



◀ **The Mansmanns' Buff Dude was rehabilitated after a tendon injury and is now competing at the preliminary-level while eventing**

Flying under the radar in Thoroughbred aftercare are the second-career connections—both professional equestrians who develop off-track Thoroughbreds as part of their business, and amateur owners seeking their next competitive or recreational partners—who invest the time and money to rehabilitate a horse who retired from racing with an injury. We spoke with three such individuals to learn more about what the process can cost.

### **DOLLARS AND CENTS**

Anne Marie Bowen remembers joking with her veterinarian in November 2021 as she pulled out the ultrasound that Aldo's Kitten, the Kitten's Joy gelding she had just purchased to rehabilitate a known strained suspensory, that he probably had a fractured sesamoid too—the two injuries often go hand in hand. Unfortunately for Bowen, she was correct, and when the follow-up radiographs were sent to Tufts University for referral, "Aldo" was given the option of surgery or euthanasia. Unfortunately, the nature of the injury was unlikely to result in the horse being even pasture sound without surgical intervention.

"I really enjoy giving rehab cases a chance," said Bowen. "Even as a young teen rider, I always just envisioned that I wanted to take in rehabs and give them that chance at a second career."

The manager of a large eventing farm in Berlin, Mass., Bowen has plenty of hands-on expertise that applies to her own horses: she typically has at least two retired racehorses in her own string in various stages of rehabilitation and retraining before she fits them to sell on to good homes. "I don't rush to sell," she remarked. "I always want to wait for the right situation."

In Aldo's case, that wait would prove to be much longer than Bowen anticipated. While the horse's arthroscopic surgery went well, with multiple chips removed, the rehabilitation process was seriously derailed when Aldo ambitiously attempted to jump out of his initial turnout

### *Second Acts*

# The Cost of Rehabilitation

SECOND-CAREER OWNERS INVEST MONEY AND TIME TO REHABILITATE THOROUGHBREDS WHO ARE INJURED ON THE TRACK

By **KRISTEN KOVATCH BENTLEY**

**I****NJURIES TO EQUINE** athletes—whether in the racing or sport horse industries—are an unfortunate fact of life at all levels of sport. Preventative care, conditioning, and a horseman's ability to listen to the horse can certainly reduce the prevalence of injury, but anyone who has been around horses long enough knows that's not a question of if, but when.

If an injury is career-ending, not every connection has the means to rehabilitate a horse—while numerous facilities cater to injury rehabilitation, such as the Kentucky Equine Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation Center or California's Kingfisher Farms, it's a process that takes time and money. Non-profit aftercare facilities handle a large number of rehabilitation cases, but the accompanying monetary donation, if one is required or requested, may not cover all of a horse's expenses, especially with complications.

paddock and didn't quite make it—he landed himself back on stall rest with layers of stitches and drains after puncturing his abdomen on a fence post. Now, 18 months after his initial purchase and the ensuing complications, Aldo is finally about 30 rides into his retraining and progressing well.

Bowen spent \$5,500 on the initial diagnostics and surgery at Tufts and invested an additional \$3,000 in follow-up care, including platelet-rich plasma therapy and joint injections, multiple shockwave treatments, and follow-up ultrasounds and radiographs. By comparison, the second horse in her rehab string, Navy King, has been relatively straightforward with a routine suspensory strain—but both rehab horses still incur the regular routine expenses of dental work, farriery, and hay and feed, as well as tying up two stalls.

For some second-career owners, the rehabilitation process is largely a labor of love: such is the case with Tuba, a son of Magna Graduate, and Amy Arzonico. Tuba was a former trainee of Arzonico's partner during his time as an assistant trainer, and the pair had followed his progress after he changed hands. "We made sure the owners knew we would take him when he retired—no matter what," Arzonico said.

So when the call came in 2020 that Tuba was ready to retire, unfortunately suffering an avulsion fracture in his last start on July 6 in which he finished fourth, Arzonico stuck by her word and the horse



**Aldo's Kitten's sesamoid injury turned out to be more serious than originally believed, and his owner, Anne Marie Bowen, faced a tough decision**

was theirs, as long as he was out of the stall soon. A friend, who donated the shipping and short-term stabling, picked up the horse—and within a few days, called Arzonico, concerned that Tuba was far worse off than they thought.

A veterinarian and radiographs confirmed that in addition to the avulsion fracture, Tuba also had two sesamoid fractures. He was able to stay in the friend's barn from July until October when he could safely travel to Columbus, Ohio, where Arzonico managed a barn and had a free stall. The barn owner was a vet herself and was able to offer Arzonico significant discounts on work—four radiograph films on Tuba's initial arrival in Columbus cost her just \$198.

"I remember standing in the barn

aisle with her and asking her what we should do," Arzonico recalled. "I asked her, 'What would you do if he were your horse?' And she responded, 'I would be really, really sad.'"

Arzonico was given three options: Tuba's joint could be fused surgically, but he already had the start of degenerative joint disease and arthritis. They could also try an injectable bisphosphonate solution just to see—or they could euthanize. Arzonico opted for the injection (administered under another discount), which in her words "turned out to be a miracle for him." The horse was hand-walking by the end of the month and on small round pen turnout by November. They moved to a tack-walking regimen in December, which they maintained through June 2021.

A follow-up set of radiographs at Haggard Equine Medical Institute in Lexington cleared Tuba for full work, and since September of 2021, he's been ridden regularly and even jumped. Arzonico reports that she did another recheck with radiographs and an ultrasound in November 2022 to be proactive, but that Tuba has maintained soundness throughout.

"I was super lucky in this process that I could do the daily rehab care myself," Arzonico added. "I was able to borrow a (pulsed electromagnetic field) machine for additional therapy; I wrapped his legs myself—just so many little things that a normal person would have to pay hand over fist for."

Arzonico invested \$1,800 in the first five months of rehabilitation for Tuba, which reflects deep discounts from the vets and no-cost board. (She did make additional investments in four rounds of ulcer treatment over the course of his stall rest, and notes that he still requires \$150 worth of shoeing, every four weeks—on just his front feet.) She appreciates that this would have been a much more expensive process without her prior relationships—and that while lengthy, Tuba's rehabilitation was relatively minor in that it did not require surgery.

Arzonico was grateful not only for greatly-reduced veterinary care, but for the \$100 a month that was sent to her,



**At left, Tuba retired with an avulsion fracture and two sesamoid fractures, which owner Amy Arzonico patiently rehabilitated; at right, Tuba made a complete recovery and has been able to embark on a second career as a show jumper with Arzonico**

TOP: COURTESY OF ANNE MARIE BOWEN; BOTTOM, LEFT: TYLER ROTSTEIN; RIGHT: PYROIS MEDIA



unprompted, from one of Tuba's former owners for a time. "It wasn't a lot of money, but it helped," she said. "And for a small-time owner, I know that \$100 was actually quite a lot."

#### TIME IS MONEY

Of course, not every rehabilitation requires a major monetary investment in veterinary care; some take only time and the expert eye and experience of their caretaker. That's the type of horse that Tom and Clare Mansmann enjoy taking on. Over their decades of experience with former racehorses, they've learned what kinds of injuries they can rehabilitate themselves at their Pacific Farm in Hume, Va., and established a trusted network with racing connections to source horses.

"If we have a relationship with owners, and there's no rehabilitation cost for us other than time, we'll take a horse on," Clare Mansmann said. "As we've gotten ourselves established, we do work with the racing owners to pay for surgery if one is needed."

**"This model of the next owner paying for the rehabilitation of a horse is so strange to me that it's accepted in this industry. There is no sense in taking money away from the people trying to help."**

—CLARE MANSMANN

horse, you have to prove he'll stay sound in a competitive career, which takes yet more time."

While the Mansmanns are happy to work with their network of racing owners, it's taken time to establish that relationship of two-way trust as well as develop their business and experience. "We have a long-standing knowledge which makes us comfortable to do these rehabs ourselves—we can recognize if something is healing the way it should. And of course, we have a great veterinary team to support us, as well as an excellent farrier."

When they do take on a horse with an injury from connections with whom they're not familiar, the Mansmanns ask for tuition funds to cover some of the initial veterinary costs.

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The Mansmanns particularly enjoy working with horses with soft-tissue injuries. Their program, which is heavily service-based in coaching riders with Thoroughbreds rather than sales, is well-suited to take on that type of injury, one that typically requires a year or more of rest and walking. Horses in the walking phase of rehabilitation will be ponied or tack-ridden while the Mansmanns' coach clients.

"Not every horse fits into this model," she cautioned. "And this only works for us because we can afford to give up a stall or paddock to these horses. If you're doing this professionally to resell a

## Rehabilitation by Non-Profit Organizations

A majority of racing injuries rehabilitated after a horse leaves the racetrack are taken on by non-profit organizations, some of which require horses to be donated with funds to help defray their expenses. Others shoulder the burden of veterinary care, including diagnostics, surgery, pharmaceuticals, and continued care, entirely on their own—budgets are typically funded by a combination of grants and donations. We spoke with three organizations well-known for their rehabilitation programs to learn more about their costs.

New Vocations Racehorse Adoption Program, the nation's largest aftercare organization, includes six facilities in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Florida, Louisiana, and Kentucky. Across all facilities, New Vocations took in 329 horses in 2022, 70% of which required rehabilitation from an injury. (Half of those horses come into the program described as sound, with injuries discovered upon veterinary exam.) The organization spent about \$200,000 on veterinary costs that year; rehabilitation expenses ranged from \$500 to \$7,500 depending on individual needs. Several clinics provide discounted surgeries to New Vocations, including Hagyard Equine Medical Institute, Hogan Equine Clinic, Peterson Smith Equine Hospital, and Baronne Veterinary Clinic. Veterinary costs do not include board, which runs about \$1 million for New Vocations annually across all six facilities. Horses in a rehabilitation program typically stay 178 days on average.

CANTER Michigan, a chapter of CANTER USA, enjoys a non-profit discount with its local vet, Kern Road Veterinary Clinic, as well as some reduction in surgery bills through Michigan State University's MSU Equine Rehabilitation Fund, which allows donors to make contributions to offset the costs. In 2022, CANTER Michigan took in 43 horses, with 81% requiring rehabilitation from an injury. Including the discounts, veterinary expenses ranged from about \$500 to \$5,900 for surgeries and treatments; these figures do not include the average of \$500 per month for post-procedure rehabilitation. The range of length of stay for horses in CANTER Michigan's program is eight to 12 months.

After the Races, based in Maryland, averages about a third of its horses having an acute injury that requires surgery each year. Surgical costs average about \$2,500, followed up by an additional \$800 to \$1,300 per month depending on follow-up treatments. The organization budgets about a third of its entire operating costs for rehabilitation while partnering organizations cover some of the surgical costs. Sound horses stay on average 43 days and rehabilitation cases average 90 days. After the Races keeps these stays somewhat shorter than other organizations by adopting out horses to qualified homes to continue the last stages of rehabilitation. This allows the organization to take on more horses in acute need.

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