

**Pain, Hoof Care & Winter Awareness**

“Compensating Ailments” in horses, which are similar ailments that we humans deal with, are typically caused by compensating action or use of alternate muscles in our effort to avoid pain. A good example of this is when we recognize that when we have a chronic pain in our foot - it often causes a seemingly unrelated pain in our opposing diagonal hip, shoulder or neck. This seemingly unrelated pain often is just as irritating or painful as the original pain. We are often surprised when a chiropractor's pressures / actions are applied, to where we think is in the incorrect area of our body, the problem is solved - at least temporarily. This compensating ailment is no different for horses and it is important for us to keep in mind whenever we notice our horse's initial ailments.

With regard to the feet - the age-old adage of “No Foot No Horse” makes correctly trimming (and shoeing whenever shoes are truly needed) the hooves very important. Not only is it important to make sure the hoof walls are not cut back too far (too short) or left too long and that the sides are balanced. It is just as important to make sure not to over or under trim the frog nor overly shortening the turn that the bars make into the hoof pad. Don't forget to leave sufficient heel height to make sure the horse hoof / foot works toward the toe correctly and isn't overly straining the fetlock / tendon areas. In addition, leaving the hoof walls "to extended or long" can create a bowl or concave effect which can prevent the frog from contacting the ground correctly. These points apply whether the horse is barefoot in their natural state or when they are using metal or plastic shoes.

I have seen more than a few ferrriers fail to correctly trim hooves with or without shoes. They do this often in their rush to get to the next customer. I have had to call out ferrriers and podiatrists to correct improper trims far too often. Some of these were also caused by insufficient practical knowledge by so called "qualified" ferrriers, although they were technically qualified.

**Example Re-trimming effort :**

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 9 years old. My client had to change ferrriers when the regular Ferrrier moved away. The new Ferrrier was supposedly fully trained /qualified. As it turned out, he was more technically trained but lacked sufficient practical training. He also lacked sufficient understanding of horses and their overall physical needs. Shortly following this new Ferrrier attending to the gelding in this example his shortfalls became evident and numerous negative changes began to occur in the gelding. His hoof wall trimming was off balance, the bars were cut off too much 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. As a result (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 (via compensating ailments - see above). (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 also 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 insufficient adrenalin flowing in his system to 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.

Prior to the initial trimming, misunderstanding of the horse's overall action was not sufficiently checked via in Hand walking, trotting and loping on a hard flat surface. Therefore, incorrect assumptions were made by the ferrier and the result was erroneous trimming decisions, causing multiple problems. Choosing a good ferrier is sometimes difficult but owners must make every effort to research a potential ferriers' reputation. In this case I convinced my client to allow me to call out a ferrier I trusted. Once a balanced trim was accomplished, the gelding was quickly 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 and rein back. His canter and lope departures (and moving at speed) were no longer a problem. The corrected trim had eased the stress on his feet, stifle and hip. It also eliminated the various compensating ailments. He required a few more days to get more accustomed to his feet actually pushing "naturally" against hard flat surfaces but he quickly began showing great improvement. He is a much happier healthy horse today.

As winter is approaching, I would like to close by reminding everyone of just a few of the winter related points to be aware of, such as slippery paved and unpaved roads, frozen ground, bridledways and tracks that are not just dangerous footing but can also be very hard on the joints of our horses. Also, extra need for vigilance in watching out for bad winter vehicle driver habits. Even though it is an ongoing effort to build awareness in drivers - it is never enough and we as riders need to remind regulators regularly.

**Until next time, have fun and stay safe.**

**Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn,**

**[www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com](http://www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com), [blackieb@btconnect.com](mailto:blackieb@btconnect.com)**