

Tales of the Unexpected

Readers tell us their true-life stories

A one-eyed wonder

When H&R reader Lisa Walker's dad helped the police rescue a pony from a service station on the A1 motorway just over 20 years ago, she instantly fell for the badly-behaved, scruffy little thing and was heartbroken when he had to be returned to his owner. But the naughty runaway, named Smurf, made a surprise appearance on the morning of her 18th birthday with a large bow around his neck!

Since then, Smurf has blossomed into an amazing pony, visiting the elderly in residential homes and children with special needs, as well as playing a huge part in the family business, 'Mini Pony Hire' – he has become quite the local superstar! But on arriving at the field one morning, Lisa noticed that Smurf wasn't quite looking himself. She continues the story...

When I went out to the field, I noticed that Smurf's eyelids were swollen on his right eye, so I rang our vet for advice and an examination was arranged. The vet found the tiniest piece of hay stuck in there but, unfortunately, it had caused some damage to his eye.

We spent the next few months battling against repeated flare-ups with drops, gels,

Smurf has lots of handmade costumes to go to 'work' in!



creams, anti-inflammatories and antibiotics. We tried to hide medicine in jam butties and fruit salads, and mix granules in apple juice, molasses and even Horlicks – anything to trick Smurf into taking it. A stubborn 23-year-old pony is hard to trick though! And despite our efforts, it was taking much longer to heal than expected.

Our vet advised us to test for Cushing's disease, as this could be a reason why the recovery process was taking longer than anticipated, even though he was not showing any of the classic symptoms. When the blood tests came back, he did have Cushing's and there was no doubt he required medication. Once we got his hormone level sorted out, he seemed to be better for a few weeks.

However, the appearance of his eye had altered, so I had to monitor him closely for any change in his normal behaviour.

Forage wouldn't normally be classed as dangerous, but the smallest piece of hay caused a rare injury that would change the life of one reader's pony forever

It's not looking good

Smurf started to show signs of discomfort and rubbed his face bald in certain areas. We bought a full-face fly mask, made it small enough for him to wear, and sewed a patch over the right-hand side to try to protect his poor eye and relieve any sensitivity to light. We also kept him stabled during daylight hours, much to his annoyance.

One day, his eye looked very different and he seemed quieter than usual, so I took him back to the vet. She discovered that the lens had actually moved into the front of the eye – a condition called anterior lens luxation, which is very rare in equines. Smurf was put on more

intensive treatment and pictures of the eye were sent to a specialist in Scotland to be studied in more detail.

After a follow-up appointment and more pictures being sent to the specialist, we spent a week trying a last attempt at getting him comfortable and improving the eye. I read up on everything I could, looked at case studies and asked others who had ponies in a similar situation – anything to find something that might help him.

Time to end the problem

During the next visit to the veterinary clinic, we decided that things weren't getting any better. His eye seemed painful, his good eye was showing signs of deterioration due to him compensating for the bad one and he just wasn't himself. The eye was going to have to come out.

I left him at the clinic, told him to be a good boy and show them how brave he is, then cried all the way home! The vet rang me as soon as he was coming round and responding, and she even sent a text with a picture of our little bandaged soldier, just to show he was up and about.

We were able to bring Smurf home the following evening, as he was doing so well. The staff at the clinic were happy that he was whinnying as soon as he heard my voice, and he



Lisa's bandaged soldier!



Lisa found Smurf in the field with a swollen eye

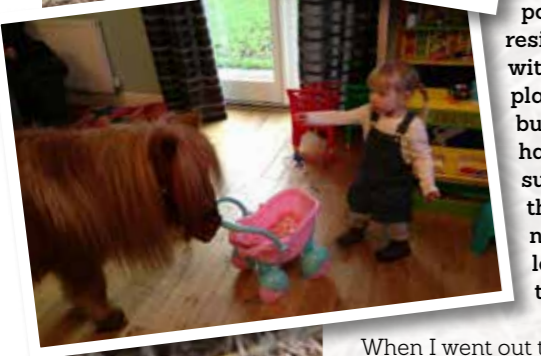
His eye was **painful** and his good eye was now showing signs of deterioration, too



Visiting the local school



Smurf is a huge part of the family



Tales of the Unexpected

Do you have a 'Tale of the unexpected' about your horse? Maybe an unusual ailment or a miraculous recovery? Send the details to Lucy Turner, *Horse&Rider*, D J Murphy (Publishers) Ltd, Marlborough House, Headley Road, Grayshott, Surrey GU26 6LG or email lucy@djmurphy.co.uk



came running over for a hug as soon as I opened the stable door!

Who needs two eyes?

At home, we split the barn into two so that Smurf and his friend, Marley, could be beside each other, but were unable to get so close that they could mutually groom and dislodge the bandages. Smurf took his medication well, was eating and drinking better than before, and was really bright. Everywhere I went, people were asking after our little one-eyed pony. We even received get-well cakes, cards and pictures from his adoring friends and family, along with messages of love and support from Australia, America and Spain!

Once his dressing came off, we took him for walks around the village and encouraged children to pet him and have a look at his stitched up 'pirate' eye. Every meeting went brilliantly, with Smurf being just as keen to

interact with the kids as before.

Now the stitches are out, he is going to attend his first public appearance at the local high school. He has been to this venue lots of times so should feel at home there. Our long-term plan is to raise awareness of partial sightedness, and work with young children to demonstrate how being different or having a disability is no barrier to doing something you love and being the best at what you choose to do. I think they will love our one-eyed pirate pony!

Smurf took his first day back at work in his stride



Veterinary viewpoint

Vet Gail MacKinlay from Alnorthumbria Equine Vets in Alnwick treated Smurf's eye. She tells us more about his unusual condition and his treatment...

"Smurf was sedated and given a nerve block, so we could fully visualise his eye. It was cloudy due to severe inflammation and had a large area of damage to the front of the eye, known as corneal ulceration. We also found some bits of hay under his third eyelid, which were delicately removed.

"Smurf was treated with anti-inflammatories and topical antibiotics for the eye, and initially the eye became much more comfortable and showed some healing. Although the inflammation in the eye improved, it didn't completely resolve."

Unusual goings-on

"It became clear that the structures within the eye weren't in a normal anatomic location, and the lens had actually luxated forward past the iris and was sitting in the

anterior chamber (front of the eye). Although seen fairly often in humans and dogs, this is a very unusual finding in a horse. It's likely to have occurred due to pressure changes within the eye subsequent to the initial trauma. However, it could have been predisposed by a weakening of the supporting structures in the eye.

"Although the lens can be removed, it would require a general anaesthetic and is a difficult surgery potentially fraught with complications. In Smurf's case, the lens stayed in the abnormal position, causing a degenerative lesion on the back of the cornea. Unfortunately, this failed to respond to treatment, so the best option for his welfare was to remove the eye.

"The eye was removed under sedation and local anaesthesia, and stitched closed. When the eye was examined, the lens was found to be completely adhered to the cornea."

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Smurf's eye was cloudy due to severe inflammation