

EQUESTRIAN



GENTLE: Helen Scott with Rambo – Picture: Richard Doughty/D&S

Award for gentle giant

A FORMER racehorse from the region officially has the biggest heart.

The Last Rambo, a 14-year-old bay thoroughbred owned by Helen Scott from Melsonby, near Richmond, won the Retraining of Racehorses (RoR) Biggest Heart Award this month.

The award is given for the best temperament – with Rambo beating 400 horses from across the UK to take the prize.

In Miss Scott's application for the award, she said: "I think my horse Rambo should be up for

these awards because he is the most gentle racehorse you would ever meet.

"He has shown such courage to get over his injury, such stamina and ability to be changed into an amazing eventer and such love and loyalty to stick by me, even when times were hard. He really is one in a million and my best friend."

Miss Scott, 17, said Rambo, who is over 16 hands in height, was involved in an accident in 2009 when he caught his leg in a fence and panicked, flipping himself over

and ripping a large chunk of flesh from his hind leg. It took him six months to recover from the injury.

"I truly believed that this was going to be the end of his career but he proved me wrong and he came back with a fighting strength," she added.

Since then the pair have gone on to compete locally at eventing competitions, and have recently gone up a level, from Intro to Pre-Novice.

Retraining of Racehorses is the UK's official charity for rehoming and retraining ex-racehorses.

Keeping your horse safe when the sun comes out

Q: What is the difference between sunburn and photosensitisation?

A: Sunburn occurs during the summer months when there is maximum intensity of sunlight and is the effect of the ultraviolet rays causing inflammation in the skin in the same way as it affects humans. It usually affects hairless areas of non-pigmented/white skin including (but not restricted to) the face especially around the nostrils and eyes.

Photosensitisation on the other hand can occur in any level of sunlight and looks like an extreme form of sunburn. It can occur at any time of year although it is most common in the summer months. It is due to the presence of an accumulation of chemicals in the skin which are photo-active, that is they undergo chemical reactions in the presence of sunlight.

Q: Where do the photo-active chemicals come from?

A: Some are produced in the body. When red blood cells come to the end of their natural life (approx 120 days after they were made in the bone marrow) they are broken down in the horse's spleen.

The breakdown products of the oxygen-carrying molecule "haemoglobin" include chemicals called porphyrins which are very photoactive. Normally the porphyrins produced in this way are rapidly metabolised by the liver, but if liver function is very poor (for example after ragwort poisoning), or if very large numbers of red blood cells are suddenly broken down by the body overwhelming the liver's capacity to metabolise all the porphyrins produced (possibly due to autoimmune disease) then the levels of porphyrins in the circulation increase, giving rise to photosensitisation.

EQUINE VET

Richard Sutcliffe from the Bishopton Veterinary Group, Ripon, on the perils of sunburn and photosensitisation



COVER UP: a nose cover will protect the muzzle

This is known as secondary photosensitisation because it arises secondarily to another disease process.

Q: So is there a "primary" photosensitisation?

A: Yes, primary photosensitisation occurs when a photoactive chemical (usually from a plant eaten at pasture) gets into the body and hence the skin. The most common plants causing this are St John's Wort and

Water Dropwort, although Hogweed has very recently also been implicated.

Q: My horse has severe sunburn – What should I do?

A: Firstly you need to remove it from direct sunlight to prevent things from getting worse. Ideally this should be by confining to a stable where it cannot look over the door. Alternatively you could ensure that the affected areas are protected from sunlight – perhaps by using a nose cover or bandaging legs or using suitable cool rugs – depending on the situation.

Secondly your vet will be able to perform blood tests if they are deemed necessary to determine whether any underlying disease process is involved. Liver disease needs prompt attention and treatment. Autoimmune diseases may cause photosensitisation and they need specific treatment to enable recovery.

Q: Is there anything I can do for my horse's nose to protect it from getting sunburn?

A: Use of a nose cover, or net, will help to protect the muzzle from sunburn if your horse has to go out when the sunlight is particularly strong. A high factor sun cream may be of benefit too, but be careful because some horses will react to some sun creams.



SUN BURN: examples of what can happen



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