

# Laminitis Recovery

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*You don't throw a whole life away  
just 'cause it's banged up a little*

*(from the movie Sea Biscuit)*

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*Laminitis remains one of the biggest killers of domestic equines. Death, however, is rarely from the disease directly, but rather from euthanasia in response to what is thought to be a hopeless situation.*

But laminitis doesn't need to end like this. For a decade now, many horses have been saved from certain death by a fundamental shift in how laminitic hooves are managed, specifically by removing all weightbearing from the hoof walls and by using padded hoof boots for comfort. This information is not yet widely dispersed in the equine industry, so unfortunately, after what was another bad season for laminitis, numerous horses have succumbed to this debilitating disease, via euthanasia.

This article summarises the process of laminitis rehab, whilst also showcasing a real life case study; yet another much loved horse that has been saved from a terminal situation. It can be done!

It is also thought that big and heavy horses can't recover from serious laminitis. Well, laminitis sufferers don't come much bigger or heavier than Blossom! (see photo 1)

Nor does laminitis get more serious than 'penetration' – when the pedal bones are forced through the bottom of the hoof (see photos 2 and 4).

The x-ray image 2 on the right shows the perilous state of one of Blossom's front hooves with massive rotation and 'sinking' and the tip of the pedal bone getting close to breaking through the solar surface. The x-ray 3 below 'Blossom's' shows a healthy hoof from another horse for comparison.

Blossom the gentle giant arrived at Mayfield (which is a specialist lameness rehab centre in Victoria) about a month into a full blown laminitic attack. She was fully lame, with only partial comfort provided by taped on foam pads and generous helpings of painkiller (see photo 5).

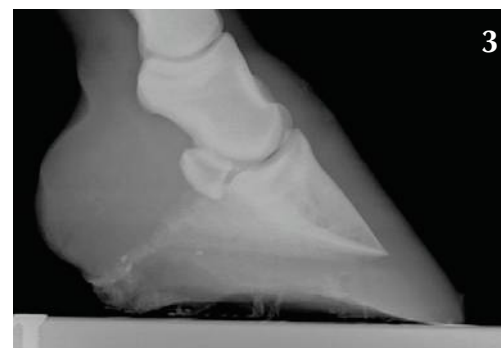
Apart from the obvious pathology, there was an ominous bulge of pedal bone in her sole (see photo 6).

To fix the patient, first remove the insult!

Serious acute laminitis is 'in your face'. There is certainly no need to second guess what is going on. But laminitic hooves are secondary and the underlying cause of the pathology can be hard to find because it is not just green grass that is the cause.

Blossom's primary causative pathology took a fair bit of getting to the bottom of. She was really quite ill, was not eating and was losing weight rapidly. Her pedal bones penetrated during the first few days at Mayfield, so it was vital that we had to pinpoint the exact causative pathology before it was too late.

Enter our travelling vet - Pos Thompson from Progressive Equine Services – who initiated extensive blood tests and culturing which showed she had a liver infection.



*Blossom's Story of success is another Mayfield rehabilitation case that shows that combining veterinary assistance, nutrition, and hoof care management including the still not widely accepted practice of removing all weightbearing from the hoof walls, is allowing many horses to make a full recovery from this painful condition.*



*Laminitis is an "in your face" condition... notice the bulge of pedal bone in Blosson's sole*

*Blossom arrived at Mayfield 1 month after the initial laminitic attack, very lame, with only partial comfort provided by taped on foam pads and generous helpings of painkiller*



Blossom's case highlights the importance of veterinary assistance for diagnostics and administration of drugs.

For the first couple of weeks Blossom spent long periods lying down and was only able to shuffle a few steps at a time, but as soon as the infection was pulled up, healing proceeded rapidly.

Blossom's healing was also helped by strategically removing her from 'bute'.

One of the biggest impediments to healing laminitic hooves appears to be the ongoing administration of phenylbutazone.

Whilst 'bute' plays a very important role in the early stages of a laminitic episode, it is really only needed for a matter of days, not weeks and definitely not months.

Herbal supplementation is also vital to support the body's efforts at recovery.

With Blossom, a combination of herbs was used during the healing process, first concentrating on her ulcerated stomach and damaged digestive system and then liver cleansing herbs.

### **Facilitate healing through correct trimming**

It is vitally important to remove all weight from the 'broken' laminae. That is the only way it is able to begin healing at the coronet (Photo 7).

This photo shows the initial trim with all of the weightbearing removed from the wall, from the front of the heel platforms forward.

### **Provide comfort**

Immediately following such a trim, comfort needs to be provided using a soft pad inside a hoof boot.



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Easycare Rx Therapy Boots are an absolute lifesaver for laminitic horses because they provide maximum comfort and support of the entire hoof.

In Blossom's case, she needed the biggest boots available (size 7) -which only just fitted!

Rehab is more complicated when penetration has occurred, so Blossom's hooves needed daily soaking in concentrated salt water, cleaning and wrapping in (very large, Clydesdale sized) baby nappies to prevent infection.

Then just hurry up and wait!

A totally new hoof can't grow back in a day. There are days at the beginning when it seems like there is just no progress, but little by little, cell by cell, new hoof is growing (see photos 8,9, and 10).

After about two months the ridge dividing the old separated hoof and the new, tightly connected hoof becomes visible below the coronet.

A return to soundness comes routinely at three to four months, when the new lamellar attachment reaches ground level at the heels.

The perforated sole repairs progressively over the same period (see photos 11 and 12).

One day, after about eight weeks at Mayfield, Blossom walked up to the gate for her dinner. Just like a new horse (see photo 13).

Blossom is now back to full health and is back under saddle. The latest news from her rider is that she is as good as ever and continuing where she left off!

Her hooves are now in the safe trimming hands of a professional 'barefoot' trimmer who will be endeavouring to keep Blossom's body weight supported by her whole hoof – wall, frog and sole; not just the hoof wall.





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### So... what lessons can we learn from Blossom's story?

The author has been involved in many rehab cases. Unfortunately not all horses are able to survive full blown laminitis, but there seems to be some common threads that dictate success or failure.

Don't delay. The longer the insult is in the body, the less likely is full recovery. Everyday is vital.

The author believes that shoeing of any kind is contraindicated during a laminitic episode. Whilst some horses will recover from minor to moderate laminitis with shoes, it is simply not worth the risk of asking a horse to bear most or all of its weight upon the inflamed laminae.

Horses that are barefoot before a laminitic episode seem to recover quicker and more fully than those who have been shod prior and have been fully weightbearing on stressed laminae.

A good result, photo 14 and 15 showing that Blossom is home and back under saddle.



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