

If Ken and Flicka Had Only Known...

Thermographic Imaging Helps Pinpoint Equine Ailments

by Karen Parker

“The way it moves its body, the ears, the eyes, the winnies. The nay of terror, the scream of rage, the winnie of nervous impatience, the nicker of longing or hunger or friendliness.”

(My Friend Flicka, 1941)

As horsemen and women, most of us remember Ken McLaughlin, the young character depicted in Mary O’Hara’s *My Friend Flicka*. Remember how he came to understand a horse’s way of communicating fear, anxiety, pain and acceptance?

But what Ken couldn’t have known was that Flicka’s barbwire cuts had not healed properly. Consequently, the filly almost died of a nasty infection even though the wound site appeared to be well.

Some of us may have encountered or will face similar circumstances involving our own equine friends. How could Ken or any of us, for that matter, save our horses from such a painful ordeal?

Thermographic Imaging is a viable first step, says Dr. Tykeeka Reye of Parker, Colorado, a Naturopathic Doctor who has practiced alternative health care on humans for more than 30 years.

In 2000, Dr. Reye, a life-long horse enthusiast and Certified Thermographer, began applying her expertise in natural health care to horses.

“After meeting more and more horses with lameness and behavioral problems, I knew I had to find a way to help them,” she says. “Unlike some people, the horses’ responses are even more rewarding because they don’t whine about their problems.”

What exactly is Thermographic Imaging and how can it help?

Thermography is an infrared pictorial representation of an individual’s surface temperature where the thermographer can detect inflammation. Because inflamed tissues have increased circulation, areas of injury show up as “hot spots,” unless edema or infarction of the tissues reduces circulation. When this happens, the result is “cold spots.”

A small hand-held camera measures these temperature changes.

According to Dr. Reye, the technology is not new, but its use as a diagnostic alternative with horses is just now beginning to emerge in the U.S. The FDA approved its use on humans during the 1980s.

Now, with complete accuracy, Thermographic Imaging can detect problem areas so a veterinarian can know where to begin treatment.

Other benefits include saddle fitting and training problems.

“Proper saddle fitting becomes more precise because the horse’s body ‘speaks’ to the thermographer through the revealed temperature changes in areas where the saddle rubs,” Dr. Reye explained. “Training problems are more easily and better addressed because painful injuries are pinpointed,” she continued.

“Owners save themselves time, anguish and money because extensive x-rays and ultrasounds can be minimized or eliminated.”

Kris Garrett of Parker shared this example of how Thermographic Imaging helped her veterinarian and farrier correct a lameness problem with her Grand Prix Andalusian dressage stallion.

“The veterinarian and a second farrier examined the shoeing job, both agreeing that the shoes were fine and not the cause of the lameness,” Garret said. “A series of x-rays did not show any bone damage, but an examination with the thermographic camera clearly showed intense heat in the heel of the lame foot, right *above* the new shoes.

“Once the shoes were refitted properly, the stallion was instantly sound on the previously lame foot.”

Thermographic Imaging is also beneficial in showing pain in less obvious places.

Kathy Hopkins of Parker testifies to Thermographic Imaging’s benefits for her 12-year-old Hanoverian.

“He had always been a bully and exhibited tension. But he is also a great mover with lots of potential,” she began. “After a dressage or jumping session, however, he’d be sore. Chiropractic work helped to some degree, but the horse was never quite right and displayed behavioral problems.

“The thermographic camera showed minor soreness in his back, but more importantly, pointed to several large abscesses in his mouth!”

Learning of the dental problem, Hopkins called an equine dentist to treat the problem. Almost immediately, the horse was up in the bridle and back in his dressage sessions.

Dr. Ellen van der Laan, DVM of Ark Holistic Veterinary Care, recommended Hopkins incorporate acupuncture, massage and a joint supplement. She supports the use of Thermographic Imaging.

“The IR camera helps me as a veterinarian locate where the problem is, thus eliminating the need for nerve blocks,” she said. “I am also very optimistic about how the camera can be used in saddle fits. This is an area I feel is very neglected by many veterinarians.”

“After three sessions with Dr. Reye, we are achieving better results than with anything we’ve tried in the past,” Hopkins reported. “My horse is now moving up to the levels we knew he could reach.”

According to Dr. Reye, the applications for thermography are endless and provide a great new alternative in addressing equine health issues. Consider thermography for:

- Pre-purchase examinations
- Saddle fittings
- Undiagnosed pain or lameness
- Pinpointing hidden injuries
- Unusual training or behavioral problems
- Dental problems
- Veterinarian diagnosis assistance
- Treatment monitoring
- Corrective shoeing
- Performance monitoring
- Injury prevention

Thermography is not intended to replace important ultrasounds and x-rays. Instead, it eliminates some of the guesswork of traditional diagnostic procedures while providing an effective method for helping owners and veterinarians narrow down the exact area of concern.

On-site examinations, with color-printed thermographic images, start at \$75 in the Denver-metro area. Dr. Reye can travel outside Denver or Colorado when it is not possible to bring the horse to her, but additional time and travel expenses are charged.

“There is such a thing as hope beyond hope,” said Ken’s father as he assessed his son’s devotion to Flicka. *“You learn its language, it will learn yours. Pay attention to all the signs.”*

Thankfully today we have Thermographic Imaging, a modern way to provide viable clues for helping us read all the horse’s hidden signs.

For more information, contact Dr. Tykeeka Reye, Certified Thermographer, at 303-204-5010, or visit www.equinese.com. Dr. Reye will also have an information booth, Equinese Thermographic Imaging (#3500) at the Rocky Mountain Horse Expo in Denver, March 14-16 where she will offer coupons for expo attendees.

Visit the website for upcoming events. Dr. Reye is available to speak at equine events.

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