



Images: Eveline Ludlow

Missy in action

A brave kitten bounces back from surgery for a dangerous condition. Sue Corfield reports.

Missy, a rescue cat from Padgate Cats Protection, was recently awarded ChesterGates Veterinary Specialists' highly acclaimed Pet of the Month title in recognition of her incredible bravery in surviving surgery for a rare and life-threatening condition known as laryngeal paralysis.

When owners, Charlotte Thornton and Andrew Bolton, from Warrington, Cheshire, took on rescue kittens, Missy and her sister, Honey, they were distraught to notice that Missy had started struggling to breathe and was too distressed to eat or play.

Missy finally secured a referral to ChesterGates Veterinary Specialists in Chester, who rapidly diagnosed her condition as laryngeal paralysis. This is a very rare condition in cats, particularly in kittens. The vets initially wanted to wait for Missy to grow stronger before operating, but as her condition was life-threatening, they had no option but to

operate immediately.

"We were warned that Missy might not survive the op as she was in a really bad way and was struggling for breath," recalls Charlotte.

ChesterGates' vet, Francois Saulnier, explains: "The opening to the trachea (wind pipe) is normally pulled open on two sides when breathing in, and relaxes when breathing out. In cats with laryngeal paralysis, the muscles that normally pull the airway open do not function properly. When an affected pet breathes in, the walls of the airway do not pull open — rather, they are sucked into the opening, or in severe cases sucked shut. Early in the condition, this creates increased noise when they breathe; later, it can completely obstruct their airway, and they can suffocate."

Charlotte says: "ChesterGates were miracle workers — as soon as Missy came around from the operation, she was eating and full of life and started playing again. I just couldn't believe the difference

in her, it was amazing.

"Thankfully, Cats Protection had provided some insurance cover for Missy and so we were covered for her op. She is fine now, although sadly, she has lost her ability to miaow."

"Laryngeal tie-back surgery is a relatively straightforward procedure in the hands of an experienced surgeon," adds Francois. "This procedure is typically performed in older, canine patients, and it is usually associated with an excellent outcome. The surgeon achieves a better opening of the windpipe by placing one or two sutures between some cartilages.

"THE OWNERS HAD TO MAKE A DIFFICULT DECISION WITH NO GUARANTEE OF SUCCESS."

"There were three major difficulties in treating Missy. The first was to keep such a young kitten, which was just one kilogram in bodyweight, under general anaesthetic. Most juvenile patients are exposed to a higher risk of



hypothermia; their airways are only small and their energy stores are limited.

"The second difficulty was the technical challenge. We were aiming our needles at a muscular process of one by one square millimetres, dissecting a larynx of three millimetres in diameter, and using some ophthalmologic suture material as thin as hair.

"The third difficulty was to provide the owners with the right information in order to make the right decision. Leaving aside the financial effort, the research

data on outcome in feline patients is already limited and the outcome in a juvenile patient is not available in the veterinary literature.

"The owners had to make a difficult decision with no guarantee of success. However, we had a successful outcome: Missy resumed a playful nature only a few minutes after surgery and when Missy came for her wound check ten days later, she acted like a normal cat and her owners were delighted with her recovery."

LARYNGEAL PARALYSIS

Vet Ellie Mardell, from ChesterGates Veterinary Specialists explains some of the facts about this rare condition.



"We do not know the cause of spontaneous laryngeal paralysis in cats," says Ellie. "I say spontaneous, because it can occur secondary to nerve damage in the neck, for example with thyroid surgery, but that is obviously different. Most cats will only have laryngeal paralysis, but a few will go on to develop multiple nerve problems. We assume that the cause is a degenerative condition affecting the laryngeal nerve (it is a long nerve). There is no breed predisposition as far as I know. It is usually seen in middle-aged or elderly cats.

"Clearly, Missy had a congenital form, which is likely to be related to malformation of either the nerves or the corresponding muscles. In older patients, it can be associated to hypothyroidism and other degenerative neuropathies.

"The disease is seen relatively commonly in dogs in referrals."

