

HORSE

Rescue

I'M LOVING MY NEW LIFE!

Lost in the desert, a starving horse finds a safe new home.

BY SCOTT ELDER

The exhausted horse can barely walk, but the drug smugglers force it farther into the harsh desert. After overloading the animal with illegal drugs, they're sneaking across the border from Mexico into a remote part of Arizona. Nearly 400 pounds of drugs are carelessly roped onto the horse without any padding. The ropes lashed across his bare back rub through his hair and cut into his skin.

TO THE RESCUE

An off-road SUV appears, kicking up dust from a dirt trail. It's the U.S. Border Patrol. The smugglers leave the horse as they run to hide. The blond horse, called a palomino, may be free of the smugglers, but not their heavy shipment. Exhausted, sick, and starving, the horse cannot survive for long.

Border patrol officers spot the palomino and approach him. They cut the bloody ropes and free him from his burden. Only

then do they see the extent of his injuries. A call goes out to Karen Pomroy of Equine Voices Rescue & Sanctuary in nearby Amado, Arizona. The group rehabilitates and cares for injured and unwanted horses, including those abandoned by smugglers.

FINDING KINDNESS

Up to a hundred horses are abandoned by drug smugglers along the border every year—many of the animals are found dead.

"The smugglers usually don't even feed these horses. They don't care about the animals at all," Pomroy says. She gathers some hay and drives to the holding pen where the palomino is being held, accompanied by filmmaker and horse lover Victory Tischler-Blue. "The horse is so thin and his back is so raw that I'm actually surprised we don't see his backbone," Pomroy says. Even more concerning are the infected gashes on the horse's legs and his obvious

limp. Several hundred pounds underweight, he hungrily devours the hay.

When the women gently approach the horse, he trots away. "He has a look of fear in his eyes," Pomroy says. "But I just know we can fix him." Tischler-Blue picks a name for the palomino: Sundance.

Pomroy drives Sundance to the sanctuary's ranch. When he steps off the trailer, the sanctuary's 48 other rescued horses gallop over to whinny hellos. Sundance replies and seems eager to make new horse friends. But he remains skittish around humans.

SPECIAL TREATMENT

The volunteers at Equine Voices hose Sundance down every day and give him antibiotics to help his wounds heal. He begins a special diet that includes beet pulp and rice bran, both good for putting weight on horses. Soon the swelling in the palomino's legs goes down and he straightens out his walk.

BRIGHT FUTURE

After five months, Sundance's once-wounded back is almost completely healed and he's gained 300 pounds. Tischler-Blue visits the ranch regularly and is astounded by Sundance's progress. "Now when people approach him he nickers, as if to say, 'Hey! Hi!' He's responding to gentleness and human kindness."

"He's big and he's sturdy. Once we do a little bit of training, he won't be a difficult horse to adopt out to a good home because he's really beautiful," Pomroy says. "He looks like a million bucks now. He's a totally different horse."

The only truly wild horse is the endangered Przewalski's horse. This breed was never domesticated.

There are about 400 different breeds of horses.

AFTER

Horses can nap standing up. But they must lie down to reach a deep sleep.

