



Catalina's Story

I imported Catalina from Germany in 2000 to be my dressage horse.

For two years Catalina's dressage training progressed well. Then things began to fall apart. During this time Catalina resisted grooming, walked off while being mounted, and was very stiff and body sore. She would not round and lift her back or put her nose on the vertical. I wondered what happened since she was willingly working well before. My trainer insisted she had an "attitude problem." The trainer used draw reins on Catalina to keep her in a frame.



The draw reins were used for several months, during which time she came up lame and the vet found her back to be very sore. We treated the back but it was a temporary respite. She began threatening to rear and was dangerous to be around. She trampled me coming out of her stall one morning. Things culminated at a show where she would not go forward on the lunge or under saddle and eventually had an episode of colic.

A few days after the show I took Catalina to the University of Minnesota where they found she had Equine Poly-saccharide Storage Myopathy. EPSM horses have chronic soreness in their muscles due to their inability to process sugars and starches. These horses are born with the disease but the symptoms usually show up at age 5 or 6 when their work in earnest begins. I began the prescribed diet of more fat and less carbohydrates. I also had her back radiographed and we found she has overlapping spinal processes (kissing spine). At this point I started looking for a new instructor and decided I would be the only one riding Catalina from now on.

As we progressed with our new instructor using only classical dressage approaches her behavioral issues were frustrating but understandable. As time went by and she trusted we wouldn't ask her to work when she hurt, her behavioral issues consumed less and less of our time and we could focus on real work again.

We ended up taking out her ovaries six months later because she would colic every month when she ovulated, and she would even ovulate while on Regumate. Upon inspecting the ovaries the vets noticed the right ovary was definitely enlarged but I never had it tested for tumors or anything. One of the

vets mentioned that often horses with back problems also have reproductive problems as well but the link is not known at this point.

Another breakthrough came when Dr. Anderson starting formulating a low sugar hay cube especially for horses with NSC issues. Once Catalina started on these cubes which were under 5% sugar, she had less issues with her muscles and she continues to improve as the months go on.

Catalina is comfortably working again and she tries very hard to do a good job. My horse with a “bad attitude” is a real sweetheart; she is very affectionate and has a great work ethic.

I’ve come to believe the nature of the horse is to be a *willing partner*. If I had understood that earlier I would have looked at Catalina’s behavioral issues closely a lot sooner. I won’t make that mistake again.

