

Pony rescued from under pick-up

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HOLDEN — This is the story of Andy the pony's second rescue.

To acquaint you with the first, Andy, a white Welsh pony, was living in a Boston metrowest suburb when he was rescued by Fred Parker Jr. and his stepson, Chris Shustak, of Bailey Road, in April 2010.

"We adopt animals that no one wants," Parker said.

The two men had gone to look at a Belgian draft horse named Linus, whose neighbors were unhappy having the large animal in a residential neighborhood, when they came across Andy. The big draft horse was in pretty bad shape with bleeding hooves, so they made plans to take him home. Andy was Linus' companion animal and so, inseparable as Damon and Pythias or Seabiscuit and Pumpkin, he came along, too.

That brought the Parker/Shustak stable up to four – there's also a miniature horse and a quarterhorse, along with two cows and a couple of newly acquired Pyrenees guard dogs.

Andy is 25-30 years old and blind in one eye, but he still has an appetite, and like most, looks forward to dinner. On the morning of Feb. 20, Parker guessed that Andy was hoping to make an early start, when the pony escaped his fencing and lost his footing on a frozen embankment. He slid down on his side to a driveway just a few feet away, ending up under Shustak's Ford 150 pick-up truck that was parked close to a garage.

The whole rear section of Andy's body jammed between a tire and the running board on the driver's side.

"The poor horse tried four or five times to get out. All we could think to do was call the fire department," Parker said.

Fire, police and ambulance responded immediately, but none of their equipment was suitable for removing a big truck from atop a small pony.

That's when a firefighter suggested a tow truck and police called Village Repair for assistance. When the wrecker rolled up the driveway, it was a sight to see, Shustak related.

"There was black smoke just pouring out of the back of the truck. It had a burnt out wheel bearing but Greg said he just had to get here," he said.

In fact, tow truck driver Greg Barthlemes owns two horses and he knew that a speedy rescue was essential. A horse on the ground and on its side poses danger; the weight that's forced onto its internal organs can cause fatal complications quickly.

Barthlemes was just heading out from his home in Rutland on a AAA call when he got the call about the pony. Since it came from police, he responded immediately.

"I got nervous when I heard it was an old horse. I was just glad I was already on my way to Holden," Barthlemes said.

When he arrived, the pony was muddied from its fall, trapped under the pick-up on a sheet of ice and shaking, while its owners were on the ground calming the animal.

Barthlemes came up with the winning strategy to hoist the truck off the pony, giving it enough room to scramble to its feet.

The wrecker he was driving was equipped with a boom and double winches. Barthlemes extended the boom out to the edge of the tailgate and ran a couple of J-winchers under the pick-up's rear axle. Chock blocks were set to prevent rolling. With the boom, Barthlemes was able to lift the truck three feet in the air. He then cut his steering wheel really sharp and backed up just a little, swinging the pick-up out of Andy's way and giving the pony room to stand.

"Thank God he was okay," Barthlemes said.

With some help from Shustak, Andy got up and limped away. A day later, he was perfectly fine, Parker said.

"He was stuck for about an hour. Any longer and he'd have died," Parker said.

In this case, the worst injuries were human ones. Parker got a gash on his hand and a scrape on his knee while Shustack ripped the fingernail off his little finger, "and it just keeps bleeding" Parker said. The truck also has a few hoof dings from the frightened pony's thrashing, but Andy's owners are more than happy.

Police, firefighters and ambulance crews were "absolutely outstanding," Shustak said.

"We were so impressed with the response. They were fantastic. They understood that it was a family member," he said.

And at Village Repair on Monday morning, Barthlemes had an unusual answer to the usual "what did you do this weekend" query.