

From: Rolling Thunder Clydesdales

Subject: Foal Fatalities

We have reached the time of year when breeders find themselves with mixed feelings, waiting on mares foaling. Apprehension mixed with anticipation and the sincere hope that all goes well for mare and foal. A healthy mare and foal bring both relief and a sense of achievement.

We all know how difficult it can be to get a mare in foal, reach heartbeat scan without incident and have your mare carry to full term.

Having achieved thus far, a difficult, still birth or loss of a foal shortly after birth or in the first week is totally devastating for owners and horses alike.

No matter how healthy and strong the stallion and the mare, mother-nature can put in her tuppence worth and totally turn things on their head.

We at Rolling Thunder were fortunate to witness and indeed assist in the birth of our colt foal recently, however problems during the birth, which were not apparent at the time, within a few days had our foal failing and close to death.

Both Shonah and I felt we should share our experience of the birth, the problems and most of all the amazing resolution in the hope it may assist others who find themselves with the same problems.

The mare went into labour quite normally, waters broke and the front feet started to appear, however, one foot was several inches in front of the other and there was no sign of the nose.

At this point we entered the stable to assist the mare. She stood up and turned in an attempt to move the foal, only to lie down again with her bottom against the stable wall. We found the head was out of position and bent slightly back and stuck in the birth canal.

After manipulation, we managed to free the head and holding the nose and feet, as the mare pushed again, the foal emerged. The cord was in a good position and still intact.

The mare acknowledged the foal and vice versa.

The foal was making an attempt to stand but was too weak. We milked off colostrum and gave it to the foal.

The vet attended, drew off more milk and tubed the foal to allow him to gather strength.

He eventually stood but didn't go to his mother and she made no attempt to bond with him, in fact if he did venture near her, she moved away.

For the next four days we had to bottle feed as the foal was making no attempt to suckle regardless of everything we tried. He was starting to weaken and after another call to the vet, John Kidd attended and carried out a procedure known as the 'Madigan procedure'.

It is commonly used on calves and lambs who are not suckling or have been born by 'C' section.

It involves wrapping a rope around the shoulders then the chest twice and tightening it. The foal immediately relaxed and went to sleep. The vet put on his stop watch for 18 minutes, as this is the time it takes apparently for the foal to progress from the womb to being born.

Watching the foal he then went through 'birth' for a second time! After 18 minutes, the vet released the pressure on the rope, the foal came to, opened his eyes and shouted for his mother. Within two minutes he was on his feet suckling from his mother normally and naturally, and ignoring all the humans in the stable.

The vet explained that it was possible the foal was 'mal adjusted' at birth, which meant he had not had the correct 'squeeze' pressure at birth that is required to turn on some systems and turn off others. It was also possible due to this that the colostrum could have been too weak or wasn't absorbed as it should have been.

Due to this the vet suggested a blood test to have his levels checked. His levels came back as follows

IGG (immune system), normal range 6.6 – 18.9, foals reading .5

Serrum inflammatory marker, normal range <5.4, foals reading >650

A total of three litres of plasma given as a 2 litre immediate infusion followed by a 1 litre infusion four days later and a week's course of broad spectrum anti biotics, now have the readings in normal range.

The foal is now thriving I am pleased to say.

The Madigan Procedure can be seen on Youtube and is well worth a watch.

Kidd vets had an almost identical case with a thoroughbred foal. The owner declined the blood test as the foal appeared to be ok. The foal crashed a week later with joint ill and sadly didn't make it.

Experts in equine reproduction are suggesting plasma be given at birth as a matter of course, if not they suggest blood testing between 18 and 24 hours old to check IGG levels and then give plasma if levels dictate.

It is safe to say, without the blood test, we would have certainly lost our foal.

We hope you all have successful foaling's this year and welcome healthy foals to healthy mares.

All the best from Rolling Thunder Clydesdales