

Compensating Ailments, Contentious Foot care

What I call “Compensating Ailments” in the bodies of horses are similar to ailments we humans deal with that are caused by compensating action or motion. Most folks recognize that when they have a chronic pain in the foot resulting in a limp, for one example, it is often the case that their opposite diagonal hip, shoulder and/or neck will often begin developing a pain due to the compensating movements that we use to maintain mobility. This is just as true for horses. The age-old adage of “No Foot No Horse” makes correctly trimming the hooves (including frogs) and making sure trim is balanced on hoof walls “very important”. Not to forget leaving sufficient heel height to make sure the horse works toward the toe sufficiently and not strain the fetlock / tendons area. In addition, make sure hoof wall is not high which can create a bowl or concave effect, preventing the frog from contacting the ground correctly. These points apply whether the horse is barefoot in the natural way or even when using metal or plastic shoes.

I have been seeing more than a few ferriers who are not correctly trimming hooves often in their rush to get a set of shoes on a horse and rush to the next customer. I have had to call out ferriers and podiatrists to correct the trims on hoof walls, frogs and heels far too often. Some of these were caused by insufficient practical knowledge by “qualified” ferriers although the Ferriers were technically qualified.

Recent Re-trimming effort example:

One of my clients in New Market has a Quarter Horse (a Rig) that runs naturally barefoot. He is a powerful and energetic boy around 6+ years old. My client had to change ferriers a few months back when the regular Ferrier moved away. The new Ferrier was apparently trained (and qualified) more technically with insufficient practical training and understanding of the horse and its overall physical needs above the feet. This became evident by the “numerous” negative changes that began to occur in the gelding (the handsome QH, rig). His hoof wall trimming was off balance and there lacked sufficient trimming of the frog. Imbalances in the hoof wall trims left them heavy on one side from the centerline of the hoof. Therefore, (1) his feet developed chronic thrush problems, which were hidden under the edges of overgrown frogs. (2) An imbalance in hoof wall trimming exacerbated an existing (previously modest) stifle strain problem on his left rear leg that then progressed to his opposite hip. (3) An incorrect / imbalanced wall trim on the front feet caused him to stand with his feet too close together in front and he somewhat stomped or slapped his feet down as he moved. (4) Imbalanced hoof wall trimming on rear feet caused him to swing his left rear foot in small circles as he stepped as well as dragging the toes of both of his rear feet at slower paces. When he was moving at extended trot and lope/canter/gallop there was sufficient adrenalin flowing in his system to

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mask the pain.) When he departed for canter/lope, on the right lead, he used both rear feet to propel himself for three or more strides before allowing himself to use his left rear leg and foot to work correctly.

This misunderstanding of the horse's overall action was not sufficiently checked via "in Hand" walking, trotting and loping on a hard flat surface and incorrect assumptions were made by the Ferrier and caused erroneous trimming decisions, causing multiple problems.

I convinced my client to allow me to call out a Ferrier I trust (one for whom I work with Re: his handsome Q.H. stallion). Once the balanced trim was accomplished, the gelding was maintaining a balanced stance and began using his body much better. Then after a 2-hour rest, he began to walk/track correctly and the sound when his feet contacted the ground was much better. In only 2 days, he was back to moving correctly in walk, trot, rein back, canter/lope departures and moving at speed with no problem. The corrected trim has eased the stress on his feet, stifle and hip. He will need a few more days to get more accustomed to his feet actually pushing "naturally" against hard flat surfaces but he is already showing great improvement.

Helping prevent thrush:

Good ways to prevent thrush is to keep the frog correctly trimmed so that periodic cleaning of the hoof and frog are most effective.

Helping prevent mud fever:

During the wet winter months of late, I have been seeing far too many owners and grooms incessantly washing the mud off their charges lower legs and feet simply for the sake of ascetics. This most often generates mud fever when the small grains of stones are rubbed off they can leave nearly invisible cuts behind. If the mud is allowed to dry, it is more easily brushed off with much less abrasion. If washing is done, it is most important to extract the water deep down in the near invisible cuts where the bacteria live underneath the water trapped in the bottom of the cuts. I personally use sprits (rubbing alcohol) and other astringents to extract the water before applying any salves or creams in aid of healing. Otherwise, the cream / salve can trap the water in the bottom of the cuts/scratches which actually protects the bacteria allowing them to continue growing.

I apologize for interrupting my intended article re: extension to my Feb. article. I thought it important to get into the feet information now and will get back to Feb. next month.

Ya'll ride safely and I hope this information has been helpful.

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