



Highgate Veterinary Clinic

Farm Case History

An Unusual Cause of Calf Lameness



Lame calf

Recently, while on one of our client's farms, I was asked to examine a lame calf. It was a six month old limousin cross suckler calf which had developed lameness at six weeks old while at grass.

The farmer had treated the hind limb lameness as an infected joint (joint ill) i.e. with antibiotic injections. The calf always remained bright and alert and very difficult to catch. When she didn't respond to treatment, it was presumed that she had damaged her leg and would be permanently lame.

When I examined the calf, she was very well in her self but could not place her right hind leg down. It was held permanently slightly up and behind the calf. The muscles at the back of the thigh were tense and the hock could not be bent.

I diagnosed a condition called spastic paralysis. It's rare, I remember seeing two dairy calves when I was a student, seventeen years ago. It is an inherited disease and caused by the spasm of the muscles of the leg. It can affect both hind legs but luckily this calf only had one affected leg.

There's no medical treatment but there are a couple of surgical techniques. One is to cut the nerves to the muscles of the hind thigh to let the muscle relax. A simpler operation is to cut partially through the Achilles tendon (running from the muscles behind the thigh and knee to the hock) and then allowing this tendon to stretch.

I opted for the second operation using local anaesthesia. Straight after the operation, the calf could put the toe to the floor. With time, it is hoped that this calf will be able to walk better but she will never walk normally. She is in no pain with this condition so her welfare will not be impaired as long as she is kept well bedded and well fed. As it is an inherited disease, this calf will not be used for breeding.

Article by Mark Stott

