

Brinsea TLC-5M

Carl Gorman BVSc MRCVS

FALKLAND VETERINARY SURGERY, 2 ESSEX STREET, NEWBURY. RG14 6QN

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It is well over a year since we tried out the Brinsea TLC-4M small animal intensive care unit (UK Vet Vol 8 No 5). Since that time, our two units have been in constant use. Wildlife, reptiles, birds, rabbits, guinea pigs, kittens, puppies – all have benefited from the easy-to-use incubators. They have been invaluable as recovery units post general anaesthetic for our exotic patients. Their portability has made them useful for transporting patients home for overnight care. They also seem to have stood up well to much cleaning and the inevitable knocks of a busy practice.



Fig. 1a: Some patients found the TLC-4M too cramped.



Fig. 1b: The new TLC-5M is much more comfortable.

Using them for this length of time has also allowed us to become familiar with the shortcomings of the original unit. Size was always an issue. The incubators were developed as brooders for poultry, and provide generous accommodation for this purpose. It is, however, difficult for us to leave cats or rabbits in the TLC-4M for any length of time (Fig. 1). They are quite cramped for parrots of African Grey size and up. Although useful for nebulising and maintaining a good temperature, by the time a perch has been installed, it is hard to find anywhere to put food and water.

We also find the temperature control very fiddly to use. A small fiddly knob, best turned with a tiny screwdriver, needs to be rotated quite a few times to adjust the temperature. There is no guide as to the heat setting that is being chosen, beyond the indicator light which flashes when the set temperature has been attained.

The excellent insulating on the units often means that it is hard to reduce the temperature to the desired level. Opening the sliding Perspex door to allow heat loss will also allow patient loss.

These are small niggles which have only slightly detracted from the value of the incubators, and they are looked upon as an integral part of our patient care. I was delighted, therefore, to be given the opportunity to try out the new, improved, larger, purpose built intensive care unit: the TLC-5M. What a raft of modification that extra digit brings. Brinsea have listened to the comments from vets on the TLC4 and come up with a piece of kit they feel will prove even more useful.

The first thing to strike the user is the increase in size. We can now house a queen and her kittens in comfort after a caesarean section (Fig. 2). Puppies and small dogs fit in neatly (Fig. 3). We could happily accommodate a large parrot for several days without compromising its comfort. In spite of its growth, the cage is still quite light, and nurses find it easy to move around the practice.



Fig. 2: Big enough for a whole litter of kittens.



Fig. 3: ... or puppies.

As well as the familiar sliding Perspex door, there is a wire mesh gate which sits inside the Perspex. This removable gate allows the Perspex to be slid around to only partially close off the unit, or even to be opened. Overheating is a thing of the past! An automatic thermal cut out which prevents heating above 45°C is fitted as standard. There is even an option to use a temperature alarm, and this can further be linked to a telephone dialler system, capable of calling up to five numbers in case of unwanted temperature fluctuations. Personally I find this unnecessary in the practice setting. The unit is small and convenient enough to travel with the duty vet.

The control panel is rather more sophisticated than on the TLC-4M, with a much more user friendly heat setting (Fig. 4). At the rear of the unit, there are separate entries for the oxygen supply and the nebuliser (Fig. 5).



Fig. 4: The new control panel.

Cleaning of the unit is still easy. Both the wire and Perspex are easily removed. There are two replaceable filters in the ceiling of the chamber.



Fig. 5: Separate oxygen and nebuliser ports.

Overall the TLC-5M appears to be a good improvement on the TLC-4M. It is user friendly, big enough to be suitable for a wide range of patients, yet very portable. The changes which have been made have all met with approval from nurses and vets in the practice. What next? Watch this spot for the large animal incubator.....

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