

removed daily or every other day so the stump and its protective sock can be cleaned. The stump also needs to be inspected for signs of trauma or pressure. "You have to be vigilant and catch things the minute they appear," says Vlahos. "It's a daily commitment and one you might not be comfortable leaving with anyone else. Vacations could be difficult."

Prosthetic devices typically require padding at the stump, and most owners quickly become skilled at choosing and arranging the cushioning material, says Grant. "We learn a lot from owners about padding," he says. "They've experimented and found what works best for their horse."

As for the other aspects of routine management and care, not much will change for a horse with a prosthetic limb. He may require the use of a sling to support his weight and aid his balance when he's trimmed and shod. Otherwise, "these horses can be turned

out in a quiet herd," says Grant. "They can buck and play and act like a horse." They cannot, however, be ridden. "I would never recommend that anyone try to ride a horse with a prosthetic limb," says Vlahos. "That would be unsafe for the horse and the rider." Most amputees are used for breeding, although many surgeons recommend artificial insemination whenever possible, to reduce the risk of injury.

The practitioners who perform amputations and prosthetic fittings are often reluctant to quote percentages regarding success rates and average life span following the procedure. "Each case is so incredibly different," says Grant. "You really can't say that what happened with one horse is going to happen with the next—good or bad."

More hard and fast scientific answers may be available soon, though, says Vlahos, who helped author

a large retrospective study with "encouraging results." The study has been accepted by a veterinary journal and is awaiting publication.

What is available now, however, is an honest portrayal of what lies ahead for the horse as well as his owner. "I'm as enthusiastic as anyone about the procedure," says Vlahos. "It's a very, very useful and feasible option that can save the life of a horse. But there has to be a reality check. It won't work for every horse, there is plenty of potential for complications and it is a huge commitment for the rest of the horse's life that not every owner can, or wants to, make."

Nevertheless, the advances in amputation technique and prosthetic development now being made offer a viable alternative and perhaps a new source of hope to those who would give just about anything to see a beloved and severely injured horse romp in the paddock once again. 🐾