

As with any great endeavour, success comes more readily when you work together as a team. And it tends to go even better when, in the words of a popular George Strait song, “you’ve got an ace in the hole, a little secret that nobody knows.” Thankfully both of these were the case for Surf Furr, a 10 year old Quarter Horse stallion with quite a story to tell. My part in Surf’s story begins after his arrival to southern New Mexico. An arrival that involved an ill-fated trailer ride resulting in severe front limb lameness and cellulitis, as well as mild pneumonia and colitis... but the excitement didn’t end there.

1 week after Surf’s arrival, his pneumonia and colitis were under control (thanks to the diligent efforts of my boss, Dr Leah Starr Hamilton) but his left front leg still looked like it had been borrowed from an elephant. It was diffusely enlarged, he was sloughing skin and hair, and in danger of sloughing his foot as well. And he was incredibly lame, an easy 4 out of 5 on the AAEP lameness scale. And as if all of this wasn’t enough Surf was beginning to show signs of severe lameness behind as well. Now we really had a puzzle on our hands. He was lame in front... was that only from the cellulitis? What else was going on up there? Now add in this apparent rear limb issue... was it compensation from the pain in front? Did he have a heretofore unidentified injury to his hind end? How do we figure it all out?

Radiographs had been taken upon arrival and were negative, but repeat radiography was performed to rule out any orthopedic injury. No radiographic cause of his lameness could be identified. Ultimately we elected to wait and treat the cellulitis first, as that was the issue likely to cause the most harm. Surf was started on a second round of systemic antibiotics along with topical antibiotic ointment and heavy bandages on the front leg. Finally, a week later, we had the cellulitis under control and we were then able to perform an ultrasound exam of the soft tissues of his leg. It was determined he had sustained a significant injury to his suspensory ligament and suspensory branches and a diagnosis of suspensory desmitis was made. Surf was still profoundly lame, but slightly improved from where he had been the previous week when the cellulitis was at its worst. However, we were even more certain at that point that there was something amiss with his right hind leg. There was never any swelling or visible external wound to that leg, yet there was something very strange in the way he was walking. Surf was able to bear weight fully, he was also able to flex and extend his fetlock, hock, and stifle joints without any issue but it was obvious there was a problem with the limb. We elected to perform a rectal exam next. Yes, you read that right, a rectal exam. During this rectal exam a fracture of the right side of Surf’s pelvis was identified!

So we have a horse who has recovered from pneumonia, colitis, and cellulitis only to be left with suspensory desmitis and a pelvic fracture... what do we do now? The answer is: you wait. Both of these injuries take time, time, and more time to heal. THAT is where our little ace in the hole comes in. Surf’s owner Dara approached us and asked if we had ever had any experience with Hidez Suits. Neither Dr Hamilton nor I ever had. After only a brief review of the information we collectively decided, why not? Dara was able to purchase a suit and have it in her hands within a matter of days. Before the suit was even completely on Surf it was evident something special was occurring. The stallion’s entire body posture relaxed for the first time in weeks and

he passed a large pile of manure (which we in the veterinary world know to be the best omen of all). And then we waited.

Surf was kept on stall rest with very short walks to a grassy area for grazing allowed 1-2 times a day. He was maintained on 0.5g phenylbutazone per day for the first 2 weeks, followed by as needed dosing after purchase of the suit. Dara soon received a set of compression socks which were used regularly and also used for the purpose of icing his left front leg once a day.

2 days into wearing the suit there was marked improvement in his hind end. He was able to ambulate more freely and normally. The severity of the lameness in his left front leg had also reduced significantly within the first week of wearing his suit. Although the cellulitis had resolved he still had subsequent skin wounds present, and within days of wearing the compression socks the skin was pinker and healthier appearing than it had been yet. On recheck rectal exam performed January 16th, 2 months after diagnosing the pelvic fracture, it was determined to be completely healed. Surf continued to have visible enlargement of his fetlock joint (in the area of the suspensory branches) but the previous lameness evident at a walk had completely abated.

I am certain that the Hidez Compression Suit played an integral part in Surf's healing process. I would likely not have believed it had I not seen it with my own eyes, but I can guarantee that a Hidez Suit will be among my recommendations for the next horse I diagnose with a pelvic fracture or tendon injury. A huge amount of credit is also due to his owner, Dara Pearce who never gave up on our waiting game, and to Surf himself, who was undoubtedly one of the most amiable patients I have treated in a long time.

Teamwork and a little ace in the hole, works every time!

Megan Tracy Petty, DVM  
Tularosa Equine Clinic  
Tularosa, NM