

Weight of Jericho

Last fall, veterinarians and caretakers gave him almost no chance of survival.

By Summer Best.

Old Jericho has stolen Jan Carter's heart. She gazes out at her pasture, where the big sorrel gelding munches on his meals – despite having few teeth – and her mind reels back to November 2002. Jericho was so near starvation that veterinarians gave the gelding minimal chance of survival. His body condition score, using the Hennecke Scale, was a 1, and his teeth were in such poor shape, his mouth was actually bloody.

“He was definitely the worst I've ever seen,” Jan says with a hint of emotion in her voice. She pauses, composing herself and her thoughts. “I purposely distanced myself from him... I didn't think he'd live.”

The gloomy details of Jericho's road to near death last year are a little fuzzy, and his caretakers refer to his previous living conditions as “appalling.” But today's great news is that Jericho has pulled through the tragedy. The once bag o' bones is now as “shiny as a copper penny” and “absolutely gorgeous,” according to Jan, who is the executive director and Lexington County representative of the South Carolina Awareness and Rescue for Equines organization (SCARE). Volunteers for SCARE donate long hours of personal time to rehabilitate horses like Jericho, later placing them in appropriate foster or adoptive care.

Rapid Recovery

“He has two molars,” Jan says of Jericho, whom she guesses is part Quarter Horse, part Thoroughbred. “And his front teeth are so worn, it looks like he's been chewing on concrete.”

Last fall and winter, Jan fed Jericho at least three to four times a day to nourish his skeleton body. “You could literally count his vertebrae,” she says. “He had liver failure and a heart murmur, and he's recovering from all that.”

Jericho's diet of Seminole Senior Formula, supplemented with added Seminole Ultra Bloom, Spillers/Seminole Showing Chaff and Seminole alfalfa cubes (soaked), and beet pulp, launched his starved body into immediate recovery mode. Weight gain was dramatically apparent, and soon Jan cut back to feeding him twice daily. Veterinarians, who think the gelding is between 25 and 30 years old, are still befuddled by his rapid progress to health.

Jericho's feed has been supplied in large part through donations from Seminole Feed in Ocala, Florida, but if it weren't for dedicated stores like Joy's Discount Feed in Columbia, South Carolina, the entire program would be difficult to accomplish. Jennifer Taylor, manager of Joy's Discount Feed, has set up an entire section of her store just to help starving and emaciated horses.

"We call it Pony Tales," Jennifer says. "Customers can come in, read a 'tale,' about one of the rescued horses through S.C.A.R.E., then they can donate extra feed for the rescued animals."

Jennifer handles the feed for free, giving up her entire profit on the products.

Bright Future

Jan has ridden Jericho bareback around the pasture, and she reports that he operates well off leg cues. When 4-H members visit the farm, Jericho is patient with all the youngsters, carefully watching where he puts his feet as they groom his body.

"This horse is so grateful," Jan says. "He knows he's been rescued and he knows life is better now than it has been in a long time. It's like he realizes people have helped him, and he appreciates it.

"When you see horses in the condition he was in, and then they make such great horses, all the time, energy and money you put in is completely worth it," she continues. "I get as much out of this as the horses do."

As for Jericho, he is looking for a permanent home, although Jan will be picky about his new owners. "I have fought so hard for this horse," she says. "He won't leave here until I am absolutely certain his next home will be able to give him the best care." Then she pauses again, "He's just such a good boy."