

Akuna Mattata: A Beloved Horse Makes a Stunning Recovery

Since she was born, Nahla (or Akuna Mattata, as she is known in her show jumping career) has always been a horse that stood out. One of triplets born from an embryo transfer, Nahla was the smallest and scrawniest, and she got a later start in her training than her siblings. Despite this, she went on to have the best show jumping career of the bunch, with rider Nicki Shahinian-Simpson. “Over time Nicki fell in love with her, and they developed fantastic rapport,” shares owner Carol Rosenstein. “They love and trust each other, and it’s just a perfect match.”

This bond between horse and rider may have saved Nahla’s life in a time of crisis, when Nicki noticed a difference in Nahla’s breathing patterns. At first, Nahla was checked out by the vet and cleared for competition. Her performance the following day was strong - a fourth place finish in the 5* \$401,000 Fidelity Investments Grand Prix - but this didn’t satisfy Nicki’s instinct that something was off.

More exams followed, revealing something dreadful: Nahla was diagnosed with guttural pouch mycosis. “She had a patch of fungus on her carotid artery, which could have caused her to bleed out at any moment,” Carol recalls.

Everyone began jumping into research on where to send Nahla for surgery. Carol called Hays Adjusting Services, who handles all equine mortality and medical claims for American Reliable Insurance Company. The expert claims adjuster had experience with this rare condition and knew who the best doctors were to treat it. The team chose a doctor at the University of Florida Large Animal Hospital to handle the case. The claims adjuster approved the surgery and all treatments instantly, and even offered to fly in other experts to consult, if needed.

Carol was blown away at the support that she received from American Reliable. “I’ve never had an insurance company go to the extra mile to actually get on the phone with doctors. They exceeded every possible expectation. They continued to follow up and be supportive and very kind. It was really the way that you want to be treated by your insurance company.”

Nahla’s painstaking surgery on the crucial carotid artery which supplies the brain went very well. Everyone was relieved at her survival, but a question remained: would Nahla be able to return to her career?

Fast-forward to today: Nahla is competing again, and she is at the top of her game. Upon her return to the sport, she took first in a recent qualifier for the Split Rock Grand Prix, and placed fourth in the big Grand Prix there. She followed this by galloping through the timers for the blue ribbon in the \$137,000 3* Houseware’s Grand Prix Tryon two weeks later.

Shares Carol, “We feel incredibly lucky and blessed. We are extremely aware of just how many things could’ve gone another way. The detection and diagnosis, the surgery, the recovery, the outcome – there were so many perils along the way and we’re really lucky.”

It was Nicki’s good instincts and swift, skilled action by the veterinary staff that saved Nahla’s life, and it was American Reliable who provided support and some peace of mind during an incredibly scary time. “They were there every step of the way. They checked in and made sure I was aware of my policy limits and my deadlines to do the follow-ups. They made sure that I knew what I needed to do to maximize my coverage. American Reliable has earned our business for good. We won’t be looking at other companies.”