

Quasi Cool Rebounds From Eye-Socket Injury To Lexington CCI4*-S Podium Finish

After the potentially career-ending incident early this year, he returns to form in Kentucky.

By **Kimberly Loushin**

As Sidnee Ledyard went to collect Quasi Cool from his paddock at Phillip Dutton's winter base in Loxahatchee, Florida, on the morning of Feb. 5, she could tell something wasn't right. The gelding hadn't touched his grain, and when she approached him, she noticed that his nose was bleeding.

She reached up to slip his halter on, and "Quasi" spooked and didn't want her touching his face. Upon removing his black fly mask, she determined the cause. Overnight, Caroline Moran's 11-year-old Holsteiner (Quo Vados—B-Estelle, Lord) had broken his right orbital bone, and due to the swelling, his eye was protruding from the socket with the iris facing down.

"I went around his field [later] to see what he could've hit his head on," Ledyard said. "There were some sliding marks next to a tree that was in his field, and then there was a chunk of forelock up in the bark, so it was pretty clear what had happened there. He must've spooked or something in the night and either spun or run and skidded and hit his face on the tree, the poor guy."

Dutton called Courtney Wittich, DVM, of B.W. Furlong & Associates, for an initial evaluation and X-rays to determine the extent of the damage, including whether any bone fragments had damaged the eye, necessitating removal. Wittich referred them to Palm Beach Equine Clinic in Wellington, Florida, to surgically repair the damage.

"[I am] very grateful to Palm Beach Equine, and the first vet that I called worked for Brendan Furlong," Dutton said. "She was the one that first diagnosed it and reacted quickly so that we could get the best care for him and make sure we did everything we could to get him there as quickly as

possible, which I think in the long term probably helped save his eyesight."

Ledyard described Quasi as being one of the sweetest horses in the barn and said he remained calm throughout the ordeal.

"He's a social guy," Ledyard said. "That morning, in his stall for the next few minutes before we left [for the clinic], he was obviously in so much pain—his face was broken, and he couldn't see and was bleeding, and every person and horse that walked by he would nicker and put his head out of the stall. He was just so sweet. He was, even in that much pain, so excited to see everyone."

Robert Brusie, DVM, DACVS, head surgeon at Palm Beach Equine, performed surgery to put Quasi's orbital bone back into place. Due to the danger of reinjury when a horse comes out of anesthesia, the surgery is performed while the horse is standing with sedation.

"He was a good boy. He stood there like a champion and let us do it," Brusie said. "He knew he was hurt. He knew we were there to help."

Brusie likened the surgery to how dented car bodies are repaired, where pieces are popped back into place. "You have to drill holes [in the bone], put screws in, and then use those screws to use traction to pop [the broken pieces] out," he said, noting that Quasi's procedure required three screws.

"In the skull, the periosteum [a thin membrane on the outside of bones that protects them but also helps them heal] over the bone is very thick, and it thickens very quickly," he added. "Once you pop it in place, it pretty much stays by itself."

Brusie said that in cases where the whole front bone



After Quasi Cool sustained an eye injury in February, Phillip Dutton wondered if the gelding would return to eventing, but Quasi came back and finished second at the Lexington CCI4*-S. *LINDSAY BERRETH PHOTO*

is damaged, a stent is needed to prevent the bone from being sucked down during intense exercise, but it was not required in Quasi's case.

Quasi received anti-inflammatories to manage the swelling and antibiotics to ward off infection or sinusitis, and Susan Carastro, DVM, MS, DACVO, an ophthalmologist at Animal Eye Specialty Clinic, consulted while he was in the clinic. Within 48 hours, Quasi returned to Dutton's farm, where he remained on stall rest for three weeks.

"The main thing with him, that eye, because of all the inflammation, the external muscles of the eye there, his eye was pointing down, so his vision was probably mucked up," Brusie said.

"That bone heals very fast," he continued. "Within a month it's about as strong as it would be, because the blood supply is so good, and it's such a thin bone. It's probably the thickness of corrugated cardboard."

During his recovery, Quasi wore special goggles to protect his eye from bumps, and he still wears them when turned out with his fly mask. Ledyard took him out frequently for handwalks and to graze.

"He wasn't able to see straight, so as long as we were directing him, we could walk him for as long as he wanted,

which is good for a horse on stall rest because normally that means they can't walk," she said. "There are a lot of horses we have that would've been very difficult. It was the easiest one to have something happen to."

Once the swelling had decreased, and Quasi's eye returned to its normal position, his care returned to normal, and he was cleared to return to work.

"It was a little bit unknown what vision he was going to have," Dutton said. "I started just hacking him and getting him used to being out and about and gradually introduced flatwork and then the fitness work. That was all over probably over a three-week/month period, and then we started jumping him. We sort of had fingers crossed when I started to jump because we weren't quite sure exactly how he was going to do, but it was no different than he was before."

After a few quiet jumping sessions in the arena, Dutton took him out cross-country and picked up the pace. Again, the horse felt normal.

"The temptation is that any time he spooks or looks at something you think, 'Oh, it's his eye,' but he is a bit of a spooky horse anyway, so I didn't feel anything different right from the get-go," Dutton said.

Before the injury, Quasi finished his 2021 season by winning the Plantation Field Horse Trials CCI4*-S (Pennsylvania) and the Morven Park Fall International CCI4*-L (Virginia). He completed one intermediate event in January of this year, and once he was back in shape, Dutton did a combined test in the CCI4*-S Stable View Spring (South Carolina) at the beginning of April. Two weeks later he won the advanced division at Fair Hill International April Horse Trials (Maryland) before heading to Lexington, Kentucky, to contest the Lexington CCI4*-S, which runs in conjunction with the Land Rover Kentucky CCI5*-L, April 28-May 1. There, he added some time on cross-country and show jumping to his dressage score to finish second on a 38.6.

"It's so exciting for me to have a horse coming up like this," Dutton said. "A lot of our sport is all about the dream, and there are a lot of disappointments, but you're always dreaming of what could happen. He looks to have the makings of being a really great horse." 🐾