



DOG PADDLE: Tarka loving life in the hydrotherapy pool which is helping her recovery dramatically after the road accident

Lab results? K9 + H2O

Hydrotherapy helps Tarka recover from vehicle injury

By David Green

TARKA the Labrador is swimming back to health after the being the victim of a "hit and run" driver.

The six-year-old, which loves water nearly as much as her famous otter namesake, was found lying in a roadside ditch by owner Rachel Smith, who had lost the dog while out for a walk on heathland.

Now the animal, which suffered a badly broken leg and a collapsed lung after being hit by a vehicle, is building up its muscles in a course of hydrotherapy at one of the

"She started off with a two-minute session and now swims for 15 minutes at a time against a current introduced into the pool", she added.

Tarka was born in Devon in the area once frequented by the famous otter and was bought as a puppy by Ms Smith, a veterinary surgeon who works for the Linden House practice in Diss.

"She disappeared while I was walking her on

'Whoever had hit her had just

However, 16 weeks after she began hydrotherapy at Hepworth, she is approaching the time when she can be allowed to run at full pelt once more.

Ms Watkins, who installed the heated, non-chlorinated hydrotherapy pool in a former pig building three years ago, said it had been used to get many dogs back to fitness after injury and to help with conditions such as arthritis.

"I saw my first hydrotherapy pool for dogs at Soham in Cambridgeshire a few years ago and fell in love with the idea", said Ms Watkins, who was trained as an equine

region's first complementary medicine centres for dogs

and other small animals at Meadow Farm, Hepworth, near Diss.

"Tarka had to be carried everywhere when she came to us at the end of April and her recovery has been remarkable.

She was only able to stand on three legs but now she is trotting on four", said the centre's owner, Rachel Watkins.

left her in a ditch'

the local golf course. Myself and three friends spent five hours looking for her but she was eventually found by my other dog, Finlay. She was lying in a ditch with a broken back leg and a collapsed lung. Whoever had hit her had just left her there", she said.

Tarka had a major operation conducted by a surgeon in Hitchin, Hertfordshire, and now she has a metal plate in her leg.

sports therapist and later worked in a small animals vet surgery.

While hydrotherapy pools for animals are now fairly common, centres providing a range of complementary techniques are not. At Hepworth, the centre also offers manipulation therapy and pet behaviour counselling. Peggy Sofley, who carries out the manipulation, said dogs and other small animals suffered from back, neck or muscular skeletal pain just as humans did.

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FEELING ROUGH: Above, a sorry looking Tarka in bandages after the crash. Right, an x-ray of her pinned hindquarters. Far right, Rachel Smith, left, with Taraka and Rachel Watkins at Meadow Farm.

