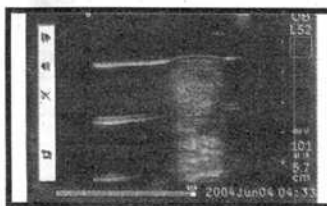
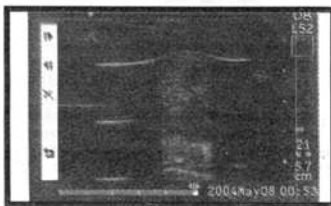
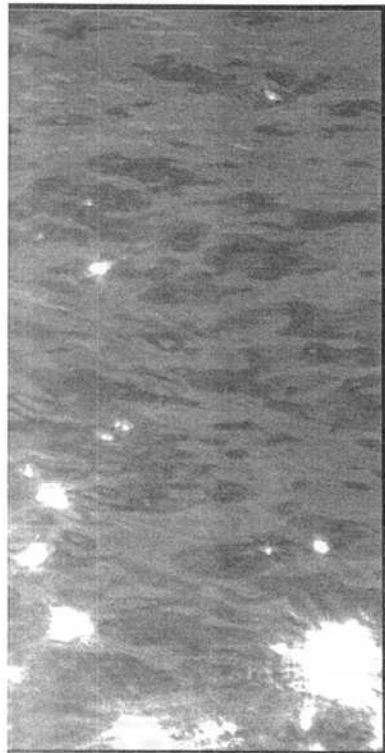


The pioneers in the development of commercial hydrotherapy for horses and discusses the latest research findings



• Top, Beef Or Salmon and stable companions take a dip in the sea at Asdee Beach. The therapeutic benefits of sea water are well-known to horses and humans. Above, these three scans (clockwise) show how a tendon injury has responded to hydrotherapy treatment. In the first scan, the hole in the tendon is clearly visible but (above right) it has cleared up noticeably after a month and (right) looks to be fully healed after another month's treatment

degrees but usually now run at less than four degrees.

Tendon injuries

In Australia, most of the research has concentrated on thoroughbred racehorses with superficial digital flexor tendon injury (bowed tendons) or suspensory ligament injury with some rapid resolution of tendon lesions such that horses have been back in training eight weeks after injury and successfully raced within six months.

Response to injury depends on the location, severity and how the horse has been treated before access to hydrotherapy.

In several cases of traumatic injury, three to four days before official competition or racing (where alternate chemical anti-inflammatory therapy would exclude horses from competition), twice daily cold spa hydrotherapy has corrected the inflammation allowing the horses to compete successfully.

This aspect has been extremely beneficial to some racehorses that have been set for major races but minor or chronic injury was likely to

stop them from racing.

In the USA, cold spa hydrotherapy has primarily been used on young cutting horses being prepared for the futurity competitions. These young horses work very hard as two and three-year-olds and many develop fetlock and hock problems which have been found to respond very favourably to hydrotherapy.

Some young horses with high potential had been dropped out of the training due to chronic lameness but since the introduction of cold spa hydrotherapy have returned to training and have then won high valued competitions.

Horses have been back in training eight weeks after injury and successfully raced within six months. In many cases an injury to one leg had been masking an overall problem which was corrected at the same time as the principal injury

A common outcome of all the clinical treatments has been an overall improvement in movement generation by the horse. It is quite apparent that in many cases an injury to one leg had been masking an overall problem which was corrected at the same time as the principal injury treatment.

In the future it is envisaged that cold spa hydrotherapy could well be used as a preventative modality in competition horses where the rigours of competition and training create continuous concussive forces on lower joints.

After all this was one of the concepts of those who used to stand coach and transport horses in cold running streams after a day's work. It is also this concept that so many racehorse trainers worldwide try to emulate when placing lower legs in ice packs after training.

Recent research has demonstrated that cold running water is the most effective way of reducing tissue temperature in the legs of horses but cold spa hydrotherapy — although not included in that research — cools the legs to a far greater degree and the legs stay cold for longer.

Much research still needs to be completed to understand the way in which cold spa hydrotherapy aids in healing but the rapid increase in knowledge being accumulated across the world is now demonstrating that many conditions of the lower leg benefit from preventative as well as therapeutic actions.

Not a cure-all but very effective

MARCUS SWAIL is one of 10 partners in the Anglesey Lodge Equine Hospital on the Curragh and was also team vet to the Irish eventers and show jumpers in Athens.

Swail's introduction to equine spas was when he came across some of the research carried out by Professor Evan Hart (see above). In time, Swail had the opportunity to visit Gloucester and saw the spas in action at first-hand.

"I don't believe they are wonder machines, or cure-alls if you like. But I am definitely a fan and feel very positive about their use," he said.

"An equine spa is excellent, not for everything, but for the typical lower leg

injury. It is very effective in that situation and I have seen many, many horses going through the treatment. When it comes to tendons, inflammations and suspensory problems, equine spas have delivered some breath-taking results."

Part of the cure, he says, could be down to the calming effect hydrotherapy can have on an animal. "Horses can have a very aggressive response to an inflammation. For instance, if a horse injures itself racing on a Saturday you could run a scan on the problem the following Monday and find one thing, treat it, and do another scan three weeks later and find the problem is actually worse than it was when you first took a look!



• Marcus Swail

The inflammation response from horses is so over the top that it's almost as if they are trying to do it all themselves."

And it is because of this reaction that Mark thinks equine spas are so helpful in the healing process. "A spa is very good at controlling and settling the horse's response. I am very much a fan of the technique when it comes to using it to treat the right injury. In the right circumstances, they can be invaluable."

Bushy Park early adapters

BUSHY PARK STUD in Borrisokane, Co Tipperary were among the first to acquire an equine spa about 10 years ago.

"We also have a solarium which is great for the muscles," said a spokesperson for the stud.

"I must have seen over 200 horses going through the process and the results have been amazing."

"The hydrotherapy and the solarium have been brilliant for our own horses. We deal with certain trainers but mostly treat our own animals.

"We might operate it a bit differently to others because we put each horse through the treatment twice very day.

"We will do it three times a day if the problem is more serious. All I can say really is that it has made a huge difference here and we are delighted with the results in most cases."

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