

No Foot No Horse & *Compensating Ailments*

This month, an important reminder for our horses. “Compensating Ailments” in horses are similar ailments, which we humans deal with regularly, are typically caused by compensating action or use of alternate muscles in our efforts to avoid pain in a different area of our body. A good example of this is when we recognize a chronic pain in our foot or leg and joints. As a result of our dealing with avoiding that pain we often feel 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 are applied to an area we think is in an incorrect area of our body. Then we are surprised when the pain is relieved. This compensating ailment is no different for horses and it is important for us to keep in mind whenever we notice our horse's ailments.

With regard to the feet - the age-old adage of “No Foot No Horse” makes correctly trimming (and shoeing whenever shoes are actually needed) the hooves very important. Not only is it important to make sure the hoof walls are not cut back too far 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. Never forget to leave sufficient heel height and make sure the horse foot / hoof 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 and even when they are using metal or plastic shoes.

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

Re-trimming :

A good example is one of my clients in New Market who has a Quarter Horse that runs naturally barefoot. He is a powerful and energetic boy around 11 years old. My client had to change farriers when the regular Farrier moved away. The new Farrier was supposedly fully trained /qualified. As it turned out, he was more technically trained but lacked sufficient practical training. Shortly following this new Farrier attending the gelding/rig in this example his shortfalls became evident and numerous negative changes began to occur. 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 of 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, as explained 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 simultaneously to propel himself for three or more strides before allowing himself to use his left rear leg and foot 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 Farrier and the result was erroneous trimming decisions, causing multiple problems. Choosing a good farrier is sometimes difficult and owners must make every effort to research a potential farriers' reputation. In this case I convinced my client to allow me to call out a farrier I trusted. Once a balanced trim was accomplished, the handsome quarter horse was quickly maintaining a balanced stance and began using his body much better. Then after a couple hours 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, canter and with rein back maneuvers. His canter and lope departures and sprinting 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. Of course, he was unshod as always and a happy boy once again.

In closing, I would like to close by reminding everyone that, as winter is just about on us, there are some winter related points to be aware of. Caution is more necessary as slippery paved and unpaved roads, frozen ground, bridleways and tracks are not just dangerous slippery footing but can also be very hard on the joints of our horses. Extra diligence and vigilance in watching out for bad winter vehicle driver habits is an important factor as well. Even though there is an ongoing effort trying to build awareness in drivers - it is never enough and we as riders need to protect ourselves and our horses plus it is helpful for us to remind regulators regularly.

Ya'll ride safely and Aware.

Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn,

www.blackburnnaturalhorsetraining.com, blackieb@btconnect.com,

01799-543711, 0771-8317654