DR NICK ROE IS A VETERINARIAN, 4* EVENTER, WORLD CUP SHOWJUMPER, LECTURER IN EQUINE STUDIES AND A REGISTERED THOROUGHBRED TRAINER. **IN THIS ARTICLE HE COVERS.....**

SPLINTS

Splints are a bony reaction or lump in the region of the splint bone caused by either trauma to the area or excessive loading to the splint bone. The excessive loading is usually contributed to by less than ideal conformation (i.e. offset cannon bones or bench knees). Most splints do not cause lameness, or maybe just a slight lameness on hard ground on a ten-metre circle.

If there is significant or persistent lameness, then you should take an X-ray to make sure that the splint bone is not actually fractured.

Obvious splints on both legs.

A large splint.

X-ray showing fracture of splint bone.

Soundness wise, old, inactive (non-painful) splints are only a cosmetic blemish, but they are an indication that there may be a conformational fault. Competition wise, there are plenty of horses who enjoy long and successful performance careers with splints, some even look like they are growing an extra cannon bone! If the size of the splint is a worry, then I recommend significant anti-inflammatory therapy straight away. This includes icing twice a day, topical anti-inflammatories such as phenylbutazone or DMSO ointments, oral anti-inflammatories, and a pressure wrap. Continue this until the splint is no longer painful when squeezing the splint while the leg is held off the ground.

The most important thing about limiting the size of the splint is how quickly you start the treatment. Once the bony lump is there it takes months for the body to slowly remodel the shape of the lump.

If you first notice a small softish splint and start treating it straight away, then you stand a good chance of limiting its size. If you do not notice it for three days, or you sit there watching it grow until it is the size of a golf ball then you are probably too late to make a difference to its eventual size.

About half of them gradually decrease in size over six to twelve months until they are barely noticeable. Some stay just as big or even sprout up a twin right next to them - these horses are usually the ones with a conformational fault. The thing to remember is that the horse can still jump as high and move just as well as they did before their legs became lumpy.