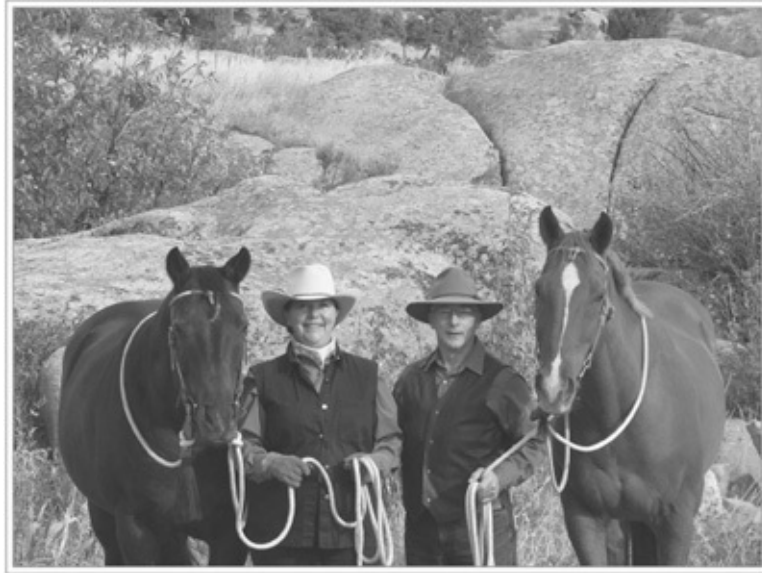


HORSE HOOF CARE



RANDY DUNN

HORSE HOOF CARE

Cherry Hill and Richard Klimesh

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NOTES FROM THE AUTHORS

WHEN WE THINK OF A HORSE, we think of powerful muscles and athletic motion with mane and tail flowing. We picture a beautiful head and an expressive eye showing a generous, cooperative nature. We see behavior that demonstrates both curiosity and honesty. There is one trait we often take for granted, however: healthy, sound hooves. Without them, the noble horse is often transformed into an uncomfortable, tentative, grouchy, sullen, and tuned-out beast. No foot, no horse.

As a horse-show judge and riding instructor for many years, I have seen many fat and shiny overgroomed horses carrying thousands of dollars' worth of tack and rider attire, dragging themselves around the ring with the most neglected hooves imaginable. Right there in the show arena or lesson ring, I've seen too many hooves with extremely long toes and low heels, quarters that have overgrown the shoes, and cracks galore. I've heard loose shoes rattling; seen mincing, wincing travel; and pulled many a lame horse out of a class, hoping the owner or rider would then take heed of the horse's hoof-care needs.

Sadly, hoof care and horseshoeing are two topics that many horse owners seem to know very little about. Only when a horse develops a debilitating lameness do hooves suddenly become a topic of interest. Like many aspects of horse care, however, good management prevents many hoof problems; an ounce of prevention is truly worth a pound of cure.

Once you learn a few basic hoof-care skills and get in the habit of cleaning hooves, feeding for hoof quality, and scheduling regular farrier care, your horse will benefit greatly. And in the long run, it will save you time and money.

Your horse and I thank you for picking up this book. You're obviously one of those horse owners who cares about your horse's comfort and soundness or you wouldn't have read this far, so I applaud your dedication! I hope that the hoof-care information Richard and I share with you in this book will help you to help your horse be the best he can be — healthy, sound, and full of life.

Cherry Hill

THIRTY YEARS AGO, when I was an eager farrier-science grad beginning my career, the choice of resources for farriers was limited, to say the least. Good-quality horseshoes were hard to find, and many farriers forged the shoes they used. Horseshoe nails were thick and tended to split the hoof. Hoof-repair materials consisted mainly of auto body filler and fiber-glass, which worked well on cars and boats but not very well on hooves. Hoof boots were a novelty then, and they were cumbersome to apply and difficult to keep on. Clinics and workshops were few and far between, and there were no online forums because, of course, there was no Internet.

Over the years, several varieties of well-designed keg shoes became available. Coupled with the slimmer nails that I had been hoping for, these improved shoes made my job more efficient and less damaging to hooves. Hoof sealers were developed that actually improved hoof quality, and new hoof repair materials not only stuck to the hoof but also mimicked the characteristics of a hoof, which allowed a farrier to trim and nail into repaired areas as the hoof grew. Today, we have glue-on shoes that often stay affixed better than nailed shoes and that are especially helpful with very young or lame horses. A wide variety of modern high-quality hoof boots now enable many horses to be ridden in comfort yet be barefoot during their off time.

Ongoing research has disproved established beliefs about hoof care and has led to new, successful treatments for what were once thought to be commonly fatal hoof diseases, specifically laminitis and navicular syndrome. The World Wide Web increases farrier and horse-owner access to much of this research and lets them exchange opinions and advice.

What hasn't changed is the fact that a domestic horse still relies totally on his owner for all the things necessary for growing and maintaining strong healthy hooves. The key ingredients for great hooves are simple, and they begin with commitment and regular care. I hope this book will give you incentive to design an effective hoof-care plan that will enable you and your equine partner to enjoy many happy years together.

Richard Klimsch



HOOF KNOWLEDGE

Why do some horses move boldly and confidently while others move meekly and cautiously? Why do some horses develop and maintain solid, healthy hooves while others' hooves become small and contracted? What makes some hooves tough and durable and others brittle and pithy?

The quality and health of a hoof depend on genetics and environment. A horse inherits the potential for good or poor hooves from his parents. Environmental factors that influence hoof health include nutrition, sanitation, moisture, and exercise. As director of your horse's hoof health management program, a good place to start is with a basic knowledge of how the foot works.

FOOT OR HOOF?

Although the terms "hoof" and "foot" are used interchangeably in conversation, "hoof" more specifically refers to the tough, horny external material making up the hoof wall, sole, and frog. "Foot" refers to the hoof and all of its internal parts including bones, tendons, ligaments, nerves, and blood vessels.



HOOF PARTS AND FUNCTION

Knowing the names of basic foot parts will allow you to communicate more effectively with your farrier and veterinarian.

The Bottom of a Hoof

The bottom of the hoof is divided into three general sections: the toe, the quarters, and the heels. The parts of the hoof that you can see — the hoof wall, frog, and sole — are all insensitive, much like your fingernails.

Sensitive hoof tissues contain blood vessels and nerves. When sensitive tissues are injured, they will bleed and cause the horse pain.

Insensitive hoof tissues do not contain blood vessels or nerves. They can withstand wear and tear, trimming, rasping, and nailing without bleeding or causing the horse pain.

Inside a Hoof

The white line is an important junction: it indicates where the sole meets the hoof wall. It is also the place where insensitive laminae attached to the hoof wall connect with sensitive laminae attached to the coffin bone.

The bars are portions of the hoof wall that angle forward from the buttress at the heels along each side of the frog.

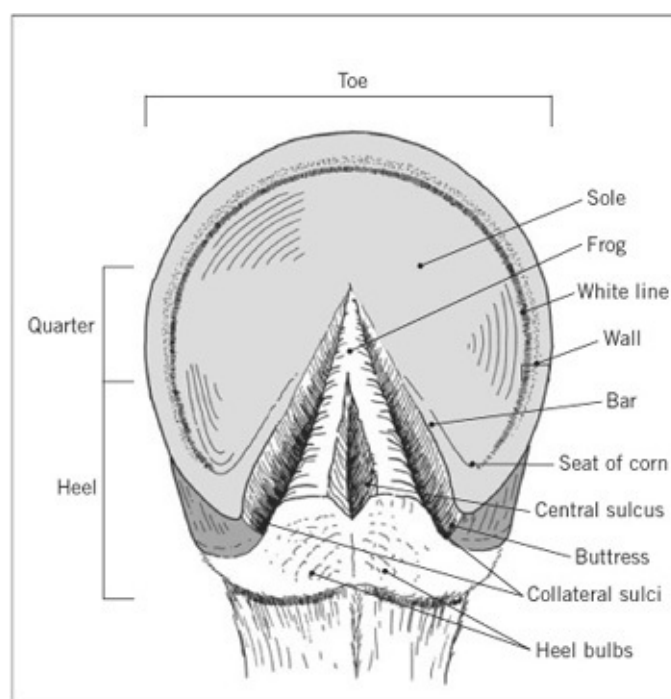
The sole is the hard material covering most of the bottom of the hoof. A well-conformed sole is cupped; this concave shape keeps it from touching hard flat ground and allows the sole to descend as the foot bears weight.

The frog is a rubberlike V-shaped cushion located between the heels. It provides traction with the ground and protects the sensitive inner structures of the hoof while allowing the hoof capsule to expand and contract as the hoof bears weight.

Deep grooves along each side of the frog, called collateral clefts or sulci, separate the frog from the bars and sole.

The central cleft, or central sulcus, marks the centerline of the frog.

The heel bulbs are a rounded area at the back of the hoof where the frog merges with the skin of the foot.



A cross-section of the hoof reveals:

The coronary band (coronet) is a soft ridge around the top of the hoof that produces hoof growth. The hoof wall grows from the coronary band much as your fingernail grows from your cuticle.

The periople and stratum tectorum make up a thin outer covering that protects the hoof. It is thickest just below the coronary band.

The bulk of the hoof wall, the hoof horn, is made up of tightly packed parallel bundles of horn tubules.

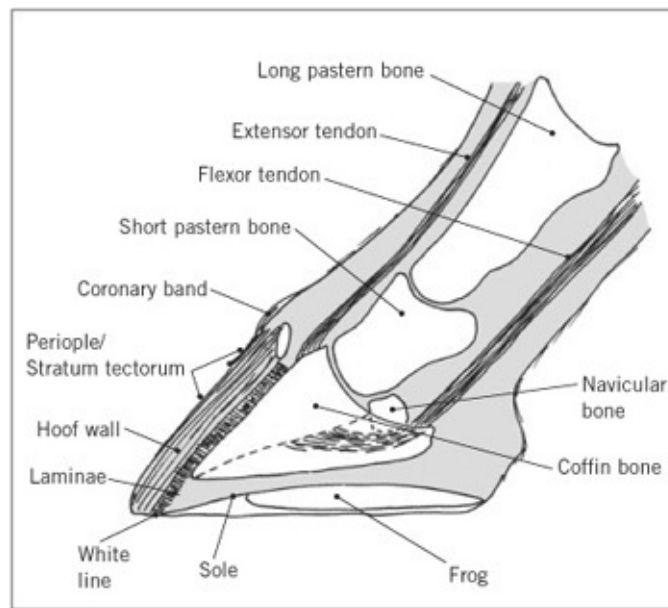
The lowest bone in the hoof is shaped like the hoof and has many names: coffin bone, pedal bone, distal phalanx, third phalanx, PIII, and P3.

The navicular bone is located behind the coffin bone.

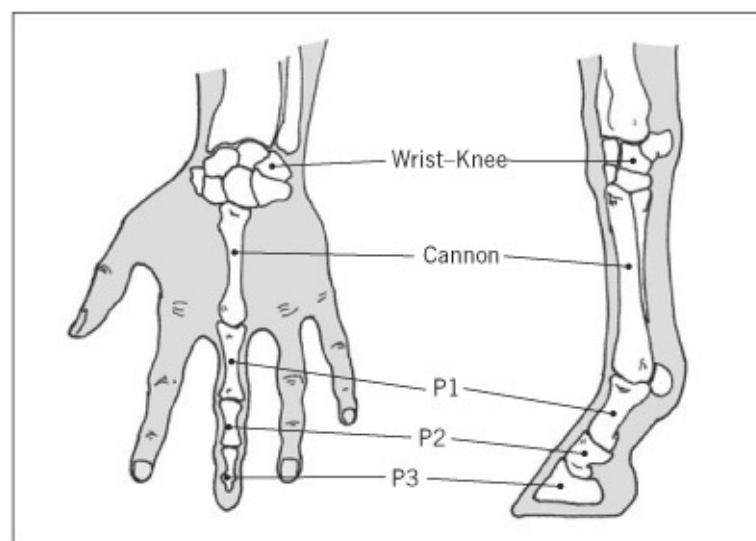
Leaves of insensitive laminae on the inside of the hoof wall interlock with sensitive laminae on the surface of the coffin bone. The coffin bone is suspended more by the laminae above it than supported from below by the sole and the frog.

A flexor tendon runs down the back of the leg between the sesamoid bones and over the navicular bone and attaches to the bottom of the coffin bone. It lifts the foot and hinges it backward.

An extensor tendon runs down the front of the leg and attaches to the top of the coffin bone. It hinges the foot forward to position the hoof for landing.



HOOFOLOGY



Human Hand and Horse Foot Compared

The **coffin bone (P3)** corresponds to the end bone in your finger.

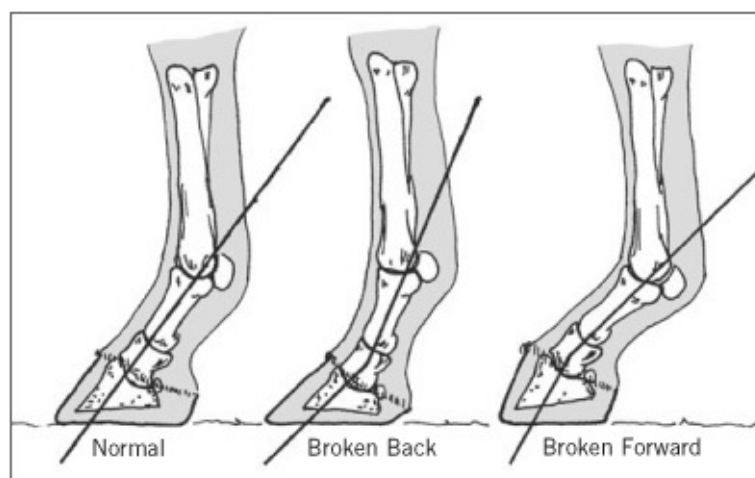
The **short pastern bone** (also called the **second phalanx** or **P2**) forms a joint with the coffin bone

and the navicular bone. It corresponds to the middle bone in your finger.

The **long pastern bone** (also called the **first phalanx** or **P1**) forms a joint with the short pastern bone at the pastern, just above the coronet. The long pastern bone corresponds to the longest bone in your finger.

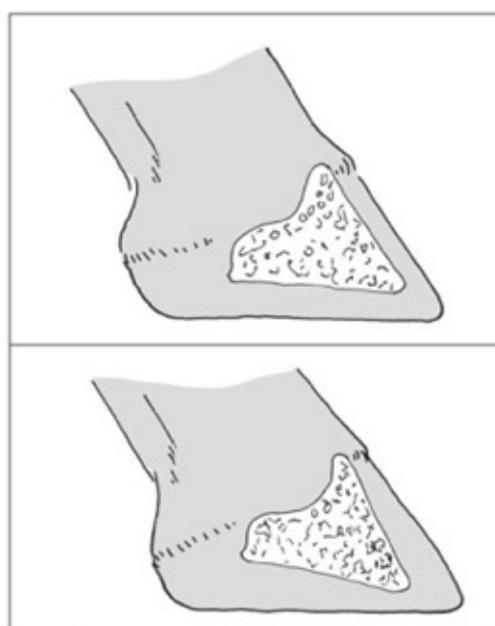
The **cannon bone** corresponds to the long central bone in your hand.

The horse's **knee** corresponds to your wrist, his **hock** to your ankle.



Hoof and Pastern Angle

Hoof angle is the angle between the front surface of the hoof and the ground when the horse is standing on a flat surface. When a hoof is in balance, an imaginary line through the center of the long pastern bone will be parallel to the front of the coffin bone. In a normal hoof, this line will also be parallel to the front of the hoof wall. Normal hoof angles range from 52 to 60 degrees. Hoof-angle imbalance can lead to all sorts of problems, including permanent lameness. A hoof angle is said to be “broken back” when the toe is too long and the heels are too low. This is the most common and most serious hoof imbalance. A hoof angle is “broken forward” when the heels are too high and the toe is too short.



Coffin Bone Angle

In a healthy, balanced foot, the front of the coffin bone is parallel to the front of the hoof wall, while the bottom of the coffin bone angles up at the back 2 to 3 degrees from the horizontal plane. Because

we can't see the coffin bone, we rely on hoof angle, measured by a hoof protractor or by an experienced eye, to align the coffin bone.

On the other hand, when a hoof wall has a dish, bulge, or other distortion or a separation of the laminae, the hoof angle will not match the angle of the hidden coffin bone. The only way to positively determine coffin bone angle, and to assure proper balance, is to take an x-ray of the foot.

HOOF KNOWLEDGE 3

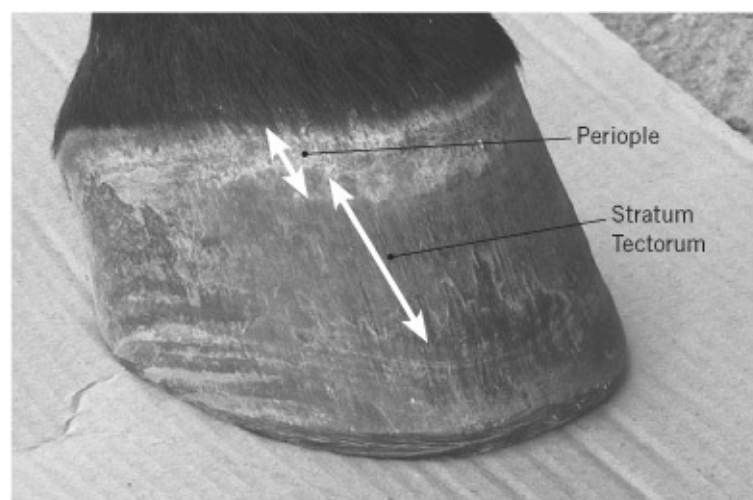
HOOF GROWTH AND SHAPE



Hoof Growth Rate

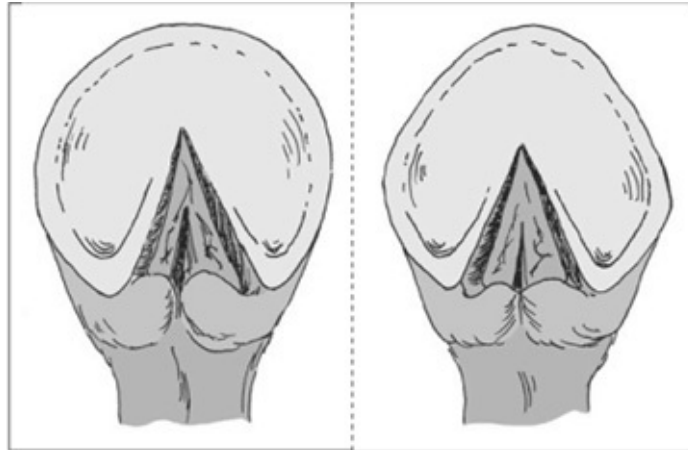
Depending on a horse's genetics, diet, exercise, the environment in which he lives, and the season, a hoof can grow immeasurably, or up to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (1.3 cm) per month, about twice as much as your fingernail. The average growth rate is $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (0.6 cm) per month. A healthy hoof on a riding horse is approximately $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches to $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches (8.3–8.9 cm) long at the toe. It can take more than a year for a horse to grow a completely new hoof.

Hoof growth slows during the winter months and increases in the spring and summer. Regular exercise increases blood flow in a horse's feet and makes hooves grow faster. Increased pressure on a portion of the hoof will make that part grow more slowly; that's why a horse with low, overloaded heels will have slower growth at the heels.



Periople and Stratum Tectorum

The periople is a narrow strip below the coronary band that is like your cuticle. It produces a waxy protective coating that ideally migrates down the hoof and forms a protective layer (the stratum tectorum) that helps maintain moisture balance in the hoof. You can see the stratum tectorum on this hoof as a jagged edge that has migrated two-thirds of the way down the hoof. It often wears away from the lower portion of the hoof.



Front Hoof Shape

The front hooves normally carry 65 percent of the horse's (and rider's) weight when at rest and, viewed from the bottom, generally tend to be round in shape. Just like human feet, however, horse feet vary widely in size and shape.

Hind Hoof Shape

Hind hooves are more pointed at the front than fore hooves and are the main source of propulsion for the horse. At rest, the hinds normally carry 35 percent of a horse's weight, but when ridden, a horse can be trained to carry more weight rear-ward to have a lighter and more agile front end.

4 HOOF KNOWLEDGE

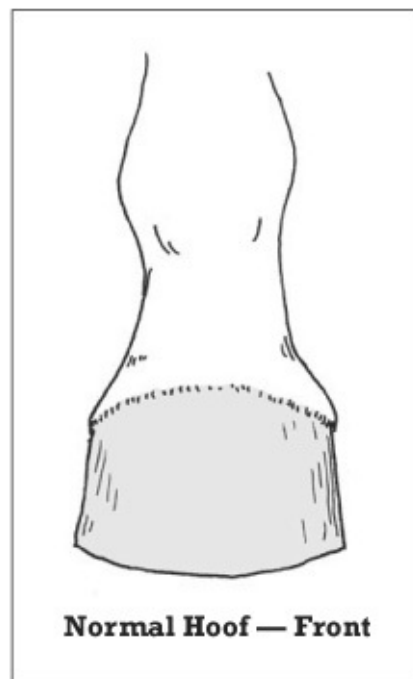
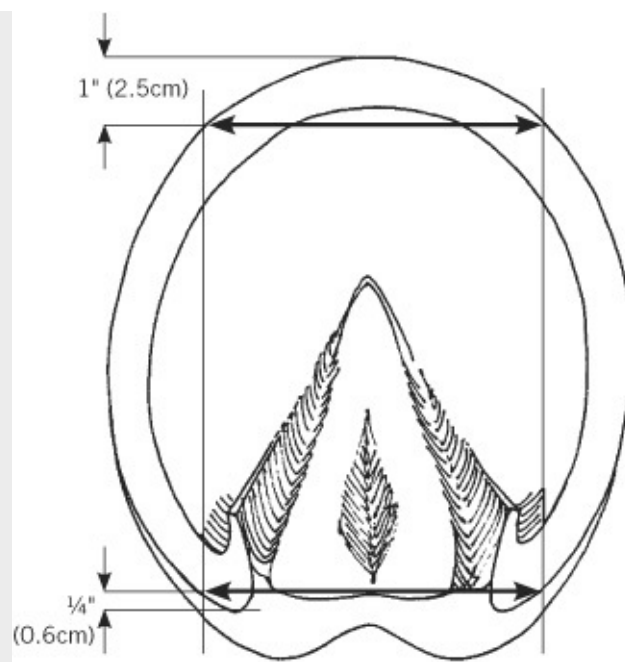
CONTRACTED HEELS

A normal healthy hoof should be relatively wide at the heels to transfer concussion and support the horse's weight. If a hoof is imbalanced because of a long toe, or if the hoof is not bearing weight because of lameness, the heels can contract and bind up the foot, resulting in pain to the horse.

You can check for contracted heels using this method of measurement:

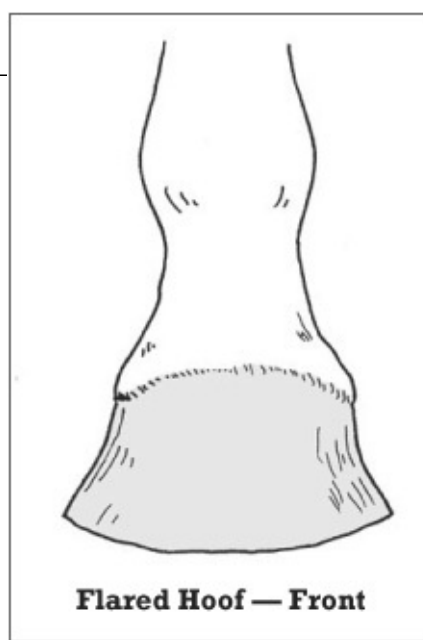
1. Measure the width across the heels $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (0.6 cm) in front of the rearmost point of the buttresses.
2. Then measure the width across the toe 1 inch (2.5 cm) back from the front of the hoof.
3. Compare the measurements. If the heel measurement is less than the toe measurement, the heels are contracted.

If a hoof fits this definition of contracted heels but is balanced due to other criteria, and the animal is sound, there is likely no cause for concern.



A Hoof Is Like a Cone

A horse's hoof has evolved to be cone shaped: wider at the bottom than at the coronet, with a hoof wall that is straight. In this case straight does not mean vertical, it means a true line from the coronar band to the ground, without dips or bulges.



Flared Hoof

A hoof wall that is not true but that curves and flares outward at the bottom is much weaker than a straight wall. A flare at the front of a hoof is called a dish. Flares and dishes can lead to many hoof problems, including cracks, broken walls, seedy toe, and lost shoes. Once you know what you are looking for, it is easy to tell if a hoof wall is true or flared.

HOOF CARE HOKUM

Old notions about hoof care are easily passed along as facts because few people question them. Repetition keeps ideas alive from one generation to another, whether they are based on research or anecdote, and whether they are true or false.

Horseshoeing has an unhealthy share of misconceptions that we call false tales. Many of these false tales negatively affect a horse's hooves, limbs, and performance, and we feel they should be stopped dead in their tracks!

False Tales

Each of the following false tales is followed by the facts as we know them.

FALSE TALE: *It's good to make a horse stand in water or mud in order to keep his hooves soft.*

FACT: Excess moisture softens and weakens the hoof and makes it more susceptible to bruising, excessive wear, deterioration, and infection. Forcing a horse to stand in mud is rarely a good idea.

FALSE TALE: *Hooves should be trimmed to the ideal angle of 45 degrees.*

FACT: Do you want to hear your farrier laugh? Just ask him when he last saw a 45-degree hoof on a sound horse. Although some books and folklore have touted 45 degrees as the ideal, the angles of normal, healthy hooves are closer to 55 degrees.

FALSE TALE: *A long toe lengthens a horse's stride and makes him softer to ride.*

FACT: In the past, racehorses, hunters, Western pleasure horses, and even reining horses have been shod with long toes, supposedly to gain a performance advantage. Research has proven that long toes do not increase a horse's stride. What they do increase is the likelihood of navicular problems, tendon injuries, and other problems.

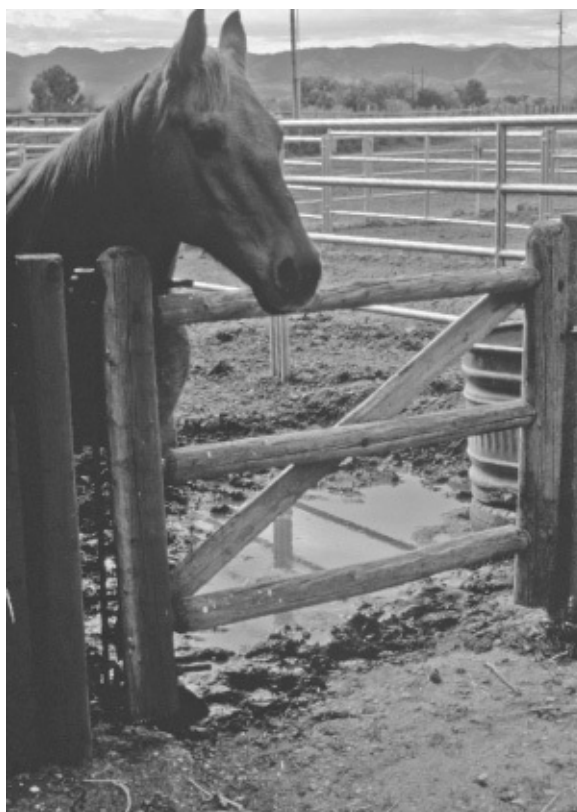
FALSE TALE: A hoof with cracks is too dry.

FACT: In most cases, hoof cracks indicate just the opposite: the hoof has been too wet!

FALSE TALE: Hoof dressing adds nutrients to the hoof wall, thereby improving hoof quality.

FACT: The hoof grows down from the coronet at the top, much as your fingernail grows from the cuticle. The outer hoof wall that you see is essentially dead tissue and cannot utilize any nutrients from hoof dressing. For good-quality hooves, it's more important to see that hoof moisture balance is maintained through exercise and hoof sealers.

FALSE TALE: Black hooves are better than white hooves. **FACT:** Although many horse owners believe that black hooves are better, research has shown there is no difference in hardness, toughness, or brittleness between white and black hooves.



Keep your horse out of the mud and muck.

FALSE TALE: The frog must touch the ground in order for the blood to circulate in the hoof properly.

FACT: The frog has been called an “extra heart” or “blood pump,” but it does not have to touch the ground for the hoof to function properly. In fact, a horseshoe typically prevents the frog from coming in contact with the ground, yet many horses that have been shod for decades have sound, healthy feet.

FALSE TALE: Horses that aren't ridden frequently don't need to be trimmed or shod as often as horses that are.

FACT: Whether a horse is ridden or not, his hooves continue to grow, and that is what dictates the need for trimming and reshoeing.

FALSE TALE: Hooves should be trimmed so that they point straight ahead.

FACT: Like people, horses come in all shapes, sizes, and body styles. If a horse's legs are such that his hooves point in (pigeon-toed) or point out (splay-footed), it is generally not a good idea to force them

to “look pretty” or to try to fool horse-show judges. In fact, trying to straighten crooked feet and legs can make a sound horse lame. A horse with front feet that toe in will often “paddle” or “wing out” to some extent when he travels; that is, his feet will swing in an arc away from his body and then come back under him to land. This may look comical but seldom causes problems.

It is normal for a horse’s hind feet to toe out to some degree. This aids in his natural movement and helps him avoid hitting himself when all legs are in motion. But a horse that toes out on the fronts can have a tendency to swing his feet inward as he travels and hit his opposite leg, sometimes causing injury. Corrective trimming and shoeing can alter movement to avoid interference without compromising soundness.



Toes In

It’s generally not a good idea to try to force toed-in hooves to be what they are not.



Toes Out

Some toed-out movement is normal, but you and your farrier should evaluate the horse’s conformation to decide if corrective treatment is needed.

FALSE TALE: *All horses should be allowed to go barefoot for part of the year.*

FACT: A healthy hoof that is properly shod does not need to go barefoot. Routinely pulling shoes for the winter can be very harmful to some hooves that require shoes for protection and support. These hooves can be broken and damaged in minutes, and it can take several shoeing periods to restore them to their previous condition. Given proper management, some hooves can maintain soundness without shoes, but they still require regular trimming.

FALSE TALE: *Mud will suck a horseshoe right off a hoof.* **FACT:** This is highly improbable. If you have ever tried to remove a properly applied shoe without first opening the clinches, you know the tremendous amount of force that mud would have to exert to suck off a shoe.

FALSE TALE: *The best shoeing job is the one that stays on the longest.*

FACT: In fact, the best shoeing job may be the one that comes off easily! Shoes that are fit very close and nailed too securely to the foot can compromise the long-term health of the hoof.

FALSE TALE: *Shoeing is a necessary evil.*

FACT: This one exasperates a conscientious farrier every time he reads or hears it because the word “evil” implies bad intent. Good shoeing can be one of the kindest gifts you offer your horse. Not only will it not damage his feet, but it could also make him more comfortable and increase his useful life.

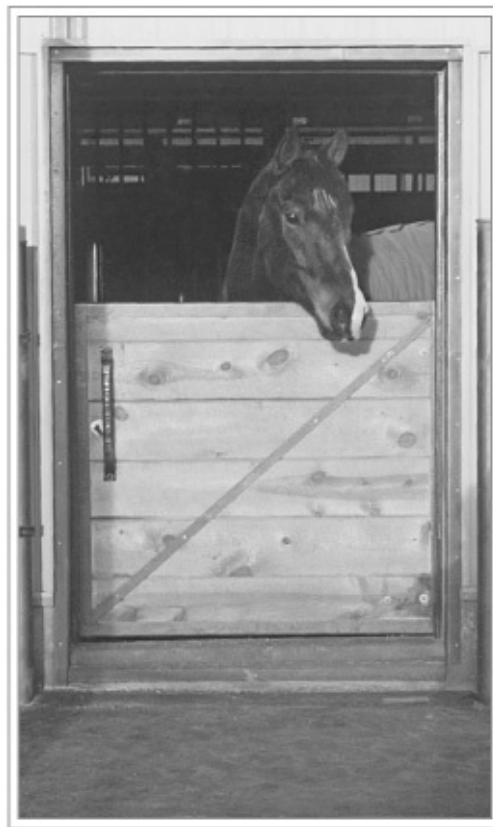


PROFESSIONAL HELPERS

Your horse depends on you to provide food, shelter, exercise, and grooming. You can handle most of those things with little or no help from others. But when it comes to health care and hoof care, it's best if you have reliable professionals on hand to offer guidance and expertise.

“No hoof, no horse” is a saying that is as old as the domestic horse. It used to be that a horse who became lame found that his days were soon over; he was sold for slaughter. But since nearly all slaughter plants in the United States have closed, and because it is very expensive to have a horse put down and buried or cremated, lame horses frequently are sold to someone else to deal with or are turned out to pasture. Often these horses suffer until they die.

Today, a deeper understanding of hoof ailments along with innovative products and technology make it possible to detect and treat minor problems before they cause debilitating lameness. Farriers and veterinarians help many horses with serious diseases, such as navicular syndrome and laminitis, enjoy long comfortable lives.



WHY YOU NEED A FARRIER

You need a good professional farrier because an untrained person can easily make your horse lame with incorrect trimming or shoeing. You might not think you need to pay much attention to your horse's feet as long as he appears sound and is not limping around his pen. The fact is that horses are very adaptable and can often tolerate poor hoof care for many months or even years without obvious signs of lameness. Unfortunately, by the time the first indications of a problem appear, the horse may

be irreparably damaged. A farrier is trained to recognize small problems and prevent them from turning into big problems.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD FARRIER?

Storytelling is not a prerequisite to being a good horseshoer, but being able to accurately explain hoof-care principles to horse owners is important. You should be able to ask your farrier what thrush is and how best to deal with it and get a thorough, intelligent, and accurate answer. Understandably, he can't teach you everything he has learned, but he should be able to give you a succinct answer to any hoof-care question and then recommend books, articles, or Web sites that further discuss the topics that concern or interest you.

Just as there are all levels of horsemen, there are all levels of practicing horseshoers. You will meet people with knowledge that ranges from the very basic skills of self-taught individuals to that of thoroughly educated, high-tech farriers. Horses with abnormal hooves and those with specific performance requirements need the experience and skill of a top-notch farrier. When an inexperienced horseshoer is faced with quarter cracks, underrun heels, laminitis, or navicular syndrome, he may not know what to do. When this happens, his efforts to solve the problem may make the situation worse. A good farrier is open-minded and motivated to seek out advice when faced with an issue he cannot resolve.

The greater the performance demands are on a horse, the more precise his shoeing must be. A backyard pleasure horse with normal hooves may get along fine with shoes put on by a farrier with very basic (but acceptable) skills. However, when that horse is sliding in the reining pen, turning barrels, negotiating a jumper course, or competing on an endurance ride, his shoeing requirements are more specialized.

There are many ways to successfully trim and shoe a horse. Be wary of a shoer or trimmer that promotes one particular method, disregarding all others. The most highly respected and sought-after shoers approach each horse as an individual animal with unique needs. They may be familiar with many methods but are bound by none.

You tend to get what you pay for in farrier service, as you would when buying a saddle or taking a riding lesson. Today, the cost of standard shoeing (four keg shoes) across the United States can range from \$45 to \$180, a trimming from \$25 to \$60. Prices vary regionally, and within a region the variation in prices will be based on a farrier's level of experience, education, skill, demand, and location.

Richard says...

SKILLS MATTER MOST

A farrier's gender is not important — some fine farriers are men, and others are women. While there is no denying that shoeing horses is hard work, strength takes a back seat to talent, dedication, and skill. We use the pronoun "he" in this book when referring to farriers just as we use "he" when referring to a horse. "He" includes all men and women, stallions, mares, and geldings.



Valuable Time

A farrier's job description does not include hiking across the pasture to gather up your horse. Like your dentist, your doctor, or your veterinarian, your farrier's time is valuable, and many people rely on his services every day. Have your horse ready when the farrier arrives, and he'll have more time to devote to the care of your horse's feet.

Characteristics of the Ideal Farrier

The best farrier is a true craftsman, one who has a genuine interest in the well-being of horses and pride in his work. He takes the time to polish his skills and looks upon each hoof that he shoes as one that will bear his trademark and demonstrate the quality of his work.

He is a good manager of time and dependable about keeping appointments. A farrier who is routinely late or who cancels appointments causes inconvenience and frustration for horse owners and irregular care for the horses. A farrier must be careful not to pack his day so full that he is in a hurry to keep on schedule, because then he will not do his best work. If the entire week is made up of one frantic hour after another, there is no time to respond to emergencies or replace lost shoes.

He is a good horseman. He understands and is comfortable using standard horse handling methods. Although it is important to stay flexible regarding specific practices at various barns, a good farrier will not consent to work in unsafe conditions or on an untrained horse. A good horseman knows when to say *no*.

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