

Horse Survives Loss of an Eye

Owner is thankful she maintained faith in her mare.

By Cindy Hale

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Now back to health, Cheyenne poses with her devoted owner, Jacki Moxley. Photo: Cindy Hale
Jacki Moxley has a lot to be thankful for. Her 11-year-old sorrel mare, Cheyenne, not only survived a traumatic injury that led to the loss of her right eye, but the horse has also thrived.

“Despite the loss of her eye,” Jacki says, “I think I ended up with an even better horse.”

The frightening saga began last March when Jacki arrived home one evening after working her shift as an assistant manager of a local feed store. She hastily began her usual routine of feeding the horses she kept on her small ranch in Norco, California. But when she got to Cheyenne’s corral, she was horrified.

“The right side of her face was battered and swollen,” she explains. In recalling the gruesome scene, she winces. “Her eye was literally out of the socket. It was dislodged.”

The vet on call was summoned, but there was little that could be done to save Cheyenne’s eye. Upon a full examination, it was determined that the horse had likely been assaulted with a board or blunt object while Jacki was at work. Yet finding the culprit wasn’t the first thing on Jacki’s mind. She wanted desperately to save her horse’s life.

“The vet told me there was only a 30 percent chance of Cheyenne surviving the injury, due to a bacterial and fungal infection that had taken hold. The optic nerve (from the eyeball) goes directly into a horse’s brain, so Cheyenne could’ve died from a massive infection at any time. The surgeon had no choice but to remove her eye. And then my husband and I had to treat her every hour, on the hour, for weeks. Not only did she need antibiotics and pain meds round the clock, but there were potential side effects from the drugs. To prevent colic or founder, we had to handwalk her periodically, even at night.”

It took about eight weeks for the wound to completely heal, and during that time Jacki admits that she considered euthanizing Cheyenne. “I didn’t want her to suffer. She had lost about 300 pounds and she was in a lot of pain. But this mare has always had a lot of heart, a lot of ‘try,’ so I decided to allow her to tell me how much strength and endurance she truly had.”

Jacki had purchased the AQHA mare as a three-year-old prospect for all-around western riding and as a reliable mount for her daughter, Brianna, who was competing in rodeo queen events. “We needed a stocky, flashy horse with a good mind, and Cheyenne was perfect for us. Over the years we’ve used her in barrel racing, team roping, team penning and ranch horse competitions. Plus she’s great on the trails. Even my mother-in-law can hop on her and ride her down the street.”

With the intensive care that Cheyenne received, the bond between the mare and her human caretakers only increased. “She began to rely on us during that long course of treatment,” Jacki says. “There’s a certain amount of trust that an animal has to have when it’s that ill, that injured. Now that she’s well, she’s back to being the same horse she was before she lost her eye. Only in some ways, she’s even better. I think she listens to her rider more.”

Though Jacki doesn’t think of her mare as being handicapped, she does feel that the mare compensates a little by relying more on her rider for cues and direction. That makes Cheyenne an even more trustworthy saddle horse for kids and novice riders. In fact, the cinnamon colored horse is back to competing in gymkhana events and trail trials.

“It’s a sad fact that horses can have accidents where they lose an eye,” Jacki states. “But I’d advise horse owners to have faith in their horse. Follow your vet’s advice. And don’t give up hope. I’m certainly thankful that I didn’t, because I’ve got my great mare back again.”