

Current practice advocated by many trimmers is to leave the bar alone, even though none of them would fail to address the health of the wall, toe, or heels by judicious trimming. We routinely maintain good wall connection, clean frogs, shorten heels, and create a mustang roll at the toe in an effort to maintain health in these structures, which are compromised by a domestic lifestyle that too often requires horses to stand in their own feces and urine for long periods of time. The hard keratin tubules and inter-tubular horn of the bar require no less care. If manure, urine, soft stall bedding, and dirt tightly pack up against the bar and frog padding, both bar and frog are weakened, allowing plugs of ammonia rich, fungus laden, and diseased material to seep deep into the collateral groove, eventually sending disease into the live frog.

Without proper ventilation and sufficient movement, hoof damage and disease will rob the natural strength of the bar and protective callus-ing of the live frog. Once it is weakened by disease, the bar becomes thin and flexible, bending under the stress of weight bearing and creating bar flare. This damages sole tissue and decreases the confidence and comfort of the horse during loading and weight bearing in the heel region. Navicular syndrome can result from this loss of strength in the heel as fungus and bacteria permeate the area.

Adding to this destructive environment, the horse is often deprived of other conditions required for hoof health: movement, firm ground, and rocky terrain. The free-ranging life-style on concussive ground combats disease by providing maximum hoof mechanics, which help dry the hoof by excising dirt plugs, allowing manure to escape the hold of too deep col-lateral grooves.

It is trimming that compensates the hoof for the loss of movement that comes with domestica-tion, keeping the walls, heels, toes within the bounds that would otherwise be dictated by a wild environment. The strength and health of the bar, so essential to the hoof's overall function, heel comfort, capsule strength and wear is no less important. It can be achieved in exactly the same way, by informed trimming. This article, the first in a series, has attempted to define both what bars are and what they do. Future articles in the series will help trimmers recognize and know what to do when bars grow to excess and begin to interfere in the horse's movement. ●

About the author: Cheryl Henderson is the co-founder of the Oregon School of Natural Hoof Care, where continuing studies support and rein-force this information. The research is providing fascinating new insights into the mysteries of the equine hoof—its form, function and recovery to a healthy state in a domestic setting for the aver-age horse owner in the twenty-first century. Visit her website at: www.abchoofcare.com

The Speed of Shoe Contraction!

All photos courtesy Ute Mieth



Marshal-BEFORE in shoes: May 2008
Before the initial shoe removal.



Marshal-AFTER barefoot: September 2009
The hoof has decontracted after over one year without shoes.



Marshal-AFTER in shoes: January 2010
Only 2 months after shoes were put back on. Reapplication of shoes quickly contracted and distorted the entire hoof once again.



by Ute Mieth

Marshal (photo above) is a right-side dominant Saddlebred gelding in his twenties, who is sometimes used for pleasure riding. He lives in a paddock area with pea gravel and an open stall. His diet consist of mainly grass hay and a vitamin supplement, in addition to “salads,” which include other edible plants, like lettuce, kale, chickweed, etc.

In May of 2008, his owners asked me to take over his hoof care because he was in obvious discomfort, constantly shifting his weight side to side in the front. At the time, he wore **reversed shoes**. Marshal was much more comfortable immediately following the shoe removal (photo above after shoe removal) and very little trim-ming (balancing heels and applying a bevel).

It took roughly a year for the hooves to open up and heal, although they still looked like they needed more time to fully improve. This could also be, in part, because Marshall may have Cushing's disease. Since I have known him, he has shown subtle body changes, like a slower shedding hair coat, ventral edema and sheath swelling, crest in his neck and hoof issues that led me to believe this might be a strong possi-bility. However, so far, he has not been tested for the condition.

One of the signs that indicate he may have Cushing's disease is the fact that he abscessed in the left front for the last 2 years at about the same time in the fall—this is when we also see a natu-ral rise in ACTH levels in horses. If a horse has Cushing's disease, the fall rise of ACTH levels often create hoof problems, such as abscessing, or worse, laminitis and/or founder, depending on disease progression.

His last abscess occurred the end of Oct. 2009, and a veterinarian opened it up. The veterinarian suggested packing the resulting wound and pro-protecting it with a pad & shoe. Unfortunately, this is causing the hoof to contract again. It took approximately a year for his hoof to open up **but only about a couple of months to contract** (and distort) the hoof capsule with a shoe once more (see photos). It is a good example of how much damage shoes can do to a hoof. ●

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