The Basics of Farriery as a Prelude to Therapeutic Farriery

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KEYWORDS

• Farriery • Hoof trimming • Therapeutic shoeing • Horseshoe types
• Horseshoe nails

KEY POINTS

- Domesticated horses need hoof care, because it is rare for the wear and growth of the hooves to be in perfect equilibrium.
- During the shoeing interval, the hoof grows downwards and forward in the direction of the horn tubules, losing some degree of angle.
- Few horses have perfect limb conformation. The shape of a hoof of a limb with conformation defects adapts in a predictable way to these defects.
- If, for therapeutic or performance reasons, the hoof-shoe combination is modified, there is not a lot of leeway in the trim of a particular foot, whereas the applied shoe type, placement, and adjustments provide endless possibilities.

INTRODUCTION

The terms, *farriery* and *farrier*, derive from the French, *ferrer* (to shoe), and include the root, *fer* (iron). The French term for farrier, however, is *maréchal ferrant*, wherein *maréchal* means officer (general), and *ferrant* means one who shoes. Equine veterinary text books from the Middle Ages often have marechaucie, marescallie, or mariescalla in their titles, both denoting the importance of farriery and the fact that the equine veterinarian and farrier often were one and the same and even of noble birth.[1] The technique of nailing an iron (steel) shoe onto a hoof is currently the most economic form of hoof protection as far as material costs go, because the metal is cheap. In the Gallo-Roman period and in the Middle Ages, however, mining ore and forging iron into horseshoes were a luxury, only justifiable with the need to efficiently protect the feet of valuable horses, especially the heavy warhorse.[2] The points of this historical etymological recall are that (1) farriery had enormous importance at the time when horses were immensely valuable (a warhorse could cost as much as a farm) and (2) shoeing was and is sometimes the only way to allow a horse to function in the service of humans.

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THE TRIM

Domesticated horses need hoof care, because it is rare for the wear and growth of the hooves to be in perfect equilibrium. When the quality of the hooves (size in relationship to body mass, sole depth, wall thickness, quality of intertubular horn, and so forth) is good, the footing favorable, and the workload not excessive, horses can, and should, generally be left barefoot. An exception is poor conformation; for example, an important angular limb deviation may cause excessive, asymmetric wear and growth across an otherwise strong hoof and certain pathologies. An example of this is a horse affected with bone spavin that may wear the outside of its hind hooves excessively.

The Barefoot Trim

Trimming the feet of a horse that does not need shoes is not different from trimming for shoeing, except that the horny sole should be left intact and the hooves, specifically the walls, should be left slightly longer (3–5 mm) and the outside edges rounded off at a radius of at least half the wall thickness (**Fig. 1**). Rounding the outside edge of the toe slightly more may be indicated for those horses that live on dry, hard (that is, impenetrable) ground. If a horse lives on wet, deep ground, it might be useful to leave slightly more toe wall to keep it from sinking in too much.

Trimming the Foot for Shoes

During the shoeing interval, the hoof grows downwards and forward in the direction of the horn tubules, losing some degree of angle relative to the ground, as seen from the side, **Fig. 2**A because the heels, with their lateromedial movement on the rigid shoe surface, continue to wear (**Fig. 2**B).[3] It is, therefore, important to keep shoeing intervals short (5–6 weeks, depending on growth rate) and regular.[4] The basic trim should commence by identifying the true apex of the frog and removing the adjacent defoliating sole until the compact nonexfoliating sole horn is reached because this identifies the appropriate sole depth. This is followed by removing the exfoliated sole from the remainder of the ground surface of the foot, including the sole between the bars and the heels (seat of corn), all the way to the white line (**Fig. 3**). The rest of the frog is then trimmed only enough to guard the triangular shape with its small central cleft, which forms the ideal breaking, shock-absorbing, and expansion organ, as seen in transverse section (**Fig. 4**). A light trim of the lateral and medial body of the frog is also

Fig. 1. Barefoot trim; note the rounded off distal wall border. (*Courtesy of* Hans H. Castelijns, DVM, CF, Cortona, Italy.)

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