

VET DIARY



OUR EXPERT

Nicola Thompson is a qualified vet who works for Wright & Moreton in Cheshire, a member practice of XL Equine. She has ridden since she was a child.

Mare behaving badly

A horse which develops an extreme change in behaviour is diagnosed with an ovarian tumour

A friend of mine owns a 14-year-old coloured mare called Crystal. She has always had a strong character but last year Crystal's behaviour changed dramatically.

She became moody and aggressive and started mounting other mares in her field. All of this was out of character, so her owner called out her vet.

Blood tests were done and the results showed Crystal had abnormal hormone levels. Combined with her change in behaviour, this made them suspect a tumour of the ovaries called a granulosa cell tumour.

These tumours produce excess hormones which can change a mare's behaviour and may cause discomfort as they can grow quite large in size.

Fifty to 60 per cent of granulosa cell tumours produce testosterone as well as other hormones. Mares suffering from this issue often don't have normal ovulation cycles. Those with high testosterone – like Crystal – can become aggressive and show stallion-like behaviour.

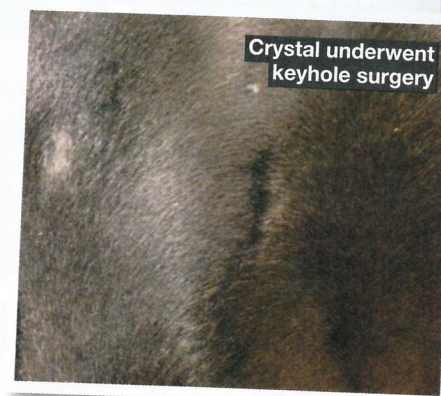
Another change noticed in Crystal was that she developed a larger crest and abnormal muscle distribution.

She became so aggressive it was difficult to lead her out of her stable or do any normal things with her.

Keyhole surgery

To firm up the diagnosis, an ultrasound scan was performed. This showed Crystal's right ovary was slightly smaller than normal. Her left ovary appeared to have a honeycomb appearance, with lots of small pockets of fluid, and was significantly larger than normal.

Her owner, in discussion with her vet, opted for surgery to remove the ovaries.



Crystal underwent keyhole surgery

“She became so aggressive it was difficult to lead her out of the stable”

This is a common treatment option and usually has a good success rate. It can be done while the horse is sedated and standing, using laparoscopy (keyhole surgery).

A small incision is made with specialist instruments to allow the vet access to the horse's abdomen.

While Crystal's tumour was grapefruit sized, it was still small enough to fit through the incision in the skin.

Otherwise a general anaesthetic may have been needed or hormone therapy to try and shrink the tumour before removal.

Back to normal

After surgery, Crystal was given a few weeks of rest, to allow the surgery site to heal before she could be exercised or ridden again.

The incisions healed well, with minimal scarring, which is another advantage of laparoscopy.

Her behaviour has returned to normal and the tumour was sent off for analysis, which confirmed the diagnosis.

This is an unusual condition but it's something we consider with mares that start behaving abnormally.

Signs to watch out for are a mare become aggressive, particularly to other horses, and that her regular seasons have stopped.

Other reasons for unusual behaviour include pain. We sometimes get horses referred for bad behaviour and while an ovarian tumour is on the list of possible causes, so is back or leg pain.

When a horse's behaviour changes, it could be a hormonal issue, even if it's not related to a tumour. If a normally well behaved horse starts bucking or a lively horse is suddenly quiet, it is always best to speak to your vet.

Any change in behaviour can have an underlying reason that might need treatment and the good news is there is a lot your vet can do to help. ■

NEXT ISSUE Our vet columnist looks at tendon injuries and what can be done to aid recovery.



Crystal is now back to normal