



Battling Back

Article and photography by Jan LeCocq

A barrel racing team overcame devastating injuries to continue giving hope to children with cerebral palsy.

For Skeet Davis of Grand Bay, Alabama, and his Paint, SC Rains Okie Star, life is about giving back. In addition to their competitive partnership as a top National Barrel Horse Association team, Davis and “Boomer” have teamed up to help kids with cerebral palsy since 2004. Davis organizes benefit barrel races and, together, he and the 2000 chestnut tobiano gelding visit organizations like “Camp Smile” in Mobile, Alabama, to brighten children’s lives through equine interaction. For the father of three, their work holds special significance—Davis’ youngest daughter was born with cerebral palsy herself.

Facing: Skeet Davis and SC Rains Okie Star both battled back from devastating injuries. Below: A fence injury left metal barbs embedded in “Boomer’s” hoof.



October 2008, however, almost put an end to Davis and Boomer’s goodwill efforts. When the big Paint was not waiting in his usual spot at the fence when Davis came home from work, the owner knew something was wrong. He found Boomer standing in the lane to the barn, with his right front leg cocked on its toe. It was clear that he had been there for hours—blood was everywhere. To Davis’ horror, Boomer’s hoof was nearly severed—the gelding had caught his foot on the one strand of barbed wire running below the pasture fence’s bottom rail, used to keep coyotes out. As horses always do, Boomer had found the one place in the field where he could get hurt.

Davis immediately hauled the horse to Dr. McCoy, the Davis family’s vet in Grand Bay, Alabama. McCoy X-rayed the wound and then cleaned and bandaged it. After several weeks, McCoy operated on the foot and removed two barbs embedded deep in the tissue. The accident shattered Davis’ hope to ride Boomer in the 2008 National Barrel Horse Association World Championships in Augusta, Georgia.

Through the generosity of a friend, Davis was able to compete at the event aboard a borrowed horse. Davis and his loaned mount were doing well in the competition until a fateful ride. In his second run at the National Barrel Horse Association World Show, a miscue between horse and rider sent Davis crashing to the ground.

Lying in the arena, unconscious, Davis had sustained an “open book pelvic break,” an injury from which more than 50 percent of victims die. Fortunately, he was only minutes from a major teaching hospital, where a world-renowned specialist in pelvic fractures took quick action to save Davis. Given the severity of his injury, Davis was required to forego horseback riding until he healed completely.

Once released from the hospital, Davis was determined to help Boomer rehabilitate. By January 2009, Davis was beginning to doubt that he’d ever ride his horse again, much less continue their commitments to helping children with cerebral



After several operations and months of therapeutic care—including rebuilding the hoof wall—Boomer is again sound.

palsy. But there was hope. Fellow barrel racers urged Davis to take Boomer to the team at Lee Veterinary and Podiatry Clinic in Atmore, Alabama, just over an hour away from Davis' home. There, Dr. Hank Lee and farrier Jim LaClaire had combined forces to diagnose and treat injured horses, combining astute diagnosis with innovative horse podiatry. Davis hoped the team could bring hope to Boomer's plight.

When Boomer arrived at the clinic, examination of his foot showed a coronary band scar in the middle quarter of his left front foot with a corresponding split in his hoof. He was lame, walking on the sole of his toe. After taking X-rays to further assess the damage, Lee administered a Palmar Digital Nerve Block (PDN) and cleaned out the split hoof up to normal hoof wall. LaClaire followed with a therapeutic shoe, filling the gaps in the hoof wall with polymer to seal and protect the foot. Boomer returned in February for a follow-up exam—though improved, the gelding was still lame. Lee used another PDN, re-examined the previous X-rays and concluded that the pain source was in the navic-

The determination of Davis and Boomer helped them return to their calling—helping children with cerebral palsy.



ular region. LaClaire reset the shoes twice over the next two months, trying to develop enough hoof surface to use an egg bar shoe, which would give Boomer increased heel support. By July, the hoof had grown to the point that only a tiny bit of polymer remained from the repair. With therapeutic shoeing, Boomer was ready to get back into action.

Today, Davis is not yet riding competitively; he is still caring for his healing hip. However, that doesn't stop him from organizing local barrel races, where he is one of the most enthusiastic cheerleaders for exhibitors. Skeet and Boomer have returned to their mission of giving children with cerebral palsy a chance to ride. Equipped with a special saddle that provides increased support and security, these children—even those in wheelchairs—are able to experience the thrill of riding on Boomer's back. With



Davis' special saddle helps children afflicted with cerebral palsy experience the thrill of riding.

the help of camp counselors, each child is gently secured into the saddle and Skeet leads Boomer around the campground, with the gelding stepping softly to provide a smooth ride for his precious cargo.

Boomer's recovery from his near-career-ending injury is testimony to the love of his owner and the cutting-edge expertise of the Lee Veterinary and Podiatry Clinic. As for Skeet, he's doing what he has always done: He faces his adversary, makes a plan and continues with his mission. Hundreds of admiring fans—children, parents and colleagues—are thankful that this inspirational team is still in action, making life better for everyone around them. **PHR**

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