



Bright Prognosis

Pacing mare gets another type of hardware

| by Kimberly French

Briteolive had just broken her maiden in her second start and was being prepared for an engagement at Harrington Raceway the following week when she knuckled over while being turned during her training mile.

Trainer Eddie Dennis was able to get her back to the barn, but he already knew the 2-year-old daughter of Three Olives-

Brite Outlook had a significant issue.

“I put her in the wash bay to strip her and she was not putting any weight on her left hind foot,” said the Harrington, Del., resident. “Then when we went to walk her out, she was lame on it and was walking right on her toe. I had a feeling it was something more than your average injury and I thought she had cracked a bone or broken something.”

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DOUBLE TROUBLE: As a 2-year-old, Briteolive suffered a P1 fracture in her left hind leg (A, inside circle), but Dr. Patty Hogan was able to fix the problem by inserting screws (B). Three years later, the mare went through the same process again for her right front leg (C and D). Dr. Hogan admits the X-rays can look alarming to the casual observer, but says that most horses recover from such an injury with little trouble and can return to racing.



Turns out Dennis was right on point about the nature of his filly's injury. After the local veterinarian confirmed it was indeed a P1 fracture in that leg, Briteolive was immediately shipped to Dr. Patty Hogan for surgery.

"We actually got lucky when the bone split," Dennis said. "It was a hair-line crack, but it was straight, like if you would have cut a piece of a two-by-four and put it back together. If I remember correctly, Patty operated on her about six o'clock that very same day."

Hogan placed five screws into the bone, which sounds rather severe, but she gave Dennis a very favorable prognosis.

"The P1 fracture affects the long pastern bone below the ankle," she said. "As far as fractures go, it is a very common one in Standardbreds. The bone almost always splits right down the middle, so the old slang term for it is a 'screw-driver' fracture because if you can imag-

ine taking a screwdriver and pounding it with a hammer, the bone would split in half right down the middle.

"The fracture configurations are primarily straight up and down, but they do have variability as far as they can propagate and cut out on the side of the bone, so a complete set of films is very important to know where the fracture is coming and going. We probably repair 25 a year—which is a lot for P1 fractures—but almost all of the horses do really well."

After the procedure, Briteolive was stall-rested for a month, then hand-walked and turned out in a paddock. She sustained the injury in September 2009 and returned to the races on March 31, 2010, with a victory in a \$20,000 Delaware Standardbred Breeders Fund contest at Dover Downs.

"She was a quick healer and there were no bumps in the road," Dennis said.

Briteolive continued her racing career for owner Clarence Staats by pacing 49 more miles with seven wins, three seconds, 13 thirds and \$74,801 in purse money until she was sidelined by another P1 fracture in her right front in May 2012.

"I took her right to Patty," Dennis said. "She did such a great job on the first one and we never had a problem with that leg. I've never even had to do that leg up."

This time Hogan inserted four screws into the 5-year-old mare's right-front pastern.

"It was the same kind of fracture which was simple and fixable," Hogan said. "I did explain that she was older now, but the chances of her returning to the races were very good. A lot of people are somewhat skeptical because they see the horse extremely lame, they can't use the leg and they can see the crack on the X-rays. Then, when they see the films with screws in the bone, that can be very alarming. People will see that and say, 'Oh my God. This horse will never make it back from this,' but typically they do very well."

After some stall rest and turnout time, Briteolive was back on the track on Nov. 27, 2012, at Dover Downs. She captured that contest and her next on Dec. 9 over the same oval.

"I give all the credit to Patty that she put her back as good as she was," Dennis said. "She did a great job with both legs. The only thing you can notice is if she stands out in the cold weather for a few days you might see a little extra filling in one of her legs, but you would never know unless you were looking for it. Now with her right leg, you can probably notice a little more thickness, but

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—Eddie Dennis

you wouldn't really notice that either. If you walk her down the aisleway, even if you knew what you were looking for, you would never even pick out she has all the screws in her legs."

As long as the fetlock and pastern joints are unaffected with signs of arthritis, this type of fracture normally has an outstanding rate of recovery.

"Clean fetlock and pastern joints are really the key and that's why the prognosis is so good, because with this type of fracture the joints are not affected," Hogan said. "Almost always the screws used are the same width, which is about 4½ millimeters, but the length varies with the width of the bone. A horse can run with as many screws as you need to put in them to fix the fracture.

"Their pain comes from the crack in the bone; even if it's microscopic, there's movement and that is what hurts. Once you fix or reduce that movement in the bone, horses are extremely comfortable using the leg. They can't put the leg down when they come in so it's very gratifying when they walk out of surgery with five screws in their leg like it never ever happened."

Since returning from her second fracture, Briteolive has started eight times with two wins and earned \$10,495.

"She absolutely loves to compete," Dennis said. "She certainly has her own personality and likes things her way. She has all those screws, but I just say the legs balance each other out and they have never bothered her."

For Hogan, it's very rewarding to restore horses to health after they incur this sort of injury.

"It's a very gratifying fracture to fix," she said. "As a surgeon, you love to repair them, especially with a Standardbred, because all you need to do is put the screws in and you know they are bound to make it back to the races. They are so great at coming back from anything; I like to joke that you don't even have to be that talented of a surgeon to repair these fractures. They make you look so good as a surgeon that if anyone wanted to make a career in equine surgery, all they need to do is repair P1 fractures in Standardbreds."

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