

Mini Horses Help Students

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Owners of the horses, Nancy and Kip Gillen of Dare to Dream Miniatures, Conesus, are unique in that Nancy Gillen is a wheelchair-bound paraplegic with limited use of her arms, and Kip Gillen is allergic to horses.

Though physically handicapped, Nancy Gillen cares for and feeds her minis, then shows and drives a mini-horse cart through the spring and summer season. Kip Gillen is responsible for horse care in inclement weather. Unfortunately allergies are at their worst at that time, making the horse care a burden. In addition, this fall, Mrs. Gillen required surgery.

Consequently, the idea of lending the minis to Alfred State College for the school year was appealing to the Gillens and very attractive to the vet tech program.

Bolton and students in the farm animal management course have been learning a lot from the minis this fall.

Why minis?

"As vet techs the students will probably have to work with horses," said professor

Victoria Bolton, but large horses are "flighty and dangerous" if you don't know exactly what you are doing. It's much easier to learn about handling and restraining horses on the minis, and then transfer the skills for work on the larger animals, said Bolton.

"The minis are calmer and adapt more quickly to change than the large horses," she said, but they "exhibit all the characteristics and attitudes of a large horse." The biggest thing for students to adjust to is how much easier it is to care for the minis, said Bolton.

Caring for one large horse is equal to what it takes to care for four minis, especially along the lines of feeding, cleaning, stalling, exercising, and grooming, said Bolton. A full-grown miniature weighs between 200 and 300 pounds whereas a large adult horse weighs about 1,200 pounds.

During the spring semester, Bolton hopes to work with students in some independent study courses getting several of the minis ready for show. These will include halter, trail, obstacle course, and jumping classes.

High-Tech Help For Horses

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The treadmill helps Goodall evaluate racehorses to find problems such as upper airway disease or low blood oxygen levels.

The horses are schooled on and around the treadmill before they even begin to walk on the equipment. Next the horses stand on the treadmill and begin with a walk before progressing "when we are comfortable with how things are going" the horses are asked to the trot and canter for about five miles. The entire schooling takes 20 to 30 minutes.

After that initiation, the horses are taken to the barn for a rest and a little feed before being brought back for the test.

"Once they're schooled and completely happy," the treadmill handler coaxes the horse into a full run — 30 miles an hour for racehorses — which is necessary if Goodall is to determine the cause of the horse's poor performance or problematic medical condition.

In addition to the flat-out

run, an increase in incline helps increase the work output, she said.

To aid in diagnosis, Goodall inserts a small catheter in the facial artery to measure blood oxygen content. Lower airway disease may result in an abnormally low oxygen content in the blood, said Goodall.

A videoendoscope passed down the nose and attached to a camera gives an image of the animal's airway on a nearby computer screen. The picture generated on the screen is recorded and put on the computer, and Goodall will "save the video pictures of what's best representative of the horse's condition," she said.

Goodall will also listen for upper respiratory tract noise, besides checking on the animal's heart and lungs.

If Goodall determines that there is an upper respiratory tract obstruction, surgery is recommended. Other conditions Goodall may observe causing poor performance may be associated with heart arrhythmias or elevated muscle enzymes.

Even though the procedure

is foreign and potentially frightening to horses, there have been few problems, according to Goodall. "Strict protocol — I think that really helps us avoid problems and complications," she said, noting that following the set routine seems to work for most horses.

"Safety for the horses is the most important thing."

Students

Since the first patient was seen in 1984, the center has served as a training ground for more than 450 veterinary students.

The "overwhelming majority," of veterinary students, according to Nadjar, are female. During each three week rotation, two to six fourth-year veterinary students are at the center for observation and hands on experience.

Since the center is one of three campuses, the students may find themselves sitting in classes via video teleconferencing.

One-year interns may also be working at the center, along with residents who are at the center for three years at a time.



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