

ASK THE EXPERT- HOW TO PREVENT CASTING IN HORSES

Editor: Below is a sad note I received recently from an Ontario Fjord owner. This was the second time this horse was found cast, which is often the case, as research shows some horses are prone to casting.

"My beloved, loyal and honest Sonja has gone from our lives. Yesterday, Tuesday, April 19, I received a call at work that she was cast against the barn and had injured her face. My husband had pulled her away from the side of the barn and had her up. The vet beat me home. Sonja's right eye was completely destroyed and the surgery to remove it was iffy. She had caught on the one spot of tin siding that was loose. Due to the damage internally the vet wasn't sure if they could remove the right eye without the loss of sight in the left. I made the decision that sudden blindness in a 20 year old, strong willed horse would not be accepted easily. On the only sunny day in a week (and it's storming again), I stood honour guard to a great friend's passing. She is buried next to the fence line of her pasture and will live in our memories."

OUR EXPERT: John Phillips is the Breeding Program Manager for the RCMP Breeding Farm near Ottawa. John has experience with thousands of horses over many years as breeder, trainer, coach, rider, and clinician.

QUESTION: What exactly is casting?

JOHN PHILLIPS: There are some horses who like to roll. It's fairly common for horses to roll back and forth. Casting is when the horse cannot roll right over. He can't get up, can't get his legs under him

because he's too close to a wall. Horses who roll seem to have an inclination to roll right up against the edge of something. And they get stuck. Also, horses are magnets for problems. If there's something dangerous around, they'll find it.

QUESTION: What should we do to prevent casting?

JOHN PHILLIPS: For one thing, when you wash your horse and put it out, you know most horses will roll. Be there when you first put him out and watch to see if there's a problem. Also, some horses are prone to rolling, and getting cast. If you have one of those horses, you can do several things. We bank the bedding up the sides of the stalls so the horse can't get cast against the wall. Another thing is to get an anti-roller. It's a surcingle, the same as a belly band with a hoop on top to keep the horse from going all the way over.

QUESTION: How dangerous is casting for a horse?

JOHN PHILLIPS: Very dangerous. A horse has only a limited time on his back. Even in surgery when a horse has to be on its back, it can be dangerous to its health, and that's in the best of circumstances, calm and quiet. I can't tell you how long a horse can live in that position because it depends on a lot of things. For example, if you bring your horse in from a ride, all sweaty and hot, and it rolls, gets cast, and thrashes around in fright, it won't have long.

QUESTION: What do I do if I find my horse casted?

JOHN PHILLIPS: The first thing is to be careful. The horse is kicking out, not at you but in a panic to right itself. You can easily be hit. If possible put a halter on him. You

want to try to gently roll him over. Try to get a lead shank around his legs and pull the legs over to give him a start. You can also try to pull his head by the halter. Sometimes only a few inches or a foot or so will do the trick. If you can shift the balance the horse can do the rest. 🐾