

UC Davis equine ophthalmologists return top eventer to championship shape.

After an all-night drive returning from the March Copper Meadows event, rider and owner Frankie Thieriot turned out her champion three-day eventer horse Chatwin so he could stretch his legs after the long drive.



Checking on him a few hours later, she noticed Chatwin had injured his eye, most likely by grazing a tree branch. Having dealt with eye injuries in a previous horse, Thieriot knew the severity of the injury and knew her 7-year-old gelding needed immediate care. She quickly texted a picture of the eye to veterinary ophthalmologist Dr. Rebecca Burwell and asked her where to take her horse.

Having referred patients to the UC Davis veterinary hospital several times before, Dr. Burwell knew just where to send Chatwin. She told Thieriot to load him up and head to Davis, while she called Dr. Mary Lassaline to facilitate the emergency appointment. Luckily, Thieriot's trailer was still hooked up from the night before so she and Chatwin were quickly on their way to see Dr. Lassaline and the UC Davis Equine Ophthalmology Service, some two and a half hours away.

"Rebecca said, 'You're actually really lucky because in the last few months, Mary Lassaline started at Davis, and in my opinion, she's the best there is,'" said Thieriot. "That, coming from Rebecca, who is viewed by many as the best there is, is quite a compliment. So I knew I was headed to the right place."

Once at Davis, Dr. Lassaline and her team quickly assessed the injury. They discovered a corneal laceration in the right eye. Chatwin was sedated and Dr. Lassaline performed a standing examination that revealed positive direct and indirect light reflexes in both eyes, and

Chatwin's vision was still intact. Diagnostic tests revealed an infection in the eye caused by the trauma. His biggest issue, however, was that a large triangular flap of his cornea was loose, and would need to be surgically removed.

Following standing surgery, Chatwin was fitted with a subpalpebral lavage catheter in his right lower eye lid to facilitate treatment with ophthalmic solutions. He was then started on an aggressive medical therapy with antibiotics, an antifungal and an anti-collagenase to help fight the infection, as well as a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug to ease pain.

Due to the severity of his injury and the need to closely monitor his eye every day, Chatwin needed to be hospitalized for five weeks.

"With the early intervention, expert diagnostics, aggressive medical care, and the ability to monitor him closely to fine tune his medication, I was confident that he wouldn't lose his vision in that eye," said Dr. Lassaline.

Remarkable Recovery

While Thieriot was thrilled with Chatwin's prospects, she was concerned that he might not be ready for the Preliminary Challenge, held annually at The Spring Event at Woodside. This once-a-year competition is only open to horses and riders at the Preliminary level, a level from which Chatwin was about to elevate. So if he and Thieriot were ever to compete in it, it would have to be this year. The rehabilitation goal for the medical team to meet was to have him ready for the Preliminary Challenge.

Since Chatwin was still fit enough to work out, and needed to in order to continue competing, he was routinely lunged by the hospital staff while recuperating.

"I don't really trust my horses with many other people," said Thieriot. "The team at Davis was so fantastic, though, that I just knew they would do the right thing with him."

Over the weeks, the wound got smaller and smaller. It grew less opaque, and was nearly healed after five weeks.

“I likened his vision to looking through lightly frosted glass,” said Dr. Lassaline. “Because he’s such a young and fit horse, the tissue will remodel to the point where it’s less and less cloudy over time.”

Dr. Lassaline was confident enough in Chatwin’s recovery and in Thieriot’s ability to continue to manage his rehabilitation (with the help of Dr. Burwell), that she discharged Chatwin in time to compete in the Preliminary Challenge, which he and Thieriot won. He also won the Galway Downs CCI 2-star national championship, as well as three other events post injury.

“I was honestly blown away by the care UC Davis gave Chatwin,” said Thieriot. “The experience I had with the Equine Ophthalmology Service made me confident in everything they do there, and made me want to go back for other things. UC Davis made me feel that Chatwin was being loved like I love him at home.”

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