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Classic Equine Equip., Inc.

USET Fundraiser June 28

Fond Farewells to Dr. Bill Nissen
and Ricardo Amaya

Adventures with the Swift Hitch

Manny Vierra, owner of Valley Oak Arabians, built this beautiful private stable for his champion purebred Arabians.

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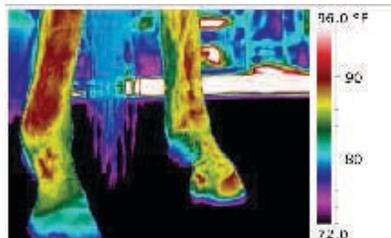
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Product Review:

SoCal Infrared Thermal Equine Scans

Fast, Portable and Non-Invasive Lameness Detection.

by Rebecca Sparenberg

It's hard to believe that most of the world was first introduced to infrared technology by Arnold Schwarzenegger's 1987 blockbuster hit, *Predator*. In 20 years, the principle of infrared has remained the same: all mammals produce heat. But the technology and its uses, well, they have come a long way. Last month I was introduced to one of the newest ways thermography is being used – equine body scans.

California Riding Magazine's publisher, Cheryl Erpelding, met Peter Hopkins, owner of SoCal Infrared Thermal Imaging Services, while he was scanning horses at HITS Thermal. Peter originally became involved with using infrared technology for use on construction sites: it was a way to detect a leaking roof, unseen water damage or walls with missing insulation. But recently he was trained to use his infrared camera to scan horses.

For my product review, he came all the way from Fallbrook to scan several horses for us at Hazy Meadow in Lakeside. As the primary horse handler, or perhaps in this case "horse holder" for the photo shoot, I got an up close look at the entire process. In preparation for the scan, each horse was carefully groomed and ridden for 20 minutes, two hours prior to Peter's arrival. They were then left to recuperate in a shady spot, as heat from the sun can affect the camera's reading.

Getting eight horses ready for their scans was a feat in itself. A lot of juggling had to be done. We had quite a wide variety of horses being imaged and I was interested in seeing how they varied. Just to name a few of the horses getting scanned, we had my mare, Skeeter, who I evented for several years on the East Coast; a 7-year-old Thoroughbred, JP, who was recovering from surgery to his stifles; Buggs, a very round Quarter Horse that has been off and on lame for almost a year; and a 14h pony, Boji, that had only been back in work for a few months after a bad run-in with a previous trainer.

How Does It Work? –Shoot, Examine, Identify

Peter is not a veterinarian, but a certified thermographer. He simply uses the Flir System Infrared Camera to take a series of 26 coordinating thermographic shots. The camera registers minute changes in skin temperature and then conveys this info as a color-encoded photograph. It can detect temperature differences of less than one-tenth a degree. Each shot is then entered into a special computer system, which formulates them into a comprehensive report. The horse owner can then have their veterinarian read the report, or for an additional fee, Peter can have your report professionally evaluated and interpreted by a veterinarian trained in thermal imaging.

Peter images the horse from every possible angle – and I mean every angle – from stem to



Peter taking an aerial head to tail shot of Buggs. It was a lot easier on a 15 hand horse!



Peter's taking a thermal image of the bottom of the hoof. Buggs was the last horse of the day ... this is the 32nd hoof I've held for Peter.

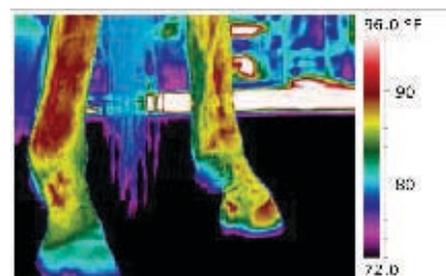
stern, top to bottom. I picked out and held up each hoof individually so he could image it from the bottom. Do the math: eight horses, four hooves each, that's 32 hooves I picked out and held up in four hours. My back was killing me by the end of the day, and I had several mysterious battle wounds. But it was quite humorous watching Peter climb up a ladder to get the aerial head to tail shot of Goose, our resident 17.2 hand giraffe. Each infrared picture also has a matching regular picture which is taken simultaneously. That way the vet evaluating the shots can check the normal photo to make sure a hot or cold spot isn't just a stray piece of mud.

While I was holding the fifth horse to go, JP, Peter shared with Cheryl and me the great story of the first horse he scanned and what convinced him of the viability of this business. It was a 3-year-old racehorse that was getting ready to be tacked up for a race. As Peter was scanning, he noticed that one of the horse's legs, particularly around the cannon, was hot.

The theory is that if a horse is tracking even, then it is putting even weight on all the hooves, and accordingly each of his/her legs should also be working approximately the same amount. Thus, the reading on each leg should be about the same. A "hot spot" indicates inflammation or increased circulation, and a "cold spot" a reduction in blood supply, which



Close-up of Buggs' hoof thermal. You can tell by looking at the heat patterns of the hoofs how your horse is tracking and if he/she is putting equal amounts of pressure on the bottom of the hoof.



A thermal image of JP's lower hind legs. As you can see he has one cold hoof and hot hoof.

could be caused by swelling, thrombosis or scar tissue. Peter pointed out the hot leg to the horse trainer, who in turn went to get the track vet; as it turned out the horse had a small hairline fracture in that leg. If he had run it could have ended his career, or his life.

JP, a horse in our group, showed a cold hoof. What was interesting to observe was that heat does not always indicate the source of the problem. In the case of JP, it was the cold hoof that indicated the sore leg. It was cold because he was not putting as much weight on it and his corresponding hind hoof and the parallel front hoof, were both inflamed from carrying extra weight. Another horse, Buggs, showed a cold spot in the same area he had suffered a hairline tendon tear in last year. Scar tissue? Swelling maybe?

A Little Extra Research

When Peter wrapped up the last horse, he left me with a packet of information and promised to get Cheryl and me the reports asap. I immediately went to office and performed my favorite means of research – I googled infrared and equine! I found out some very interesting things.

According to the Equine Center, a veterinarian hospital in San Luis Obispo County, at the 1996 Olympic Games in

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Atlanta, where millions of dollars worth of equipment was available to equestrian teams, the most requested diagnostic tool was the thermography. Why? It was fast, portable, non-invasive and could be used to detect injury sites before they became large lameness issues.

Dr. Jim Waldsmith of the Equine Center published an article on his website about thermography. In it he said, "Many horses are presented to our practice with a request to define subtle changes in the horse's gait ... On clinical exams these horses are many times found to be 'body sore,' resenting flexion and palpation in several areas of their body ... After a complete clinical exam we find thermal imaging allows a quick and non-invasive assessment of the entire horse's body. Frequently, areas of hoof imbalance, joint inflammation and abnormal tack wear can all be quickly identified. By simultaneously identifying and treating all areas of abnormality, the horse's athleticism is improved and risk of further injury diminished."

In a Flir Systems press release, Peter's associate Dr. Tracy Turner, had this to say about the use of thermography in equine medicine, "Thermography can detect changes in inflammatory tendons and joints as much as two weeks before clinical lameness is apparent. Moreover, equine thermography

can also be used to assess the vasculature and blood flow of tissue before and after exercise. The uses are endless: pre-purchase examinations, saddle fit, a training aid to avoid injury (i.e. detecting hot shins before they buck), pre-race examinations, hoof balance, track design, following tendon injuries, tendonitis, diagnosing capsulitis..." The list was impressive, and it went on and on.

I cornered one of the regular vets at Hazy Meadow, Gary Amaral D.V.M., to ask what he thought of thermal imaging. Once I explained the process to him, he was interested in seeing it used for saddle fitting. Saddle fitting was one of the few things we didn't have Peter perform while he was out. But Gary also thought infrared was a good diagnostic tool to start with when your veterinarian is unsure of the location or cause of lameness; as thermal imaging is far less expensive than x-rays or an ultrasound.

In the end I didn't have my reports read by a veterinarian. There was nothing blatantly apparent that we hadn't expected. My mare had more heat along the right side of her spine than her left, but she was still getting fit at the time and is not as flexible tracking left; mostly because I'm weaker to the left, and I've been her main rider for 10 years.

But I'm going to keep the reports for future reference. Who knows when I could use them?

It would be interesting to compare two scans: one at the beginning of the show season and one at the end, or before and after an injury. Several other owners have shown interest in having their horses' report professionally evaluated, and one boarder has already asked me when Peter was coming back. If this is how far infrared technology has come since 1987 and the *Predator*, I can't wait to see what equine medicine is doing with it in 2027.

For more information on thermography and SoCal Infrared Thermal Imaging Services visit www.equineir.com, e-mail info@equineir.com or call 1-888-SO-CAL-IR, toll free.

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Equine Infrared Scan

Stop Guessing, Start Knowing

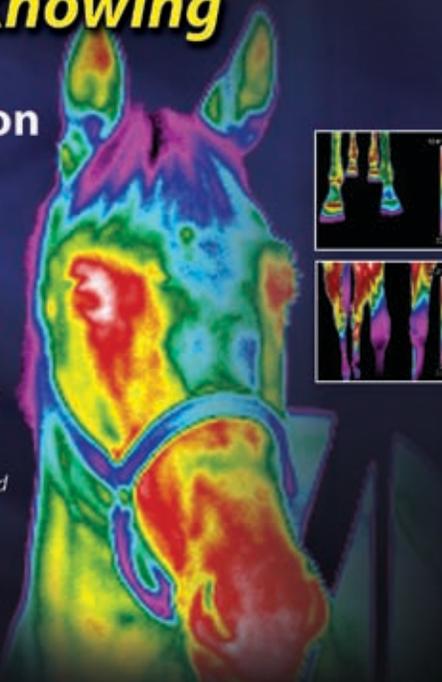
\$200 Full Imaging Report w/
Veterinarian Interpretation

An imaging only report is available without interpretation for \$125*
*Travel fee may apply. Contact our office for further information.

- PRE-PURCHASE IMAGING
- HOOF BALANCE IMAGING
- TRACK FOOTING IMAGING
- PRE-RACE IMAGING
- SADDLE FIT IMAGING
- JOINT INFLAMMATION IMAGING

Before Thermography, veterinarians could only locate a problem with observation or palpation but with equine thermography, an abnormality - now called thermographic or infrared abnormality - can show tissue that's stressed before the affected tissue becomes damaged.

SoCal Infrared is an authorized sales agent for Flir Systems. If you are interested in having an infrared camera or performing these types of scans yourself, contact our office for further information.



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