

All photos courtesy of Hampshire Fire and Rescue

A LEG IN EACH CORNER

RESCUING HORSES IN STICKY SITUATIONS

It's that sinking feeling that many horse owners will experience at one time or another – arriving at the yard to find your horse's leg stuck in the fence, or your pony has escaped and is stuck in a ditch.

New Forest vets – along with their colleagues in the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service's Animal team – are often called to a range of incidents involving unlucky equines and their stressed owners.

From Forest-run ponies stuck in cattle grids, to adventurous equines caught up in a fence, chances are that your vet has seen it all.

Seadown Veterinary Service's **Hannah Buteux** gives us her take on this vital aspect of her job...

A varied job

Being an equine veterinary surgeon, I never know what each day will bring. Much of the day is comprised of routine diary appointments – but every now and again, something completely unexpected and often challenging, comes left of field.

It's not unusual for a day to be completely turned on its head when a 'rescue' emergency call comes in for an equine vet to assist Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS). The call takes immediate priority and there's always an adrenaline rush as you drive to the scene of an accident, never quite knowing what the emergency situation might be. Luckily, working at a well-staffed hospital means we can rearrange visits between us to allow a vet to quickly attend.

Members of the animal rescue team work to calm Abbey down



Abbey with both her hind legs caught up in the gate

The call

On one such day, I was on my rounds when the call came that a lovely horse I knew well (and at 28 should have been far more sensible!) had managed to get both her hind limbs stuck in her field gate and was perilously hanging from them. After a quick turnaround in a Forest car park, I headed out to her yard as quickly as the speed limit allowed, while trying to keep a cool head and mentally checking off the kit I would need on my arrival.

By the time I got to the yard, the fire brigade has already arrived, effectively calmed Abbey and are planning for extrication. After reassuring her terrified owner, I don my vet helmet, gather my kit and medications and set off to assess Abbey and update the Animal Rescue Specialist on her current status.



With both hind limbs twisted in the metal of the gate, her whole body weight is suspended, threatening to fracture her leg and crushing forwards on her chest, restricting her breathing. In spite of all this, she is staying so calm and trusting the team around her. Together we firm up an extrication plan and very quickly the well-trained rescue team swing into action.

I initially sedate Abbey to allow the team to get into position safely and then anaesthetise her, allowing her legs to be finally freed. We move her to a safe area to recover and after a time spent snoozing off her anaesthetic, Abbey is up on her feet and remarkably calm and ready for some food. A thorough check over reveals no worse damage than some minor bruises and a few scratches – an extremely fortunate horse!

Abbey recovering after her ordeal

Hannah with BARTA founder and New Forest animal rescue pioneer Jim Green



It's all about team work

Hampshire Fire and Rescue has been at the forefront of standardising the rescue of horses in the UK and in 2008, they started veterinary training courses in association with the British Equine Veterinary Association. More recently the British Animal Rescue and Trauma Care Association (BARTA) was created to take on this role, and is led by New Forest animal rescue team manager Jim Green.

Having attended rescues with HFRS over the last 10 years in the New Forest, I've developed a real passion for emergency medicine, and successfully become a Regional Veterinary Lead a newly created role for BARTA. This involves supporting and being a point of contact for other vets throughout Hampshire and Dorset, teaching firefighters on their animal rescue courses, and helping design and implement training material for BARTA.

Our latest project has been filming a training video for firefighters to give oxygen therapy to pets involved in house fires or road accidents, in association with the Smokey Paws charity.

I am really relishing this chance to help develop this area of emerging veterinary medicine, but I am still very happy to see a routine day booked in my diary! Although you just never know when the phone may ring once more...

Hannah Buteux is an equine veterinary surgeon at Seadown Veterinary Services and British Animal Rescue and Trauma Care Association (BARTA) Regional Veterinary Lead.



Hannah and members of the Hampshire Fire and Rescue animal rescue team on a recent training day