



Miniature horses

WORDS BY DR B SHAWYER MRCVS

When describing Miniature Horses to non-miniature horse owners, the best way to describe them is 'A large horse attitude compacted into a small horse's body'. However, there are several things of veterinary interest that differ from large horses and should be considered when owning a miniature horse.

DENTISTRY

An adult large horse has up to 44 teeth, and this is the same for miniatures. The problem arises when fitting these 44 teeth into a considerably smaller jaw and therefore overcrowding is frequently seen, predominantly in three- to five-year-olds. Large and persistent eruption bumps are one of the first signs of seen in miniatures with dental problems. These bumps are hard swellings over the lower jaw and bridge of the nose and in some cases can cause pain. Miniatures are also prone to malocclusions such that the alignment of the upper teeth does not match the bottom teeth, causing under- or over-bites and abnormal hook formation on cheek teeth due to abnormal wear. Therefore, regular dental examinations and rasping is vital to ensure your horses mouths remain pain free. Equally as their heads are so small, it would be advisable to sedate for dentistry. This allows for fully assessment of their mouths without the fight, and the sedation will help relax the mouth enough to visualise to the back of the mouth, which may be missed if assessed without sedation. This is important because the hooks that can form from malocclusion, are often found and missed, at the back of the mouth.

COLIC

As part of a full colic assessment, vets will perform a rectal examination to assess location and possible abnormalities of the

abdominal structures. However due to the miniature's size, the risk of performing a rectal exam is far higher and so many vets will avoid performing it. Some vets may opt to perform abdominal ultrasound instead to try and obtain this information. There are some causes of colic that are particularly common in miniatures and are often due to the small diameter of their gastro-intestinal tracts, leading to what is known as faecoliths. Research has shown that faecoliths account for 67% of surgical colics in miniatures. Supplementing with physilium, laxatives and regular dentistry may help avoid faecolith formation.

TRACHEAL COLLAPSE

This disease is virtually solely seen in miniature horses. Signs include honking sounds when the horse takes an inwards breath, difficulty breathing, excessive effort with the outward breath and increased respiratory rate. Mild cases may only be seen when exercised or stressed, whilst severe cases will be seen at rest. It can be diagnosed by history, clinical signs, endoscopy, and radiography. Treatment is often supportive with varying prognosis depending on extent of tracheal involvement.

WORMING

Due to the size of miniatures, their weight is often overestimated and consequently they are overdosed. With this in mind, we advise extreme caution when considering the use of Moxidectin in Miniatures due to the narrow safety margins of the drug. This makes it particularly difficult when looking to combat encysted redworm as it leaves 5-day fenbendazole as the only other licensed option, which has seen extreme resistance. Therefore, if using the fenbendazole 5 day course, It is advised to follow up with a faecal egg reduction test two weeks later, to determine the efficacy of fenbendazole within your horses. ❖

