

A Lucky escape

Vegas is a gorgeous one-year-old chocolate Burmese whose smoochy, super-relaxed ways got her caught under the tyre of a neighbour's car.

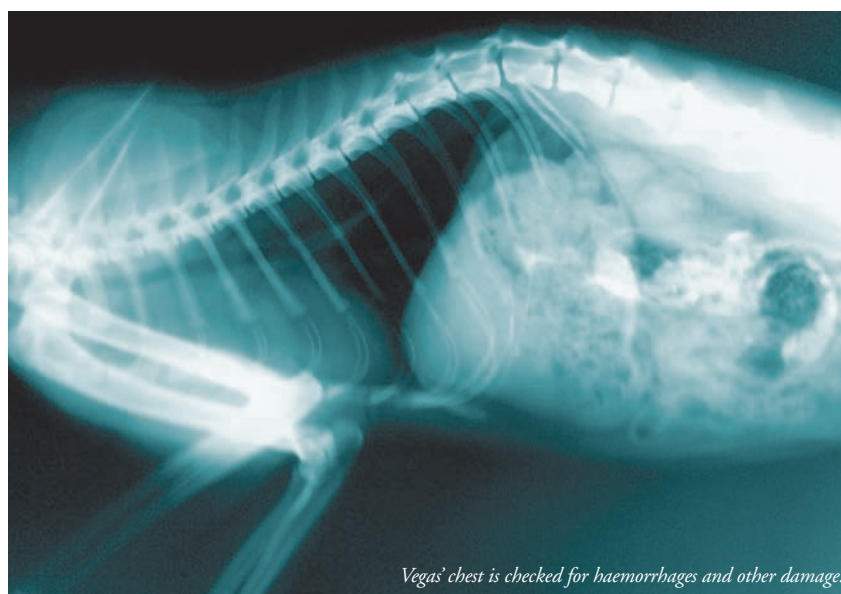
BY DR ALEX MELROSE

Fortunately, she was rushed to our clinic and we checked her straight away. Vegas was unable to stand, had very pale gums and was extremely subdued with episodes of sudden panic, crying and distress.

Externally, there were some superficial grazes and shattered nails, often typical of vehicle impact. Internally, however, we knew we were looking at a lot of damage. Examinations revealed a lowered body temperature from the shock, cracking sounds when her pelvis was manipulated and very high heart and breathing rates. Our greatest concern, however, was the total lack of sensation in her left leg and the fact that she had no control over her bladder – when her abdomen was palpated, her urine leaked out all over the table.

We immediately gave Vegas some pain relief, including a tiny clear plastic Fentanyl patch applied to a shaved area on her side and covered with a bandage. This goes on just like a sticker and gently carries the drug through the skin to provide safe, strong relief for up to three days.

We then proceeded to get more information about what was happening inside Vegas. Her neck was clipped and a needle used to draw blood directly from her jugular vein. This was then placed into blood tubes and run through our in-house laboratory.



Vegas' chest is checked for haemorrhages and other damage.

We also clipped a forelimb and inserted a 24 gauge intravenous catheter into her cephalic vein, which we then attached to an infusion pump. The pump allows us to accurately deliver the right amount of artificial fluids – in this case, 12ml per hour – into her tiny 3kg body, and to prevent clotting in the drip lines.

Once she was reasonably stable and we had controlled her pain, we gently put her into position for some X-rays. Chest X-rays are always taken after road accidents to look for a ruptured diaphragm, fractured ribs and lung-field injuries such as a ruptured lung

lobe leaking air into the chest cavity, or a collapsed lung. Despite her high breathing rate, Vegas' chest pictures were all clear. Next we X-rayed her spine. Any collapse of vertebrae or discs along her back would present a very grave prognosis for her. The fact that she had sensation in her right hind leg made a serious spinal injury less likely, and we were relieved to find her spine looking great.

Further back at the pelvis was where the real problems began. The weight of the car had cracked her pelvis in half, right down the middle symphysis. Each side had then been shunted forward and



The right-hand side of Vegas' pelvis is no longer parallel, and is pushed in on an angle towards her midline.



Due to her pelvis being cracked in half, Vegas' pelvic wings don't overlap as they should.

inwards, disrupting the joints between the wings of the pelvis and the sacrum. With that much disruption to the pelvis it's common for trauma to occur to the nerves that run off over the pelvic notch and down to the limbs, and also to the nerves providing bladder control. We hoped that her paralysis would prove to be temporary and that the nerves weren't irreparably severed!

The blood results came back showing minor liver damage from the impact, her blood sugar rising as a stress response, and some platelet loss from minor internal bleeding. We attached a bag of blood plasma to the IV drip line to assist with the treatment of shock and blood loss, warmed Vegas slowly with an electric blanket and made her as comfortable as possible with an array of anti-inflammatory and pain-killing drugs.

On Vegas' second day of treatment there was massive progress. She had already regained control of her bladder and had sensation and movement in her previously paralysed leg. However, she still wasn't eating so we supported her with intravenous amino acids, vitamins and minerals. Discussions with her delighted owners indicated we would be attempting to get this pelvic fracture to heal by confining her to a cage for a month, then slowly increasing her activity

levels after that. If things go well she'll be in for three months of rehabilitation and re-strengthening. The pelvis is very good at knitting itself back together as long as the fracture site is not moving around too much. The alternative surgical option involved realignment of the bones and inserting screws and wires through the pelvic wings into her sacrum.

On day four, Vegas ate, ate and ate some more! She also stood up on all four limbs for the first time. She's continuing to improve each day now and will be heading home soon in a special large cage to continue her enforced rest and healing. This was a lucky escape for young Vegas – hopefully she's learnt to stay away from cars, even stationary ones. 🐾



On the road to recovery: Vegas looking – and feeling – much happier!

Photos by Michelle Kilcolly

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