competitions in both hunters and jumpers and was featured on the cover of *Practical Horseman* in 1995 for an article about her and Catch 22.

Even as a horse-crazy kid, Berman had ambitions of training out of her own boarding facility, and as her dreams came to fruition in 1999, the horsewoman endeavored to create a fun-loving, laid-back atmosphere where students of all levels and ages can pursue their riding aspirations—no matter how small or big.

Helping riders develop genuine partnerships with their horses—in the saddle and on the ground—is at the core of her program. To this end, she stresses the importance of teaching her students how to understand what their mounts are saying without the convenience of conversation.

“Riding and working with these animals is about having a conversation with your horse. It’s not a command or a demand. It’s about developing a partnership,” Berman said. “Riding is the only team sport where one of the members can’t communicate verbally, so you have to learn how to read your horse’s body language and his emotions to understand what he’s telling you.”

After being out of the saddle for almost 20 years, physician Michele Brown discovered Two Bit Farm when a

friend and her horse-obsessed daughter goaded the former hunter/jumper rider into taking a lesson with them. While she initially thought this would be a one-time endeavor, Brown quickly reconnected with her passion for horses and started taking regular lessons under the instruction of one of Berman’s assistant trainers. One afternoon, however, she learned the head trainer would be filling in.

“I’m not going to lie. I was terrified and almost canceled my lesson that day,” Brown laughed. “I’d seen Leigh’s students and their horses—they were all accomplished riders who jumped the ‘big’ fences. I didn’t think I would fit in and assumed she wouldn’t want to waste her time teaching a low-level beginner like me.”

In hindsight, Brown said she couldn’t have been more wrong and after a few more lessons with Berman, she was making swift progress. “She immediately made me feel like I belonged and treated me no differently than she did her other riders,” she said.

Brown went on to import several young horses from Europe with Berman’s help and said the horsewoman truly has a gift for training young horses to be amateur-friendly so they can be safely enjoyed by their future owners.

“Leigh never rushes a horse—or rider—beyond what they’re ready to handle. She recognizes that we’re all individuals and progress at our own pace, and she tailors her training accordingly,” Brown noted. “She believes putting in the time to instill the basics pays off in huge dividends down the road. With Leigh, the free horse gets the same quality care and attention as the more-expensive horse, and beginner adult riders are treated the same as

▼ As a professional, Berman spent years showing and training at top-ranked competitions in both hunters and jumpers before starting her own training program at Two Bit Farm.



©ALYSSA MURPHREE MEDIA



©JESS CASINO PHOTOGRAPHY

▲ When Berman's dreams of opening her own training facility came to fruition, the horsewoman endeavored to create a fun-loving, laid-back atmosphere where students of all levels can pursue their riding aspirations.

develop confidence in and out of the arena. "Leigh constantly encourages me to push myself and reminds me how capable I am," she said. "She not only inspires her riders, but she also encourages us to be our best selves."

Berman teaches her students early on that perfection doesn't exist in riding. Instead, she encourages her students to work toward small goals, one at a time.

"As long as students continue to try and grow, I will always stand by their sides and work to help them reach those accomplishments for as long as it takes," she said. "I'm a big fan of positive reinforcement. I don't yell or push my students in a way that would make them feel demeaned. I want them to be confident walking into the ring and I try to give them the correct tools and practice to get there."

Conrad brought her 3-year-old Warmblood "Squishy" to Two Bit Farm after hitting a training wall with the gelding. "From the first time I met Leigh, she was kind and compassionate toward me and my horse, despite his large attitude," Conrad laughed. "She is gentle and supportive while also being clear in her teaching style. And Leigh never fails to make me laugh, even when I'm incredibly frustrated with myself."

Her mother, Brenda Conrad, has enjoyed watching her daughter and Squishy grow under Berman's tutelage and said the trainer strives to provide forthright and meaningful instruction and insight based on the personal goals her

those who aim to compete at the highest level."

Connecting With Her Students

Following a 10-year hiatus from the sport, Beson also rediscovered her passion for riding after joining the Two Bit Farm family almost three years ago. She said Berman has played a vital role in helping her

students set for themselves.

"At her core, Leigh is genuine and that resonates with her students and colleagues," she noted. "When we first started looking for the right trainer, Leigh's name came up as a first choice many times. That alone spoke volumes. But when we met her, we knew she could guide us through this journey."

Dawn Murphy, who's been riding for almost five decades and has been at Two Bit Farm for the past 15 years, said that under Berman's guidance, her riding, horsemanship skills and confidence have excelled.

"I had always considered myself a decent equestrian, but Leigh taught me how to be an outstanding horsewoman," Murphy said. "She guides us through our lessons with kindness and understanding and never makes us feel foolish or incompetent for mistakes."

After her previous horse passed away, Berman encouraged Murphy to try an off-the-track Thoroughbred she'd found who was little rough around the edges. "She thought he might be something special and 'Duey' has turned out to be one of the finest horses I've ever owned," she said. "I owe all my success with horses to Leigh. She not only taught me the finer points of riding and horsemanship, but she's become a dear friend. She's had a huge impact on my life, and I'm truly a better person because of her."

Fostering Barn Camaraderie

For Berman, Two Bit Farm's essence extends beyond the training ring. She considers every barn member—boarders and weekend warriors alike—part of the barn family. "We are a family—and families are all-encompassing from spending holidays together to the ups and downs of life," she said. "We ride together, but we also take care of one another and celebrate together."

Last year, Berman hosted the farm's inaugural Bring Your Own Pumpkin party that included a pumpkin-carving contest and Friendsgiving feast to give her students the opportunity to spend time together outside their lessons.



COURTESY LEIGH BERMAN

▲ Berman finds it important to give back to her local community by introducing Boyertown residents who may not have had the opportunity to meet a horse to two of her mounts.

years, we all support one another and refer to the barn as our ‘TBF family.’

Sharing With Her Community

Berman also recognizes how much horses and the sport have to offer to all and pays that forward by supporting her local riding community and the Boyertown area in general. She hosts biannual derbies to provide high-level competition experiences for riders who might not be able to afford or have the time to travel to rated shows.

“It’s important to make showing more open to riders of all levels, so they can experience what it’s like and further develop that partnership with their horses,” she said. “These derbies also help build up my students’ confidence and often leads to them to go on and compete at bigger shows.”

Never one to eschew hard work on behalf of her students, Berman even builds creative—and sometimes tricky—jumps for her derbies and designs courses similar to those at higher-level shows. “Leigh puts 150-percent into everything she does,” Beson said. “Her courses are so artistic and fun that it really makes you feel like you’re at a rated show.”

Berman also partnered with a local gym to introduce middle-school students to a few of her mounts to offer pony rides and to teach them about physical wellness and the partnerships people can share with horses.

“Leigh creates these special moments for her riders, but she also has fun herself so we all can embrace the experience,” Beson said. “She always fosters an environment that’s fun and respectful—and in turn—her riders strive to do their best. Whether you’ve been at the

for barn for a couple weeks or 20



COURTESY LEIGH BERMAN

“We take it for granted, but outside our industry a lot of people never have the chance to meet or touch a horse,” Berman said. “It’s important to introduce kids and adults who don’t have that opportunity to all that these amazing animals can teach us. It was so fun

to see the smiles on the kids’ faces when they were interacting with the horses. I think it was a great experience for them and some even came out to the farm to visit the horses again.”

▲ For Berman, watching her students and their horses come together as partners and excel in whatever they wish to achieve provides her with the most joy.

Hidden Heroes of Our Sport

The Practical Horseman Trainer of the Year Program, with prizes provided by Cosequin®, is designed to honor the unsung heroes of our sport—trainers who work tirelessly to improve the education of both their riders and horses. Entrants were nominated for the contest by individuals in the horse community. Out of all the trainers nominated, 10 finalists were selected, with Berman earning the 2024 Trainer of the Year title.

Whether she’s hosting a barn-family Friendsgiving dinner, coaching students at the top of the sport, offering tips to a weekend rider, introducing her local community to horses or shoveling manure at the end of a long day, Berman’s students unequivocally believe the lifelong horsewoman was more than deserving of the award.

“I love the all-encompassing journey of watching my students and their horses come together as partners to grow and excel in whatever they want to achieve,” Berman said. “I’m never happier than when my students come out of the ring feeling like they’ve accomplished something. I couldn’t care less about the ribbons, as long as my students and their horses are happy. That’s what makes me feel whole at the end of the day.” 🐾

COSEQUIN®

WHEN PERFORMANCE MATTERS,
CHOOSE COSEQUIN®



Cosequin® supplements contain high-quality, researched ingredients to support your horse, regardless of age, discipline, or performance level.



Shop by scanning the QR code, or by consulting your veterinarian.



What To Know About KNEES

Healthy joints are a must for sporthorses, and some are more complex than others. Here's a look at common knee issues and tips for keeping them from becoming chronic.

BY LAUREL SCOTT

We've all seen those hunter/jumpers who really "snap" their knees over fences. And how about those dressage horses whose extravagant knee action prompts a collective gasp from spectators? Good or bad, function or fad, a sporthorse's athleticism is defined in some measure by how these joints perform. As they bend, extend and compress—supporting considerable weight and enduring repeated concussion—strong, flexible knees help ensure a clean jump, a ground-covering stride and eye-catching movement—until they don't.

Trauma to the knee can occur in a number of ways in any type of horse and at any age. Faulty conformation can be a factor, with offset joints ("bench" knees) or outside, forward or backward deviations carrying an increased risk of injury and lameness. However, regardless of build, the more a sporthorse is campaigned, the more likely he is to incur wear and

tear or outright injury to this complex, weight-bearing joint.

Early diagnosis of the nature of the problem, followed by timely, conscientious treatment, offers the best chance of keeping an acute knee injury from turning chronic and possibly ending a sporthorse's career.

▲ Acute knee injuries are most common in disciplines involving speed and/or jumping.

Diagram of an Equine Knee Injury

First, a very basic anatomy lesson about a joint that is anything *but* basic: The horse's carpus, or knee, consists of a number of small bones that form two rows and connect in three primary sub-structures: the radiocarpal, intercarpal and carpometacarpal joints (see diagram page 9). Most of a horse's weight is carried in the medial aspects (inner half) of the radiocarpal and intercarpal joints, with movement occurring on the medial side of the knee.

These bones, which join the radius at the top of the knee and the cannon and splint bones below the knee, are held together by a complex series of ligaments. Besides maintaining joint stability, these ligaments act as shock absorbers during motion. The knee problems most common in sporthorses generally fall into one or more of the following categories, keeping in mind that they sometimes overlap. In laymen's terms, these are:

1. **Soft tissue injuries** (the ligaments, cartilage, etc.) in and around the joint. This is what generally occurs in twist sprains, strains, pulls, etc., and can include a common condition called proximal suspensory ligament desmitis. A "big" or "popped" (swollen) knee can be indicative of merely tissue inflammation, or the inflammation could be part of a more complex situation involving the structure beneath it.



STILTS' STORY

At first glance, 12-year-old Runsonstilts ("Stilts") might appear to be just a plain, brown off-the-track Thoroughbred. But to his owner, Margaret McKelvy of Mount Airy, Maryland, he's the perfect amateur horse, as eager to venture out on the trail as he is to jump or "dance in the sandbox." As she remarked, "He goes as well as I ride him and will always rise to the occasion."

Stilts has also developed into a nice event horse, carrying the marketing/business professional to Preliminary-level competition. Until, that is, a kick injury revealed an unexpected knee issue.

▲ Stilts is a solid competition horse and pony-ride babysitter.

Stilts has also developed into a nice event horse, carrying the marketing/business professional to Preliminary-level competition. Until, that is, a kick injury revealed an unexpected knee issue.

"After we moved up to Preliminary when he was 7, we had a few instances of general unsoundness that we couldn't pinpoint," McKelvy recalled. "I took him for a bone scan, and it mostly pointed to his front feet; so, we got that straightened out." Trouble with drop fences into water ensued. But since McKelvy and her veterinarian had done so many lameness diagnostics "... and fixed what we could find," they treated it as a training issue and Stilts returned to competing, she said.

Still, McKelvy had a nagging feeling they'd missed something. "Then he got kicked in his left knee during turnout," she said, and X-rays revealed arthritis.

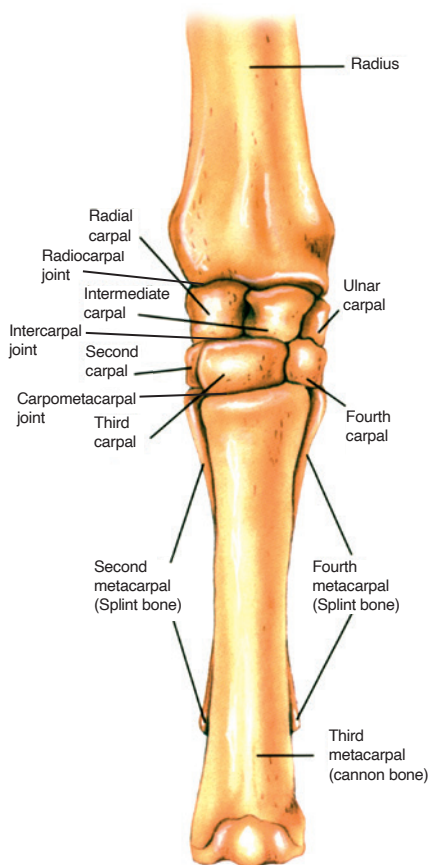
Stilts' initial prognosis was guarded, with McKelvy's vet recommending that he be retired from Preliminary-level competition. She took him to a performance horse specialist for a second opinion, who agreed with her vet. "So, my home vet consulted with a colleague at Marion duPont Scott Equine Medical Center [in Leesburg, Virginia]. They created a plan to do a series of IRAP [Interleukin-1 Receptor Antagonist Protein therapy] and an adjustment to his workload—or rather, work type."

Managing Stilts' arthritic knee has been a "rather expensive" but worthwhile journey involving a combination of treatments and a switch to more knee-friendly activities. "At first, we did a series of two IRAP treatments a few weeks apart followed by Osphos, and that got him going and sound again. I backed off his workload a lot in those first few months and ceased any sort of conditioning work. I also added in bi-annual Adequan® series for him. Then I purchased Horsecare Ice-Vibe boots for his knees, and he gets his legs iced from the knee down after any jump school. I also put Surpass® [a topical NSAID] on his knees after hard workouts.

"We can still compete at Novice and Training in eventing, and I've turned my focus a bit to dressage," she continued. "We've competed through Second Level and have hopes to move up to Third Level and get our USDF Bronze Medal."

It's been about three years since Stilts' arthritis was discovered. McKelvy has monitored his progress with periodic X-rays and "hands-on" vet checks to stay ahead of any problems. "After the first progress report showed more progression of the arthritis than we were hoping for, we started a series of IRAP every other month for about 18 months," she noted. "His latest progress-report X-rays just last month showed that the progression had slowed down a bit, so we're backing off the IRAP."

McKelvy advises finding a vet who you can freely communicate with and who understands your goals. "It was hard for me to accept that Stilts wasn't going to be a two-star horse, but my vet helped me figure out what he *can* do and has helped keep him sound and going. I think it's also important to point out that Stilts isn't on any sort of anti-inflammatories at the moment to maintain his soundness," she added. "And I also know that I still have tools at my disposal for the future."



▲ A front view of the left forelimb showing the different bones and joints involved with a horse's knee.

2. Wounds. Gashes, lacerations and the like can be either superficial or extend deeper into the tissue. Like the inflammation that often accompanies them, they can also be just one component of a more complex injury involving the knee's inner workings. Loss of synovial fluid (the joint's essential lubricant), the potential for infection of the joint (which can become chronic) and scar tissue buildup can be complicating factors in this type of knee injury.

3. Bone issues. Trauma and wear to the joint, as well as accompanying inflammation, can result in regenerative changes to the bone (such as remodeling or increased density—think bone spurs), not to mention chips and fractures. Included in this category are ailments like subchondral bone disease of the third carpal bone and third



©AMY K. DRAGOO

▲ Because a horse's knee involves so many parts, X-rays are especially useful in pinpointing the exact nature of the problem.

tear; inflammation is both a contributing factor and a result. In equines, one type of osteoarthritis develops as a response to stress-related changes, fractures or chips in the bone and damage to the cartilage (think young racehorses in hard training, for example).

A second type, seen more often in older horses, appears to develop without the same cycle of exercise-induced bone and cartilage remodeling and damage. Over time, loss of synovial fluid results in a gradual decrease/breakdown of cartilage thickness and an increase in friction within the joint (bone rubbing against bone). This degeneration, combined with weakening of related ligaments, can produce the “creakiness” and instability often associated with arthritis in a senior equine. Like your grandpa’s “trick knee,” this is often what is occurring in a “chronic” knee problem.

Diagnosis

It's hardly surprising that acute knee injuries are most common in disciplines involving speed and/or jumping. They are often the immediate result of trauma and will occasionally require surgery.

By contrast, “wear and tear” to the joint can occur over time in virtually any horse sport, simply as a result of repeti-

carpal bone sclerosis (or even both), which are seen a lot in racehorses.

4. Osteoarthritis. Just like in humans, this degenerative disease develops in joints as a result of trauma or just plain wear and

from hitting their knees (on something such as a jump), falling on flexed knees or sustaining lacerations,” noted Caitlyn Horne, DVM, ACVSMR Equine Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation at North Carolina State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine. “Getting an early accurate diagnosis of what structures are involved—and to what degree—helps [us] make early, more effective treatment decisions. Treating a knee once the process of osteoarthritis has already started or a significant scar has already formed is going to be more difficult.”

Davidson stressed the same point, adding, “The knee is a complex anatomical structure. There are many small carpal bones. There are important soft tissue structures along the palmar (back) of the carpus.” This includes the aspect of the suspensory ligament that lies just below and behind the carpus.

“There are also important synovial structures including the carpal joints, joint capsules and the carpal canal,” she said. “Acute knee injury can damage any of these anatomical structures depending on the type of injury. Also, the dorsal carpus has extensor tendons and tendon sheaths.”

Unless the injury’s location is painfully obvious, a lameness is generally traced to the knee through a combination of physical examination, gait check, flexion tests and nerve blocks.

Then the real work begins; because the knee involves so many parts, X-rays and ultrasound are especially useful in pinpointing the exact nature of the problem. “In acute injury, the carpus may be swollen, which can make acute identification of underlying internal damage to the important bone and/or soft tissue structures of the carpus difficult,” Davidson explained. In these cases, advanced imaging like magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computerized tomography (CT)

tive motion; this can present as either a gradual, intermittent or sudden-onset lameness. “One acute overuse soft-tissue injury in the back of carpus is proximal superficial digital tendonitis, aka ‘high bowed tendon,’” noted Elizabeth J. Davidson, DVM, DACVS, DACVSMR, associate professor of Equine Sports Medicine at New Bolton Center in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. “This injury most commonly occurs in the middle-aged or older sporthorses,” she added.

Regardless of the cause, one thing is clear: Early intervention is critical if treatment and rehabilitation of an acute knee injury are to be successful.

“In the sporthorses I see, the most common knee injuries are typically



©AMY K. DRAGOO

▲ “Wear and tear” to a horse’s joint can occur over time in virtually any horse sport, simply as a result of repetitive motion.

scans might be necessary to determine which structures are involved. By contrast, swelling can be subtle or even absent in some knee injuries, Davidson noted, “... especially palmar [back] of the carpus injuries. Veterinary evaluation including diagnostics is recommended for these injuries.”

Wounds and/or lacerations to the knee present yet another set of potential issues. “It is important to assess if the wound communicates with a synovial structure and/or has caused penetrating damage to the bones and/or soft tissues,” Davidson said. “Without prompt identification, a wound that penetrates a synovial structure can result in an infected joint or tendon sheath,” she added, noting that “chronic sepsis of a synovial structure is very difficult to treat effectively.”

After applying cold therapy to a knee injury to reduce inflammation and swelling, the knee might be bandaged initially to immobilize it and to prevent infection if the injury involved a wound or laceration.

Treatment

The type and length of treatment that is required to heal a horse’s “bum” knee will naturally depend on the type, location and degree of the injury. Considerations to determine these factors include which tissues are involved, whether the joint or carpal sheaths are implicated, whether there is a wound, cartilage tears or damage to the bone, etc.

If a ligament has been torn, for example, prepare for weeks or even months of rest, hand-walking and a gradual return to exercise as dictated by your veterinarian. As Davidson noted, “Soft tissue injuries tend to take longer to heal and often required prolonged confinement and controlled exercise program. If the soft tissue injury is missed (not identified), the horse may inadvertently be placed back into exercise too quickly; the missed soft tissue injury may not have healed adequately which may prolong healing and/or result in re-injury.

“Bone fragmentation and/or small fractures can also be missed without veterinary evaluation, and without adequate and appropriate treatment, any joint injury can result in arthritis,” she said.

Generally speaking, the first priority after a knee injury will be decreasing any heat and inflammation. This is important to help reduce both the pain now and the risk of chronic degeneration (and even more pain) down the line.

Conventional anti-inflammatory treatment usually starts with cold therapy, such as icing or poultices, immediately after a traumatic injury. The knee might also be bandaged initially to immobilize it. Then, depending upon the diagnosis, non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as phenylbutazone (bute) might be given to address the pain, keeping in mind that the risk of gastrointestinal and kidney issues increases with long-term use of NSAIDs. Going forward, your veterinarian might consider regular use of anti-inflammatory medications or even injections of drugs (either non-steroidal or steroidal) to address chronic knee problems.

Corticosteroids can provide powerful, even dramatic relief of inflammation and pain. Some types also offer a degree of joint protection and—if administered with hyaluronic acid—joint lubrication, as well. However, it’s wise to reserve corticosteroids in particular for conservative use when nothing else seems to work. This is because excessive or long-term administration of certain steroids can, ironically, result in cartilage breakdown and even contribute to the onset of laminitis.

Polysulfated glycosaminoglycan (Adequan®) or hyaluronate sodium (Legend®) injections are common non-steroidal options for maintaining joint soundness in older sporthorses. Adequan is said to help increase HA production and decrease synovial inflammation, while Legend is reportedly intended to treat joint



©DUSTY PERIN

▲ After initial treatment, a knee injury might need to be banadaged to immobilize it and prevent infection if the injury involved a wound.

steroids. “The regenerative therapy that we use most commonly in the knee is IRAP [Interleukin-I Receptor Antagonist Protein],” said Horne. “We use this in multiple ways, as an anti-inflammatory after an acute injury, as a post-operative series after surgery or as a maintenance therapy for a chronic knee injury.”

For older horses with sustained knee injuries, a whole-body approach might also be worth exploring because over time, an injury in one leg can lead to overcompensation and soreness elsewhere, too. Possible treatments along these lines include judicious non-steroidal therapy in the form of either phenylbutazone or firocoxib, a COX-2 inhibitor that can often be given to horses who are sensitive to more conventional NSAIDs.

Rehab Best Practices

The length of confinement and rehabilitation required by a knee issue—and the timing of a controlled exercise program—will vary with the diagnosis and severity of the problem(s).

Of particular concern during rehabilitation is maintaining the complex range of motion in such a normally flexible joint. “One of the common issues I see in treating and rehabbing

dysfunction related to synovitis (inflammation of the synovial membrane) associated with osteoarthritis.

And don’t discount novel regenerative therapies; these are gaining popularity as alternative ways to treat joint issues without

acute and chronic knee injuries is that flexion of the knee can be very painful,” Horne commented. “It is important to address this early, as it can then turn into a chronic problem that is more difficult to treat.

“The knee is normally capable of a large degree of flexion, and it is important after any type of injury to keep this range of motion,” she explained. “In the acute stage, it is important to try to get the horse as comfortable as possible quickly by decreasing the associated swelling and any intra-articular effusion [fluid accumulation within the joint]. Sometimes this can be done with just simple things, such as cryotherapy [icing] and compression bandaging.

“Once the horse is comfortable, initiating early range-of-motion exercises is critical in order to prevent future loss of range of motion and encourage a healthy joint environment,” Horne continued. Depending on the case and comfort level, she said one could start with just passive range-of-motion exercises (ask your vet to demonstrate) or both passive and active range-of-motion exercises, such as work over ground poles and cavalletti.

Range-of-motion exercises can be tricky, however, where wounds and lacerations are concerned because of the risk of tearing the wound open. Wounds also bring with them the prospect of scar tissue buildup, which can further impede motion over time. “We do see chronic scars from old wounds or extensor tendon injuries [over the knee],” Horne confirmed.

Because of this, she said it might be necessary in such cases to temporarily limit knee motion to allow the wound to heal more effectively. This is why “... getting early veterinary care



©AMY K. DRAGOO

can be very important in these cases,” she said, adding, “Once the wound has healed, addressing the scar early is important to prevent decreased range of motion later.”

So, let’s say your horse got lucky—he wrenched his knee but appears to have recovered; the swelling has subsided, and he now seems to be moving sounder than ever. However, if he didn’t have a full veterinary evaluation, don’t be fooled by appearances, Davidson warned.

“Many horses become comfortable and/or sound BEFORE the underlying injury(s) has healed, which can give one a ‘false sense’ of security about the actual tissue healing,” she said. “And a too-early return to exercise and/or turn-out can result in re-injury of an inadequately healed injury. Therefore, relying on the horse’s comfort as the only criteria to determine if the horse is ready to go back to work can be inadequate and misleading,” she explained.

To this end, Davidson recommended periodic re-assessment of both horse comfort *and* the actual injury by a qualified veterinarian. (Ultrasound scans are one tool that can be helpful here.) “Minor injury might require a few re-assessments. Major injury might require numerous periodic re-assessments throughout the injured tissue’s healing process,” she noted.

◀ If a ligament has been torn in a knee injury, prepare for weeks or months of rest and hand-walking.

Conscientious conditioning and management will go a long way toward maintaining a rehabbed knee and even preventing future knee injuries.

Four key takeaways:

1. During your horse’s “down time,” do as much as you can—within comfortable levels—to maintain his knee’s range of motion.

2. Whether bringing your horse back from injury or maintaining his usual schedule, make any changes in the type or intensity of his work gradual. Space out longer sessions and keep a close eye on his responses.

3. Bear in mind that the fibers in torn or stressed ligaments heal/remodel slowly, and the “repairs” might be weaker, less elastic and more prone to injury than before.

4. Remember that every case is different, and knees, like all joints, undergo changes over time. Keep your veterinarian

apprised of your horse’s progress and seek his or her guidance about how to proceed.

A word here about oral supplements: Formulas with glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate in particular are widely used these days to support equine joint health. Experts generally view oral supplements as less effective than injections at reducing pain, inflammation and discomfort after a joint injury. Where some theorize oral supplements might be most helpful is in the prevention of osteoarthritis in joints that have not yet sustained trauma.

This last part is important since, as Horne noted, “Osteoarthritis is probably the most common chronic knee problem that we see.” She went on to say, however, “I do not think chronic joint problems are necessarily inevitable, as there are lot of factors that play into osteoarthritis, such as genetics, the job of the horse and how the horse has been managed.

“I think we continue to learn a lot about joint health and have learned a lot from human medicine about the fact that early treatment and rehabilitation intervention are critical to help reestablish a healthy joint environment.” **PF**

“Since riding is a physically demanding sport, taking care of my horse’s joints and hooves is paramount. **That’s why I choose Cosequin® ASU Joint and Hoof.**”

PHILLIP DUTTON
INTERNATIONAL 5* EVENT RIDER



COSEQUIN®
ASU



When performance matters, choose Cosequin® ASU Joint & Hoof.

Scan now to shop!

▼ Survey conducted among equine veterinarians who recommended oral joint health supplements.