



## Sweetwater Becky's Journey

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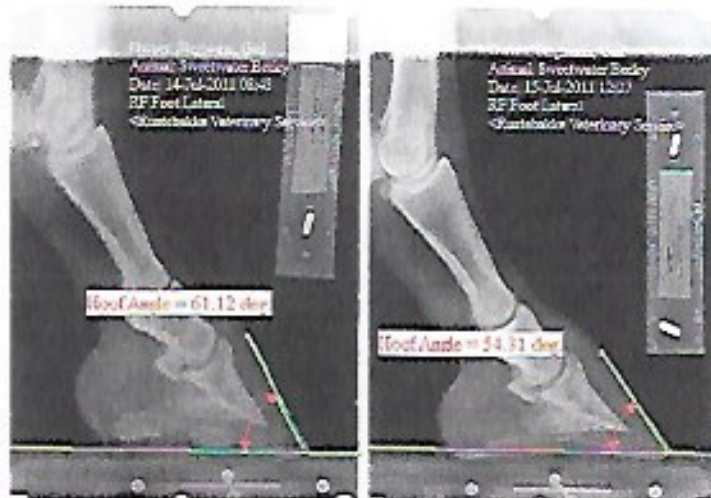
Sweetwater Becky, a then one-year-old palomino molly mule arrived at Jacklin Racing Stables, Rathdrum, Idaho, in the spring of 2010. She was a young racing prospect that was given to me by Becky Reimers, who co-owns an accomplished racing mule, Red Ticket. I remember she was just a fur ball and one of my first challenges was to take a pair of clippers to her. I am a little obsessive when it comes to body clipping all of our mules. She tried to long stretch kick me a few times, but for a young one that hadn't had this experience before, she did fairly well.

I was eager to have the vet come out, bring her up to date on her shots and give her a wellness check after her long trip up from California. Dr. Nicole Leonard arrived that same afternoon, and within a matter of 30 seconds took one look at her and said, "Uh oh...you have a problem." She identified her left front foot was clubbed severely and that this could equate to a lifetime of lameness, laminitis and trauma to the lamina of the toe area, stiffness and pain. A club foot shows a prominent coronary band and an upright angle to the hoof. It sometimes is not visible to the eye. Left untreated, this likely would affect her soundness in training and derail her ability to race on the track. I have to admit, I was very uneducated both visually and internally about club feet before I came by way of this mule. I subsequently learned that Becky's dam, a race mare, had a club foot and that genetics are the primary cause of this problem.

I talked to my father, a scientist, who is one of the most knowledgeable men I know and a wonderful source for gath-



LF Lateral taken before surgery    LF Lateral taken after surgery



RF Lateral taken before surgery    RF Lateral taken after surgery

ering information and providing direction. He was familiar with Dr. Rustebakke in Clarkston, Washington, who performs what is called "inferior check ligament desmotomy" which is a treatment for contact flexor tendons in equines. The surgery involves cutting the check ligament and letting the deep flexor tendon relax and take the pull off the coffin bone. Check ligament is frequently performed on foals 2-8 months who exemplify club feet.

My decision to put this young mule through surgery was made immediately. I wanted to insure that she would not have to deal with a lifetime of struggles with lameness, regardless of whether or not she made it onto the track. Early detection of a club foot is key to proper effective treatment. The surgery is most effective in young equines, six months of age (typically the time the club foot starts expressing itself) but there have been a few studies showing that mature horses can benefit from this surgery and go on to have successful active athletic careers as well.

I drove Becky to Dr. Rustebakke's vet clinic and left her there for a few days. He took x-rays and determined that she not only had one club foot, but she had two and the one that was the least visible to the common eye, was actually the worse of the two, with the upright hoof the toe having an angle with the ground of 63.86 percent. We concluded that

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surgery would benefit this mule greatly and proceeded accordingly. The result, as you can see from the x-ray, was significant. Both hoof angles came down to a more normal level, approximately 53 and 54 percent or approximately a 10 percent drop. This surgery was considered a success.

We returned Becky home and spent about a month changing bandages, walking her and treating her wounds. She recovered well and over the next few years, training and normal activities



Becky before surgery

resumed as we moved her towards her racing career. Dr. Rustebakke explained that farrier input following the surgery is as important as the surgery and we used a farrier who was quite knowledgeable in this area with much experience in trimming and treating this hoof abnormality.

As a three year old, she made it on to the race track. Her first race start was in Winnemucca, Nevada. She went on to race on the tracks in California, including Stockton, Pleasanton, Ferndale, Fresno and others. She was sound through her entire racing season. She didn't have a stellar season so her racing career ended after 2013. My daughter Tyanne is now riding and training her to be her gaming mule, and my dad has her reserved for packing and trail riding. She will have a very versatile life filled with lots of activities. I am so thankful that I opted for this surgery as Becky is an exceptional mule that deserves a quality, pain free future.

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Becky post surgery as a yearling



Three-year-old Becky on her first race

See you at the Great Celebration Mule and Donkey Show in Shelbyville, Tenn., July 10-12, 2014!

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