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B B C Worldwide

Vets in Practice

SERIES 3

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10 x 30 minutes

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BBC Worldwide

Vets in Practice

SERIES 3

Healing sick animals is a vocation

National Television Awards 1999
Most Popular Documentary

Documentaries

10 x 30 minutes

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Vets in Practice

SERIES 3

Introduction

Vets in Practice, a prime-time docusoap, first transmitted on BBC1 in 1997 and quickly became established as a firm favourite with viewers of all ages and turned Trude Mostue, Steve Leonard and their colleagues into household names. As the young vets do their best to treat sick and injured animals, this fly-on-the-wall series has millions of British viewers hanging off the edge of their seats with its warmth, honesty and sometimes heart-stopping moments.

Trude Mostue, Mike Sandiford, Steve Leonard (voted one of *Company* magazine's 50 most eligible bachelors) first appeared in the BBC1's hugely successful *Vets' School*, which followed their training. The series follows them and fellow trainees, now 18 months into their careers as practising vets.

The young vets take on dramatic, tear-jerking but quite often hilarious animal cases while also dealing with the ups and downs of their personal lives. Their loves, their hates and the inevitable stresses and strains that go with the job are all captured on camera.

Documentaries

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Production Credits

Narrator

Christopher Timothy

(All Creatures Great And Small)

Series Producer

Rachel Bell

Executive Producer

Grant Mansfield

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Episode Synopses

1. Norwegian vet Trude has decided to split from her journalist boyfriend, Hector Taylor, after their two-year relationship. "I decided to leave it for a bit and take a break. At the moment, it's not the right thing. You are always going to be a bit sentimental but maybe I need the space and to be on my own for a while. I need to sort out what I want to do," she explains. "I feel like I am starting to live properly now," she adds. Emma Milne and Joe Inglis, who have been together since vet school, have also made a momentous decision about their lives. It wasn't the well-planned romantic proposal in Paris that Joe had in mind but, he says, it all leads to the same end. "It was Christmas Eve - we had gone down the pub and had quite a lot to drink," admits Joe. "I always thought, when I eventually proposed, it would be in Paris... a bottle of Champagne and down on one knee." Events are also not going as planned at work when Joe faces one of the most difficult tasks he has ever undertaken. Gizmo, a Californian king snake, stops breathing while under anaesthetic and Joe has to give it mouth-to-mouth to save its life. He is not used to working with snakes and the resuscitation is a bit close for comfort. What has made it worse is that it is not "just a snake, but an angry snake".

2. Steve and Keith Leonard get together with their older brothers, Den and Tom, for a family reunion and a spot of rehearsal in their Irish band. The four brothers are all vets but Steve is the only one who has chosen to work with domestic pets rather than farm animals. "It's like being in a hospital looking out through barred windows, waiting for the next cup of coffee and looking at dogs' and cats' bottoms," says Tom, who is baffled by his younger brother's choice of career. But, in Lancaster, Steve enjoys the ups and downs of working with domestic pets. His bedside manner is tested when he has to explain to youngsters Eve and Jessica that he has put down Charlie the hamster. "It can be very difficult to tell small children you are going to take their pet away and kill it. You have to put it in terms they can understand," he explains. Steve now has his own shoulder to cry on at the end of a hard day, having been in a relationship with Zoe for five months. "I have never been a person for longevity in relationships. Two weeks is usually what I manage before I panic and run off." A year into his career, Keith is also enjoying his working life on farms in Wales. "I like cows - if they are handled right they are as friendly and affectionate as any pet. There are cows you can sit on and hug."

3. Equine specialist Samantha Robinson has a tricky liver biopsy to do on a little pony. Meanwhile, Joe Inglis and Emma Milne are arranging their wedding and it's make-over morning for Hannah Pollard. Hull-based Samantha, who has been riding since she was a child, says: "I do enjoy small animal work but horses are the reason why I came here." Her first biopsy is successful but it's not good news for the pony. In Southend, Hannah Pollard is treating herself and her pet dog, Hester, to a well-earned make-over. "It's a lot less effort with Hester because she's beautiful," says Hannah. Hester is dropped off at the poodle parlour to have her hair stripped while Hannah heads off to London to be pampered. It's Emma's day off, too, and she is doing a spot of window shopping. She knows exactly what she and Joe don't want to wear for their wedding which is going to be in a "really small register office in Northampton", but it's a problem choosing their outfits. She says: "I probably won't have a wedding dress because I am not into that sort of thing. Joe said to me, did he have to wear a suit? I said, yes, it would be nice. A suit would be appropriate."

Documentaries

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4. Newly-weds Alison and Craig Beck have an unusual domestic situation when their cat Flob falls ill and Trude tests her pulling power while celebrating her 30th birthday. Alison diagnoses a thyroid problem for her beloved pet cat and it is husband Craig who agrees to do the operation under her supervision. Alison admits, before she is banned from the surgery by Craig: "I'm being melodramatic and I like making a big deal. This is nerve-racking." Trude celebrates her 30th birthday with a day of outdoor pursuits with her sister, Leanne, who has come over to visit from Norway. They try their hands at quad biking before Trude's pulling power is tested with a spot of archery. "I have had lots of cards and presents from my Mum and family. It's a pity the rest of them cannot be here." She is very philosophical about the end of her 20s: "It's time to have fun and you just need some time to live. There are so many things to do. Life is very good at the moment."

5. Trude demonstrates that there is more to being a vet than just handling sick animals when she is presented with Gerbil, the sick gerbil, and his very upset young owner. Keith Leonard's roadside manner is tested by a real-life Babe – Rosie the pig, whose habit of taking a walk with the dogs left her future hanging in the balance; and his brother, Steve, tries to save the life of a stricken puppy. When tearful Owen Thompson shows Trude his injured Gerbil, with an infected tail, she is uncertain that he will recover. She tells him there is not much hope but she is determined to help Owen's pet. "I get really sentimental. It is a fairly hopeless task. I feel that I should try just for the little boy. I feel really bad because I made the kid cry, but what can you say? I'm not very good with kids. He was very brave." The future also looks bleak for six-month-old puppy Bruno, who has contracted the deadly parvo virus. Steve Leonard returns to his surgery after hours to check on the sick puppy who is badly dehydrated. He explains: "It can be very difficult to switch off at the end of the day, especially when you want to see something through. It's not a nine-to-five job by any means." It is Steve's job which has taken its toll on his love life. He has split up with his girlfriend, Zoe, after just five months. "With doing sport and work, there is not much time for anything else any more," says Steve. It's touch and go for Rosie the pig, who has been knocked down by the side of the road. Keith Leonard is on his way to play a St Patrick's night gig with his brothers when he is called to see the casualty. He explains the dilemma to her owner: "You have got to decide whether you have got nice bacon or a nice pig."

6. It's a time of change for the young vets, with newly-weds Alison and Craig Beck moving across the country and soon-to-be-wed Joe Inglis and Emma Milne buying their first house. But, before Alison can get home to do her packing for her move to Kings Lynn, in Norfolk, she has to see to Charlie, who has a serious injury to his leg. It is Charlie's third serious accident and his nine lives are gradually diminishing. "He's an accident-prone cat," explains Alison. "The first time I met him he fell out of a bedroom window." Another of her feline patients is at the end of her life. At 22, Ginger no longer has the quality of life her tearful owner would like, so she has brought her in to be put to sleep. "If she was left she would die in pain. Her last moments are going to be peaceful," says Alison. Emma and Joe have found their perfect home after deciding to settle in Cheltenham. It's an end-of-terrace Victorian house and, as an amateur inventor, Joe is particularly excited about the workshop in the cellar. "That's one of the nicest benches I have seen," he comments during the viewing. While they are waiting for the completion of their house sale, Emma celebrates her birthday with a rally-driving lesson, a present from Joe, while her fiance takes to the skies with a flying lesson.

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7. The life of a pet who brought her owners together is in Trude Mostue's hands and, in Hull, Sam Robinson and her colleagues are waiting for the surgery's pregnant grey mare to give birth. Trude discovers Tye, an eight-year-old German Shepherd, has a large tumour in his stomach, much to the shock of his owners, Jaqui and Mark Thompson, who thought he only had a stomach upset. Tye means a lot to Jaqui and Mark, who first got together five years ago when they started walking their dogs after work. Before she performs a very difficult operation, Trude has to ring Jaqui to ask for permission to put him to sleep on the operating table if the cancer is too far gone. Mark sums up their feelings: "Life has taken some difficult turns for both of us. We have had a dog that has seen us through it. To think they have a bit of a stomach bug, and to suddenly realise that we may not see them again, is traumatic." Pregnant mare Millie Bean's foaling history is a cause for concern. She lost her first foal during the birth so she is under 24-hour surveillance from practice owner John Levison and his girlfriend, Liz, who are camping out at the flat above the stable. Sam is convinced the mare is about to give birth but she is already three days' late.

8. Working as a locum in a Reading animal casualty department, Fiona Green meets Daisy, a Staffordshire bull terrier who has eaten rat poison. She has internal bleeding and the only thing that can save her now is a blood transfusion using blood donated from one of the practice pets. "She looks relatively bright at the moment," says Fiona, "but she could deteriorate any minute." Steve Leonard's patient, Fred the iguana, also faces an uncertain future in Lancaster. He appears to be suffering from a nutritional deficiency but Steve admits he knows little about iguanas. He seeks expert help and Fred is rushed to a surgery in Blackpool for emergency treatment. Steve is more certain about another of his reptilian patients, an anorexic tortoise called Linford. He mixes up an appetising combination of cucumber, banana and antibiotics to get him going. Life-and-death cases for his brother Keith, in Carmarthen, means a financial loss for a hard-pressed farmer. Keith is called out to a heifer in labour but soon realises that he cannot save the calf or the mother. He has to put her down. "It's always disappointing but it's a part of farming life," he says.

9. Emma and Joe are just days away from their wedding but still hard at work. A mechanical problem faces Emma whose patient is an arthritic retriever with immobile back legs. She tries to fit a trolley to his back to enable him to walk, but the results are not as good as she expected. And Albert, the boxer with a penchant for rubber balls, has to go under the knife in Craig Beck's surgery in Kings Lynn. Emma and Joe are determined to have a non-traditional wedding. Emma admits she would feel hypocritical if she married in a church, as she has strong anti-religious feelings. But Joe's wild stag night is very conventional – he ends up being stripped naked.

10. It's Emma and Joe's wedding day and many of their friends from vet school will be turning up to celebrate their marriage. They have chosen an unconventional wedding, which includes arriving at the reception by boat. For Trude Mostue in Bristol and Sam Robinson in Hull, however, it is just another working day. Trude sees Miss Pinky, a stricken hamster, for the second time. It's difficult for the Norwegian vet because she has treated the pet just days before and her seven-year-old owner was so grateful she wrote her a thank you letter. The hamster needs a hysterectomy which can be a tricky operation for a small rodent. Horse specialist Sam also has to perform an equally difficult operation but on a much larger scale. The horse has a high pitched whinny which indicates that it has a blockage in its throat. With valuable animals at risk, Sam is under pressure to perform.

Documentaries

10 x 30 minutes



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Ratings

Episode	UK Txn Date	Channel	Time On	Viewers	Audience Share
1	21.07.98	BBC1	20.00	8.4 million	40%
2	22.07.98	BBC1	20.00	7.7 million	36%
3	28.07.98	BBC1	20.00	8.9 million	42%
4	29.07.98	BBC1	20.00	7.9 million	37%
5	04.08.98	BBC1	20.00	9.8 million	41%
6	05.08.98	BBC1	20.00	7.9 million	37%
7	11.08.98	BBC1	20.00	8.1 million	40%
8	12.08.98	BBC1	20.00	5.8 million	28%
9	18.08.98	BBC1	20.00	8.1 million	43%
10	19.08.98	BBC1	20.00	7.2 million	35%

What The Papers Say

"...it's got most of my favourite things. Cats, dogs, horses and an array of highly trained, intelligent blondes." *The Times*

"The veracity, wit, and dramatic tension of this real-life veterinary series ... Producer Nick Shearman fully deserves the continuing success that his series is enjoying, because each programme so far has managed to be thoroughly entertaining without resorting to snide commentary or obvious fakery ... Here, one feels simultaneously on the side of the experts, the owners, and the animals ... I'm completely hooked, even though I'm not a committed animal lover." *Evening Standard*

"Personally I find the animal lovers in the fly-on-the-wall series more fascinating than their pets." *Mirror*

"Good-looking young people and cuddly animals are two of the most potent ingredients in any ratings cake, but of course even that is not enough: no factual series can get on the box now without elements from the *EastEnders* school of plot development ... the vets are providing the storylines as if to the manor born." *The Times*

Documentaries

10 x 30 minutes