

When I knew Lucky had ECVM, I was still in a research phase. I ended up with an article from Zefanja Vermeulen about ECVM. That message still stays with me. She described the ECVM condition as very intense. And when I read that, everything within me said: "Yes, it really is." Not only for your horse, but also as an owner. And that is why I would like to share my story with you.



Lucky joined us in February 2014. I was 14 years old, and he was 4.5 years old. With his white mane and shiny palomino coat, he was absolutely stunning. He had a lot of charisma and that has always remained. We've done a lot of different things; actually, almost everything. Dressage, jumping, cross-country riding, riding without a saddle, outdoor rides, pony camp, swimming and probably more. Ultimately, my passion really lay with dressage. In 2018 we started successfully in the Z1 between the horses and at the beginning of 2019 we had achieved our last winning point for the Z2 (sub top level).

Lucky was a very honest pony and he always had a lot of jokes. We had good but actually also bad moments with training. I can say that I did not receive the Z1 as a gift. As a young pony, he often suddenly took off while riding. He had a bad balance and found it difficult to take the correct position and bow on a circle. He also often looked for something to scare. But hey he was only 5 years old, so I thought young ponies do. Right?

At his boarding stable he made name as the naughty pony, one who did not surrender easily. If you don't know better at such a time, you assume that too. When I look back on all that now, I see a pony that had a lot of trouble with its own body. Balance has always been a

difficult thing for him. Flat through the corner in a canter and lunging was always super difficult due to his staking behavior, falling away on the shoulder. Jumping, on the other hand, was great, but.... now and then he could go really fast.

Balance, support and impulsion were his greatest challenges. As a young pony, but later also as an adult pony. Fortunately, it had of course improved in those years, but that always remained points of attention.



We have always had a searching feeling. Always the feeling that we had to “fix” something. Because our training sessions were never very constant. We often had a relapse. And then you look for where that comes from. You are going to try supplements to make him stronger, maybe a different saddle, the bit would not be good, his stable will be big enough, maybe irons offer more support, let you ride and so on.

We were at a time when we thought yes, we have it under control. I think our most successful year was 2018. I turned 19 and he was 9 years old. We were able to do a lot of competitions that year and he was in very good shape. Finally, his muscles started to develop, and he started to collect really well. I was So very proud of him! I really enjoyed the moments we had that year. It went so well then that I sometimes thought we could handle the ZZ light too. We even scored higher than 65%! Never thought that we would ever achieve that in the Z between all the big horses.



What Lucky also liked very much was cross country. Didn't ride for months and then it seemed like he did it every day. We really flew together!



What I want to say is.... That it really wasn't always bad or difficult! We also had huge highlights. But in the end Lucky just couldn't any more ...

In June 2019 we had an endoscopy of his stomach on suspicion of a stomach ulcer. He was under a lot of stress and the training sessions went a little less. Even when you just looked at his stomach, he got angry. He is colic quickly, is grumpy and lopsided. Although Lucky has always had a sensitive stomach, it was really too bad at the time. We guessed it right, because Lucky did have stomach ulcers. He was given medication for 8 weeks and then again an endoscopy to check. After those 8 weeks everything was completely restored and we were allowed to go back to work.

After the treatment of the ulcer, we expected that everything would get better, but that was actually not the case. Would he really not like dressage anymore? And so all our questions started to come up again.

I then started making a lot of outdoor rides. His flighting behavior became more and more extreme, to the point of danger. With the dressage, the changes did not work, impulsion was gone, pony was crooked, and the turns were bad.

Months went by and Lucky got a little stiffer and worse. He didn't even really like jumping anymore and didn't succeed like he used to.

I decided to only do trail rides. I preferred to do this with another horse or my mother on the bike, because he was getting pretty violent outside. This became more and more as he got older. Back in the day when he and I were young, it was easier to take a leisurely ride outside than later. We always drove with martingale for safety reasons, because otherwise I really couldn't control him. I didn't know any better and always thought; so is Lucky. And we have always accepted him the way he was, because we loved him.

2020 had begun. We were still doing our trail rides, but we really didn't know what to do next. He was already so bad then that a B test didn't even work anymore. We requested a meeting with Lucky via an animal communicator. And you believe in it or not that doesn't matter to me, but it helped us a lot. It's bizarre how much truth emerged in that conversation. He indicated "I really want to, but I can't do it anymore. I feel like an old grandfather, a lot of tension in my back legs with mainly right back, headache, very deep pain in my CTJ (Cervical Thoracic Junction) area." The pony had a lot of compensating behavior and eventually got stuck.

That conversation put us on a different path. We always thought of pelvic problems, but now for the first time in all these years it emerged that he was in deep pain in his CTJ area.

In June 2020 he had a sore back. It turned out that his ligaments were inflamed, 2 vertebrae with bone formation and osteoarthritis in his SI joint. You cannot see how bad the osteoarthritis was with just an ultrasound, but it was clear that it was there. We still had hope and thought that this would be the cause.

We then treated him with meso-therapy. From that moment on we started the rehabilitation process together with our stable mate Dorine Erkens, a certified groundwork instructor who helped us a lot in this process. Lunge and handwork 4 to 5 times a week. For a moment it seemed to get better, but in fact he still remained stiff and did not want to walk, accompanied by outbursts. In the rehabilitation process he was also treated twice by the chiropractor, but this also gave too little improvement. We stood still in the rehabilitation process and were unsure what to do.



Then the condition ECVM came to us. Dorine had attended a webinar by Zefanja and Sharon about ECVM. When our rehabilitation process came to a standstill, she talked about this condition. I immediately went all over the internet to read as much about it as possible. When I did that, I felt very strongly that Lucky had that. There was so much recognition and it would also provide so many answers from the past.

At the end of October we drove to a clinic where we came very specifically with the request to take a photo of the cervical vertebrae C6 and C7 on suspicion of ECVM. This clinic was familiar with ECVM, because the photo has to be taken from a certain angle. When we talked about Lucky on the phone, it was clear to the vet that this was a neck problem. After the clinical examination, it was thought that internal problems were causing his complaints. Lucky had no neurological abnormalities, which you often see with lower neck problems. We also knew that Lucky had a lot of problems internally too. You could see that all too clearly in him with his bloated stomach, colic, bumps and fluffy fur. But we wanted a picture so we got it. It only took 1 photo because it was clearly visible. Lucky had ECVM on C6 and C7 on 1 side. Strangely enough, I felt a relief. Finally, after all this time I had answers. It feels good to know what your horse has and that you can really understand him. By the way, Lucky revived to

spend an afternoon on the road. He really enjoyed it and cooperated well with the investigation.

But then what comes next ...?

Then comes the realization that he has something incurable and will actually only get worse. What should you do? A lot of questions come up again. Can we still ride? Enjoy his last years here? You don't know when that moment will come to let him go, because every horse is different.

I was going to try it one more time. Whether it was still possible to ride. You want to exclude everything that is and is not possible. We did a trail ride outside with my mother accompanying me on the bike. A walk in the sun, it was a beautiful day! But gosh he felt wobbly. If you have not sat on a horse for months, you will feel everything much stronger again. Besides Lucky I also have a young horse and then you suddenly feel that contrast very much. But that was still not enough to provide the answer whether riding was still possible or not. That came on the way back. Everything was fine until we went back. He got hotter and hotter. Starts dribbling, throwing his head in all directions, running crooked and really, he just wanted to go fast. We live here on a busy dike with lots of traffic when the weather is nice. And I got the feeling that I had no more control and dismounted. And to be honest... I hardly ever dismount when riding outside because I always prefer to sit on it. It had now become a dangerous situation.

Conclusion: Riding is no longer possible.

It seemed as if Lucky now knew that we knew what he had, because he was done with it himself. Sometimes I wanted to lunge him for his body, but that just really didn't work anymore. He jumped in all directions in the air and then stopped. And I'm glad we always understood each other so well. I remember well the last day I lunged him. He was very clear with me. Walking was almost impossible, so I wanted to trot. I asked him this and... poof. He jumped into the air with four legs, came down and looked straight at me. Okay ... clear ... he's done.

Actually, nothing really went okay anymore. Walking had also become dangerous, and he didn't like brushing either. All he wanted was for me to tickle his shoulders and neck and some sweets. This is what the last weeks of Lucky's life looked like. He deteriorated at a tremendous pace. He seemed to be elderly, was very grumpy, more on his own, had diarrhea, made less contact with us and the other horses and had only small moments of satisfaction.

He was in a lot of pain. And that was visible in everything. You know that decision is coming that you never really want to make, but it has to. He could no longer.

Monday morning December 28, 2020 he had colic. We let him go in peace at our house. All his horse friends have been allowed to say goodbye to him and of course we too.

Lucky taught us a lot. And I also see this as his last lesson in life to us. And I am very grateful for that. We have done and achieved many beautiful things together, especially if you now know that he had a disability. He really did it for me. A golden coat, but also a real golden heart.

We miss him enormously. I had a completely different plan in mind. But he already knew. That already came up in our conversation, but then I didn't understand it yet. I then asked how he saw his future. He then said that he felt like an old grandpa, wooden, that his body hurt and that he would stay with us forever.

There are so many physical things that I haven't even told you yet. I will mention them briefly for the purpose of imaging.

Eweneck (dropped neck)

A lot of bucks

Bad balance

Bad impulsion

Crookedness

Bridle lameness

Tact errors in the trot

Biting at the place of his girth

Many compensations in his body. His Left front leg / hoof grew inwards. Cold legs and feet due to poor circulation Insulin resistance (While he has been feeding molasses and starch poorly for several years) At the end, too muscular buttocks by compensating for his fore Stomach ulcer A lot stress about nothing. Often colic Often weak manure Sensitive on his head I hope you can get something out of my story. As I have said, it is an intense journey.



Even though Lucky is gone now, it still feels that way. We have experienced beautiful things together and grew up together. I did not want to miss it! He is no longer in pain and is now getting his rest.

Listen and take a good look at your horse and they will tell you a lot more than you think!