

40 years of Colt Castrations

Colt castrations are a common surgical procedure and are considered a bit mundane by many vets in equine practice. Potentially however there is a whole range of complications that can occur from the anaesthetic, surgical difficulties especially with rigs, haemorrhage, evisceration and infection.

When you look at that list it seems quite scary, but if you have been in practice long enough, you will have encountered them all.

I always preferred the mundane, and wherever I can, I avoid dramas and circuses.

Anaesthesia provided most of the dramas 40 years ago. At this point, I should make a confession, yes, I have used suxamethonium. When faced with a station bred colt that had little or no handling, to be able to run it up a cattle race, give it intravenous 10mls of suxamethonium, let it out, 20 seconds later it would be down, the testicles beautifully relaxed for easy castration and then 10 minutes after that he was up walking around with no apparent after effects.

I knew there was no analgesia, the horse was just paralysed, but in defence, most of the colts we castrated this way, and this was only a few, would have been roped down and castrated by one of the cowboys in the district, if we hadn't done them.

Barbiturate anaesthesia was the standard general anaesthesia through the 70's and 80's. We would pre-med with Ace, but there was still an unpredictable induction and recovery. Sometimes the colt would flip over backwards with all feet off the ground and crash into their back. Because of the inductions, standing castrations were very popular with owners. I must admit I never felt completely relaxed with my head underneath the colt's belly, with my neck twisted as I peered upwards at his undercarriage.