

Rowena, Blue and Fred



# GOODBYE BLUE

## PART 2

In part one, Blue was the perfect example of a horse off the track, but a newly discovered condition means we have to say goodbye to this lovely little horse

**I**n part one we introduced Fred and Rowena Cook who invited us to follow the retraining progress of ex-racehorse Blue. We visited the trio to see how they carry out the retraining process. However, as Blue was lunged wearing a GP saddle for the first time, Fred and Rowena noticed that he was a little unlevel in his movement.

To rule out any problems they had everything checked the following week, but were hit by some shocking news. Blue had advanced periostitis (abnormal calcification of the bone) and osteoarthritic changes of the short pastern bone (degenerative joint disease).

As Blue was so young and facing such a poor prognosis, Fred and Rowena made the only decision they felt they could, to have Blue euthanised.



Georgina checks and treats Blue



Vet Stuart examines Blue's foot

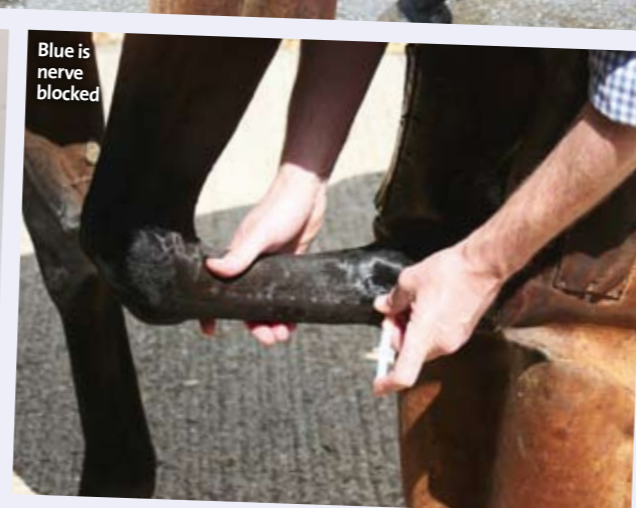


Stuart uses a model to show that Blue's hoof is normal



Another good X-ray gets them no nearer to an answer

While this news is extremely sad we feel it's important that a full and reasoned explanation into Blue's passing is given, particularly as he'd already gained quite a number of fans! Fred and Rowena were keen to share their diary of Blue's treatment



Blue is nerve blocked



The final radiographs of Blue's pastern showed the problem – the tiny spurs, which are just visible



## Hello Oscar!

With Blue's sponsors Dengie, Barnsby Saddlery and the Retraining of Racehorses (RoR) keen for the project to continue, Fred and Rowena began to look for another horse to work with. Despite spending two days on the phone to trainers they had no luck until Di Arbutnot, director of operations for the RoR, offered a helping hand.

"Di said she knew of a horse at Hollesley Bay ready for re-homing. A few days later Call Oscar arrived," says Rowena. "He's a 17hh, 10-year-old National Hunt gelding, who's had eight runs with two wins, two seconds and a third."

Prior to Di's husband, trainer David Arbutnot taking over Oscar's training he had to have a splint removed from his near fore so was on box rest. After a lengthy lay-off, Oscar returned to training and ran a super race at Exeter, finishing second. Unfortunately, he then sustained a tendon injury and scanning revealed a small hole, so the decision was made to retire him. Consequently Oscar found his way to Hollesley Bay.

Early in August, a scan of Oscar's forelegs confirmed all was well, and he arrived at Fred and Rowena's yard on 22 August.

"Oscar is a lovely big horse with a superb temperament and he's settling quickly into his new environment, and making friends with Thomas, our miniature Shetland," says Rowena.

Oscar is now being quietly lunged to begin loosening his body and strengthening of his tendons.

## Fred and Rowena

Fred and Rowena are extremely experienced when it comes to the retraining of racehorses. Their care and understanding of Blue during his short time with them is apparent in their diary and *Your Horse* believes there's a big lesson to be learnt from this tragedy. Ex-racehorses may often have old injuries that need due care and attention, so always be aware that by taking on an ex-racehorse you'll also be taking on the responsibility to care for them, whatever their issues. For any help or advice you can call Fred and Rowena on the RoR helpline 01780 740773. If they're unable to answer your call immediately please leave a message and they'll return your call as soon as possible. Visit [www.equine-training.co.uk](http://www.equine-training.co.uk)

Since part one it's not been a happy time for us. Blue's unlevel movement soon

turned to intermittent lameness which, despite treatment from chiropractor Georgina Sim, continued thereafter. We were confident that this had nothing to do with the fact that Blue had been pin-fired in the past, as there was no heat or swelling to the tendons or the fetlock joints.

Initially we thought that perhaps it was due to back problems and tenderness to the feet as he was without shoes. However, front shoes didn't eliminate the on-off situation of Blue being lame, and as the lameness then became permanent we began to wonder if it could be a foot abscess.

Our farrier, Nick Forryan, came to carry out a lengthy examination of Blue's foot but he couldn't find anything and quickly ruled out the possibility of an abscess. We continued to have things checked but as each day passed the lameness appeared to get worse and Blue was clearly uncomfortable, even in his stable. Then, suddenly, he began to drop weight.

## Our delightful little horse was a cripple

### Bewildered

As we continued to worry about our lovely little horse we arranged for him to have further chiropractic assessment. This in turn

established that Blue's lameness was causing severe secondary muscle tension and soreness in his neck muscles. Feeling no closer to a real answer we turned to our vet Stuart Thorne whose initial examination led him to suspect a deep-seated foot abscess (too deep for our farrier to have pinpointed) or, at worst, a fractured pedal bone. However, despite poulticing, the lameness still didn't ease and Blue was taken to Fellowes Farm Equine Clinic for further investigation. Here, even more examination ruled out tendon-related problems.

**Narrowing it down**  
After distal flexion of the foot, which Blue strongly objected to, a series of nerve blocks were carried out. Only one showed a slight improvement, but none of them removed

### The hard decision

So, after much deliberation and consultation, taking into account that Blue was only just six years old and that he was so unlikely to ever become sound, we took the decision to have him euthanised. For him to be in such a condition at such a young age was heart-breaking and, on the grounds of his welfare and not our own sentiment, we really had no option. He was too lame, and clearly

the lameness. Finally, an abaxial nerve block was applied at the level of the bottom of the sesamoid bones, at the back of the fetlock. This eliminated the lameness entirely, although none of us were then too happy to see slight lameness in the off-fore, too!

X-rays were taken of Blue's foot and lower joints, the first of which made for very pleasing viewing. There was absolutely nothing abnormal going on in Blue's foot. However, the next radiographs showed exactly what was happening, which didn't make for happy viewing at all. Blue had advanced periostitis (abnormal calcification of the bone) and oosteoarthritic changes of the second phalanx (degenerative joint disease). In other words, our

delightful little horse was a cripple and would remain so as the condition would only worsen. The fact that Blue presented lameness to his off-fore also suggested that the same thing was possibly happening there, or something similar.

### The hard decision

So, after much deliberation and consultation, taking into account that Blue was only just six years old and that he was so unlikely to ever become sound, we took the decision to have him euthanised. For him to be in such a condition at such a young age was heart-breaking and, on the grounds of his welfare and not our own sentiment, we really had no option. He was too lame, and clearly

in distress (as indicated by his weight loss) to even live out a happy retirement with two other permanent residential ex-racehorses. It just wouldn't have been kind or ethical to have him hobbling around the field trying to join in the antics with the others. Our decision was not an easy one to make or one taken lightly and without very heavy hearts. We love to give horses a long, happy retirement and are happy to cater for any needs they may have, so long as quality of life is there. So while some of our inmates have happily lived well into their 20s or even early 30s, sadly this was not meant to be for Blue. He will always be fondly remembered by those that met him and certainly by ourselves.



# Retraining racehorses

## Hollesley Bay and horses

Hollesley Bay initially provided training in farming skills for those wishing to colonise British colonies around the world, becoming known as Hollesley Bay Colony. Apart from being a substantial and successful farming enterprise, Suffolk Punch horses were also bred there.

In 1938 the site was acquired by the Prison Commission, along with the Suffolk Punch Stud, and became a Borstal Unit for young offenders. Expansion, combined with changes to the prison system, saw Hollesley Bay become an Open Prison with many inmates working on the Colony farm and stud.

In 2002 the Suffolk Punch Trust was established and took over the

stud, but at the same time continued to work with the Prison Service to provide training programmes for prison inmates. Following a successful project in the USA funded by the Paul Mellon Trust, the RoR, in collaboration with the Suffolk Punch Trust and in consultation with the Prison Service, established a rest home for horses straight out of training

at Hollesley Bay, prior to them being re-homed.

Responsibility for care of the retired racehorses is down to the prison inmates, thus providing them with positive work experience and, if they wish, the opportunity to achieve an NVQ. For this reason, horses who find themselves at Hollesley Bay are affectionately termed 'prison horses'!

## Are you retraining your ex-racehorse? Perhaps these tips could help!

### EXPERT ADVICE FROM EQUINE NUTRITIONIST TRACEY HAMMOND MSC (DIST)

#### “He needs to gain weight, but I don’t want him to get fizzy”

For weight gain without the fizz there are several things to consider. Firstly, don't underestimate the importance of forage when it comes to helping with weight gain. Select the best quality forage you can and ideally offer your horse ad-lib forage intake if he's stabled. Secondly, when selecting conditioning type feeds, try to utilise those based on predominantly slow release energy sources such as fibre and oil, as these are much less likely to contribute to over-exuberant behaviour. Finally, ensure that any higher energy or calorie feeds are introduced gradually, so that you're not suddenly supplying your horse with lots more energy.

#### “My horse won’t tie up outside his stable”

This is a completely alien exercise for the ex-racehorse as being tied up outside their boxes is something that just doesn't happen on a racing yard. So, as with any horse who's unfamiliar with something new, this has to be taught gradually, quietly and confidently.

Initially the yard needs to be quiet, with no distractions or operations going on that could cause alarm or distress. Ideally have a quiet companion nearby to give your horse confidence and assure him that nothing untoward is about to occur.

Start by tying up your horse for only very short periods and stay with him at all times. Groom him, pick his feet up – anything to keep him occupied and his attention on you. Following this, and as his confidence grows, you can then gradually lengthen the periods of time he's tied up.

To get your horse used to being tied up when you're not by his side, start by ducking out of sight for very short periods of time (perhaps you need to disappear in to the stable or to the tack room). You may have to begin by disappearing for literally just a few seconds and again gradually build up the time scale. Sometimes it can help if the horse can still hear your voice, so try talking to him from afar.

Obviously, before you begin to tie your horse up outside his box, be sure he is quite happy being tied up inside first!



Get his feed right and avoid a horse that's too hot to handle

### Top tip

Remember that jockeys are always 'legged up' – your ex-racer may not understand why he has to stand for you to get on



Stay with your horse if he's frightened of being tied up