



HORSES THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

Can Lead to Months of Rehab

By Wendee Walker

At 2:15 a.m. on April 20, a violent banging woke me. Then all was quiet and I drifted back to sleep. Staccato bangs and kicks again startled me awake and I rushed down to the stable, expecting to see a cast horse.

Instead, my four-year-old Lusitano Arteiro lay collapsed on the floor with his hind leg trapped up high, through the bars of the divider. His solid 1100-pound body was hanging by his delicate hind fetlock.

Photo courtesy of Wendee Walker



This made no sense. His hoof was bigger than the space it had squeezed through. With tremendous force, he must have kicked up with a pointed toe, then tilted and rotated the foot with just the right momentum for it to slide through the bars.

As he had fought to free his hoof, his fetlock must have slid down to the base of the divider and wedged in solid. He must have toppled to the floor and struggled to free himself, pushing and kicking with his other three legs. Each attempt drew more blood from the growing wound. Sweat darkened his golden neck, puddling on the stall floor as he went into shock. As I approached, I smelled his dank sour fear. I wanted to rush in to help, but I knew to stay well back from his thrashing legs, and to keep my face away from his powerful head, even as he rested. At any moment he could lurch up into the air for another struggle.

Arteiro groaned and twisted his head, looking at me, vulnerable, pleading for help. Blood trickled from his mouth as he writhed on the floor. I slathered his foot with Vaseline and tried pushing it through from the other side, but it was so jammed in, I couldn't do anything. I was sure the leg was broken.

On the phone, I begged the vet, "Please come quick. You may have to euthanize." But the wait for the vet to arrive at our remote ranch took all I had to ground my anxiety. Within an hour Peter Ahern, DVM of Kenwood arrived and administered a sedative.

After Dr. Ahern and my husband Mike Fisher tried several things, finally, with a sheer burst of determination, Dr. Ahern hoisted a sledgehammer and swung it into the bars trapping the hoof. I flinched with each slam, sure if entrapment didn't break his leg, the heavy sledgehammer would. The bars vibrated and spread just a little, so I pushed his hoof free, blood dripping from my wrists. His hoof thunked to the floor, and we held our breaths as we watched Arteiro lie still. After a few very long minutes, he pushed out a gigantic grunt and stood up. We exhaled.

Three humans stood by observing his primal instinct to survive as he balanced with one hoof lifted. Dr. Ahern palpated the ravaged and swollen fetlock, then gave me some relief with his assessment that no bones were broken. He left me with bute, antibiotics, and directions to confine, cold hose and wrap in an ice boot for 10 days.

From that moment on, Arteiro, his support team, and I took a detour from training and began our rehabilitation journey.

By sharing excerpts from my journal about what I have experienced, so far, I hope other horse guardians will find getting through the anguish and disappointment caused by a sick or injured horse a little bit easier.

Week One and Two: Extra shavings, Ice Boots, Epsom Salt Baths, and Advice

I'm taking one breath at a time.

Arteiro has been quiet, almost sheepish. He has to be sore.



Arteiro wears the Bemer blanket for 30 to 45 minutes daily, sometimes with his cat Benjamin, and sometimes without.

He's eating, drinking, and making manure, but he seems stiffer each day. As I walk him out of the stall for cold hosing, I wince when I look at the smile-shaped hoof crack below the coronet band and at the heel bulb. The cracks squish open and closed with each step. The medial fetlock/pastern wound is like a rug burn, and it looks angrier. Today it started oozing. I had sent pictures to doctors Ahern and Sonders. One vet said to keep everything clean and moist. The other recommended keeping the hoof trauma clean and dry. I opt for moisture and keeping hoof covered in triple antibiotic and Corona paste with lanolin. The fetlock blister is covered in Alushield spray but not wrapped.

The good news is I don't have to euthanize my horse. The bad is he's got deep bone bruising, and he must lose weight while not exercising. This could be a six to twelve-month rehab. Fingers crossed that the swelling will be down enough for radiographs and ultrasound at our ten-day check-up.

With mail deliveries slowed during the pandemic, anything I order for his care will not arrive for at least five days. And, I need to keep Arteiro's leg, poll, and sacroiliac joint of his back iced, now, immediately. After posting on Facebook a plea for ice leg boots and other supplies, I am inundated with help from our equine community. Friends remind me that post trauma, a horse needs electrolytes. Others say to slather on and feed the homeopathic Arnica Montana. Another recommends Manuca honey for the wound. One friend brings by ice boots. Anne Snowball of Calling All Animals delivers a Bemer (bio-electro-magnetic-energy-regulation) blanket to increase blood circulation, get the inflammation down, and support healing.

Weeks Three and Four: Barn Aisle Spa Days Continued

For the first four years of life, Arteiro was in a pasture with his dam, sisters, brothers, and cousins. His sire lived across the driveway. This 24/7 stall time is hard on both of us. I have to be a lot more creative now that he feels well enough to dismantle his

stall. I've opened the back door and put up a gate, giving him a 12' x 24' space.

It's challenging to cover the oozing fetlock/pastern wound with Manuca honey and keep it wrapped. Arteiro tears off the maxi pad/vet wrap bandages overnight. He has destroyed the bell boots used to cover the wrap, and two water buckets.

I sleep better now that a welder added bars to the stall divider where the hoof was trapped. The bars originally had three and a half inch spaces between them. The manufacturer said this was a freak accident and it's never happened before.

I'm disappointed the swelling is not down enough to radiograph at our ten-day recheck. But he is less lame and is enjoying the Epsom salt essential oil baths, finished off with a roll in the sand pile. He still rolls all the way over, and I know that's a good sign. He goes into the zone for Frankincense and lavender. He blows out and relaxes with peppermint. He's such a happy guy, and he wants to do more than walk to the mailbox and back. I vary our routes, but I set the timer to make sure we only walk for ten minutes.

He is wearing the Bemer blanket and I'm practicing Reiki meditation each morning.

Weeks Five and Six: The Six Foundation Clicker Games

By our 30-day recheck, Arteiro is sound at the walk. Radiographs and ultrasound show "no overt findings." To support his joints and help reduce inflammation, he's on a strict diet and has been started on Legend® and Adequan®. We walk for up to fifteen minutes now.



The Ace bandages are tied around chest, belly, and haunches to improve his awareness of his body and movement.

For a deep dive into positive reinforcement training, I have signed up for Alexandra Kurland's class through theclickercenter.com. Doing the homework helps us both stay sane. A few times a day I load my treat pouch with low carb grass hay and alfalfa pellets and head out for short homework sessions. Arteiro does not want these sessions to ever end.

We do a little each day and aim for good posture. I ask him to walk over a pole without clunking it, mark with a cluck, reinforce with just one alfalfa pellet. I have to laugh. Today he broke a ground pole by putting his whole weight on it. I think he thought that's what he was supposed to do because we had been practicing standing on a mat and stepping up onto the balance beam.

Weeks Seven and Eight:

A Scare and Adding Complementary Therapies

Today we were simply on our short walk when Arteiro braced his entire body and tipped forward -- then almost fell over sideways. Was he having a seizure? I glanced back to see his right hind sticking straight out behind him. Grabbing the lead line near the snap, I pushed his weight backwards. His leg went back to where it belonged.

Of course, this was a Sunday. I called the emergency vet and was assured that although frightening as it is to see, a "locking stifle" is not an emergency, and can be caused by muscles getting weak from stall rest.

I chose some unsanctioned but monitored pasture turn out so he's be able to move around more. For more exercise I am now every other day ponying him from my Mustang Yogi.

Our veterinarians gave their nod for me to pursue cranial sacral, acupuncture, TTOUCH, and chiropractic body work for him.

Weeks Nine and Ten: Riding from The Ground

The heal bulb hoof crack fell off.

I can see the leathery exterior of the hoof capsule, and Arteiro couldn't care less. The smile shaped crack at the front of the hoof is growing down towards the ground. It's still flexible but does not seem to bother him. We have not had another locking stifle episode. I've added Linda Tellington-Jones "promise wraps" to our walks. It's a gentle core strength building system. It seems to help him know where his feet are.

Today, we add long reining to our walking. I joined "A Course About Straightness" through ArtisticDressage.com to learn this. We are walking figure eights and he's learning to have balanced walk-halt-walk transitions. Given that he will have weakness in his right hind leg, it's imperative for him to maintain good posture. For variety, each day I move a tarp and ground poles to different spots. By the time this rehab is over, he will be a trained horse.

Weeks Eleven and Twelve; Using All the Tools

Three months. Each morning Arteiro wears the Bemer blanket, and I do chores and practice Reiki. At the 90-day post-entrapment recheck, I am reminded that Arteiro has to lose weight. I'm still dividing one flake of low carb hay into four slow-feed bags, and rationing hay pellets into the boredom toy. Other than still being chunky, I'm thrilled that everything has improved. He walks sound, and after being flexed, is only slightly lame. The ultrasound shows improved fiber pattern in the injury, as well as less swelling. There will be scar tissue, but it has not irritated the fetlock/pastern sheath or joint capsule.

Arteiro is a tough horse, and he dodged a bullet. If this progress continues, we will be cleared for more turnout, trotting, and even riding shortly after his fifth birthday this fall. My heart is filled with abundant gratitude for my Reiki practice, the outpouring of support from our horse community, and some luck, too, for getting us to where we are now.

In Portuguese, Arteiro means mischievous. Arteiro, the mischievous one, has proven to be the resilient one.

