



SUMMMER 2023

Introducing Vet Mark / Enstone Young Farmers Visit / Hannah Daniels introduces Endurance Riding / Castration / Brand Ambassador Update

Introducing Vet Mark

We are delighted to welcome Mark Vale, BVetMed MRCVS, who joined our veterinary team at the start of June.

Mark graduated from the Royal Veterinary College, London in 1994. He started his career in mixed practice in Staffordshire for 4 years, during which time he gravitated towards equine work.

Mark's next move was to the Cotswolds to an equine position in 1998 before moving to Northamptonshire in 2006. He has a particular interest in sports and performance horses. Mark is an FEI (Fédération Équestre Internationale) Veterinary Officer and has regularly attended various events in all disciplines.

For relaxation, Mark enjoys mountain biking, fly fishing, ski-ing and cooking.



Avonvale welcomes Enstone Young Farmers



On a Monday in early June we had the pleasure of welcoming members of the Enstone Young Farmers to our practice. We really enjoyed spending time with the group, showing them around our facilities and sharing an insight into the world of an equine vet.

We split the group into two and toured the practice, giving our young enthusiasts a hands-on experience. As you can see from this picture, we included a look at our mobile x-ray kit and one willing volunteer put on the x-ray gown and gloves to see just how heavy they are to wear!

We also demonstrated how to operate an ultrasound scanning machine, use of a dental oroscope and all things dental, what happens in the lab and a visit to our operating theatre. And to round things off, we had a visit from Quilly, Head Nurse Lucy's pony, who definitely stole the show!



The cakes, drinks and goodie bags rounded off a really lovely visit, it was a pleasure to meet everyone.

Office Hours

Mon-Fri 8:30am - 5:00pm

Contact Us

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24hr Emergency Service

Hannah Daniels shares her passion for Endurance Riding

When you say Endurance Riding, most people think of the 160k + FEI competitive level competitions taking place in Dubai, Qatar, Windsor. But endurance is so much more than that, there are levels to suit every horse and rider and you can be as competitive as you want to be.

I love endurance riding, you get to see some absolutely amazing countryside, ride around private estates and experience riding in forests, farmland, beaches, mountains, the list goes on. I never ever thought I would have the opportunity to do some terrain riding, riding down old sheep tracks on the side of some very large hills, or gallop along a beach in Wales or experience one of the most spectacular forests in the country.

I started endurance riding back in 2019 when I entered an Endurance GB pleasure ride with my Arab, Ibrahim. Pleasure rides are a great way to try out a shorter endurance distance in a controlled and safe way. I was nervous of riding on my own or at speed following an accident, but with EGB pleasure rides there are gate stewards, road stewards and a ride organiser and the rules about passing other riders and code of conduct are very clear. 24K of amazing Cotswold countryside later I was hooked and wanted to do more.



I registered as a Novice competitive rider the same season and tried my first graded ride. Graded rides are the first step up into proper endurance riding, the distances generally start at 24K and go up to about 50K for Novice classes and you have to complete the course within set speed limit parameters. You then get awarded a grading and rosette at the end, based on the condition of your horse when it is vetted 30 minutes after your finish time. A Grade One means you have finished within the speed parameters for the class you have competed in, with pulse of less than 44bpm (48bpm for longer classes), and have passed all the other vet checks, including the trot up. Some classes now also include the performance formula, which is awarded to the rider and horse who have the highest average speed and lowest finishing heart rate across all class participants. You are awarded a certificate and voucher to spend on your next ride.

I also met my coach and now very good friend Sally when competing. Having a coach/mentor is a really good thing to have if you want to improve, push yourself and learn how to look after your horse properly when out competing.



Sally has been an amazing sounding board when things haven't quite gone to plan and has introduced me to the amazing world of terrain riding. She has competed in the American Tevis cup (100 miles in 24 hours) <https://teviscup.org/> multiple times and the Mongolian Mongol Darby (1000 miles in 3 days) <https://equestrianists.com/mongol-derby/>. Maybe one day I will be brave enough and fit enough to do those, but not yet.

In January I qualified to move up to the open classes, these have faster speeds and longer distances but the gradings are awarded in the same way. Our first competition in open was a two-day 80k at Pembrey in Wales, which was absolutely AMAZING. It's mostly sandy tracks through beautiful woodland but with a good stretch on the beach. A split 80k is a really good way to jump up a distance, as you are only riding 40K each day and you and your horse get a break overnight. We did really well out on course but I got the vetting a little wrong and scraped through the trot up.

Hannah's Endurance Riding continued...



Completing the post ride vetting is a bit like a formula 1 pit stop, there is a strategy to it. You don't want to vet too early, as your horse's heart rate will be too high and they have not had a chance to rehydrate and will fail the hydration check. But if you vet too late your horse could get cold, start shivering and stiffen up and fail the trot up, this will also increase the heart rate. Knowing when to vet and how to vet is an art form and getting good at it is harder than you think.

The two questions I get asked the most are *how on earth do you ride for that long?* and *do you and your horse need to do any specific training?* To be honest the distance sort of creeps up on you, you start by riding 25K's, which take about 2 hours and then you think 'if I can ride for 2 hours I can ride for 3, and so it goes on the more you do and the fitter you become.

In answer to the second question, yes you do once you go above a 40K novice. For the rider it's about being comfortable, and the stronger, fitter and more flexible you are the more comfortable you are going to be and the more likely you will be able to walk the following day. I have started to do plyometric, cardio and yoga training to keep me ticking over and mix in some weight training. I also use Rider Size which are exercises specifically aimed at horse riders. I avoid running at all costs as I hate it.



For the horse exactly the same applies. Just because endurance is all flat work doesn't mean you can avoid doing pole work, lateral work and all the other training that keeps your horse strong and supple.



Generally speaking, if you are riding your horse 3+ times a week and they are properly working, you should easily be able to complete a 30 – 40K novice course.

My season this year hasn't quite gone as planned, but I am hoping to do a split 80k at the Cirencester inter regionals in July and compete at the Red Dragon Nationals at the end of September. Next year all being well I will be doing some of the bigger terrain rides including the original endurance ride The Golden Horse Shoe, The Exmore ride and Red Dragon.

Follow us on Social Media

If you don't already, please follow us on our social media pages (Facebook and Instagram), as we regularly post case studies, health tips and updates.

We have monthly themes (June was colic) and each Monday share some important information relating to that theme.

We also share information on events we hold, sponsorships and updates on our Brand Ambassadors.

@avonvaleequine



Castration

Castration, also known as gelding or cutting refers to the surgical removal of both testicles and their associated structures from a colt or stallion. It is usually performed in order to reduce unwanted stallion-like behavior in males not intended to be used for breeding.

When to Castrate

Castration can be performed at any age, and the ideal timing may depend on a combination of management factors. Traditionally, castration of colts not intended for future breeding is carried out in the spring of their yearling year. The weather and availability of dry paddock turnout is significant in determining when to castrate. In general, spring or autumn are chosen as there are fewer flies yet the ground is relatively dry, but here we are at the mercy of the Great British weather!



In general, castration before 2 years of age is associated with fewer complications as the testicles are smaller and there is a lower risk of bleeding or herniation post operatively. There is no evidence that early castration leads to a difference in long term development and indeed we regularly castrate colts from 4 months of age before weaning, and find this can be an excellent option, with the foal having the reassuring presence of their mare during the post-operative period. Weaning itself can be a stressful time for a foal, so if planning to castrate a weanling, we advise waiting for a period of at least a few weeks post weaning in order to avoid combining potential stressors.

Handling is also an absolutely key factor in being able to perform a castration with minimal stress to the colt. It is really important that all foals get used to regular handling from an early age, and if you acquire a young colt which has not been well handled, spending a lot of time getting them used to being stood still and groomed all over will make the process of castration, and any other procedures that need to be carried out, very much easier for all concerned.

The colt should be in good body condition, up to date with worming, have no signs of respiratory or other disease and ideally have already been vaccinated against tetanus. If the primary course of tetanus has not already been carried out then a dose of tetanus antitoxin (pre-formed tetanus antibodies) can be given at the time of surgery.

During a colt foal's development in the womb, testicles are formed inside the abdominal cavity in a location close to the kidneys, and then each descends down a short tunnel known as the inguinal canal in the groin region into the scrotum. Both testicles must be present in the scrotum in order to perform a straightforward castration. The testicles are usually already present in the scrotum of a colt foal by birth. However, in some colts this testicular descent is delayed and one testicle may be slow in arriving in the scrotum, or in some cases fail to leave the abdomen at all or get trapped at some point along the journey. If they have not both descended into the scrotum by around one year of age it is unlikely that they will do so. A veterinary examination prior to castration will confirm the presence of both testicles and also that no other tissue is present in the scrotum such as is the case with an inguinal hernia.

Two testicles must be fully descended into the scrotum in order for standing open castration to be performed.



Types of Castration

Whether castration is performed standing under sedation and local anaesthesia or under general anaesthetic either at an owner's yard or in the clinic will depend on the age and size of the horse as well as the preferences of the owner and veterinary surgeon.

Many castrations can be safely carried out standing at the owner's premises using a combination of sedative and local anaesthetic techniques. A clean, dry area is required, along with a competent handler; preferably one who won't faint at the sight of blood! One of our nursing team would accompany the veterinary surgeon to a castration if the owner had any concerns about holding their horse for the procedure.

Prior to a standing castration, a general veterinary examination including listening to the heart and lungs, and visual examination and palpation of the scrotum is carried out. The horse is then sedated in a quiet, dry, clean area. Painkillers and antibiotics are also administered preoperatively. The tail is bandaged and thorough cleaning of the scrotum is performed before local anaesthetic is injected through the skin of the scrotum into both testicles. After further cleaning, the scrotal skin over each testicle is then incised and the testicle pulled down through the incision and the cord from which it hangs is then clamped for several minutes with a piece of equipment known as an emasculator. These carry out crushing of the blood vessels within the spermatic cord to aid blood clotting as well as severing the attachment below this point.

Castration continued

In some cases, a ligature may be applied to tie off the blood vessels, although where possible this is avoided as the suture can act as a focus for infection to settle out on. The scrotal skin is then left open so that drainage of fluid can take place over the following days. This technique of castration is known as 'open' castration. Ideally the colt should be stabled for 24 hours to promote clotting, and then turnout or some amount of exercise is essential in order to minimise post-operative swelling.

For some very small or difficult to handle horses, it may be preferable and safer to perform this same open castration procedure under a short general anaesthetic, either at your yard or at the veterinary clinic.

In horses over the age of 3 years, the risks of standing castration are potentially greater, and you may be advised that 'closed' castration under general anaesthetic in a sterile clinic environment is the safest option. For all 'rig' horses who have an undescended or only partly descended testicle, castration in a clinic setting is essential.

Post-Operative Complications

Although castration is one of the most commonly performed surgical procedures in equine veterinary practice, it should not be considered minor surgery. Due to the large blood vessels supplying the testicles and the non-sterile nature of the field castration setting and subsequent turnout, there are significant risks of post-operative haemorrhage and infection. Immediate post-operative haemorrhage following standing surgery is usually controlled by keeping the horse quiet in a stable for 24 hours post-surgery. The horse should be monitored fairly closely and if a steady stream of bleeding resumes after the veterinary surgeon has left, they should be called. Very rarely, the horse may need to be re-sedated and action taken to stop the bleeding such as clamping the vessels or packing the scrotum with sterile swabs.

It is normal for there to be some swelling at the surgical site and the sheath for several days after castration, and for there to be a small amount of serous discharge. This can be minimised by ensuring turnout and encouraging walking with in-hand exercise in addition if necessary, and the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as phenylbutazone (bute) if advised by your vet. More severe swelling post-castration may be an indication that serum has become trapped due to premature healing of the skin incisions, or that there is infection within the castration site. In these cases, reexamination by your veterinary surgeon is required in order to determine whether drainage and antibiotic treatment are required. If infection is allowed to track up the remnant of the spermatic cord tissue, a so called 'scirrhous cord' can form which requires surgical removal for its resolution. Cleaning or hosing around the area if the horse will allow and judicious use of fly repellent around but not on the scrotal wounds may help in preventing infection.

The most serious and thankfully rare complication of castration is herniation of abdominal contents such as abdominal fat or intestines through the inguinal canal and out of the scrotal wound. This is a greater risk when castrating older stallions which have large testicles and a large opening via the inguinal canal into the abdominal cavity, and can be mitigated by performing a 'closed' castration where the opening is tied off, under general anaesthesia in an operating theatre. If there is any evidence of any tissue protruding through a castration incision following an open castration, this is an emergency which, if intestine has herniated, could be fatal or may require surgery to replace or resect the affected length of intestine.

The length of time it takes for any coltish or stallion-like behavior to settle down post-castration is individually variable, and will also depend upon the age of the horse. We would usually recommend not turning out the castrate with mares for at least a month post-surgery in order to give the testosterone levels some time to settle down. For older stallions, the long-term change in behavior may be limited.

In summary, ensuring that castration of your colt or stallion is as low stress and low risk as possible for all involved requires a number of factors to be taken into consideration. Understanding the procedure and potential complications and discussing your individual circumstances with your equine vet should ensure you come up with the most suitable approach.

Emasculators as shown on the right are used to clamp, crush and cut the spermatic cord and associated vessels.

If you would like more information or would like to speak to an experienced vet about castration, please give us a call.



Brand Ambassadors and Sponsorship

This year so far, we have supported many events, covering all disciplines. It is always a pleasure to sponsor riding clubs and events in our catchment area and we've given away lots of Avonvale branded goodies as prizes.

We also support Brand Ambassadors, who fly the flag for Avonvale and it's a pleasure to see how these riders are progressing through the season. We post updates on our social media pages with lots of photos. Here's some of our brand ambassadors plus some of the clubs we've supported recently.



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