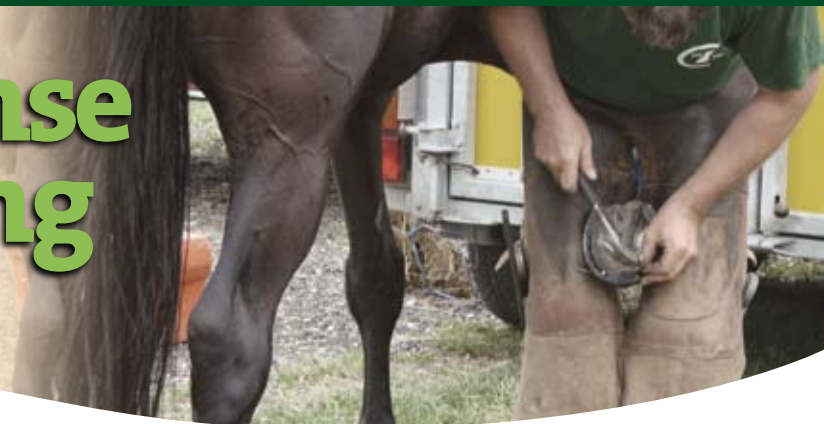


Common Sense Horseshoeing

Thoughts from a Northwest farrier

by Larry Davis



Throughout history, the farrier has been looked upon by some as a saint and by some as a butcher. In most cases, both titles apply to farriers who continue to practice the trade.

Equine hoof care was first in evidence somewhere between 3000 and 1580 BC. The early horseshoes were made of reeds, then later progressed to leather cups, and then to iron after 400 AD. Regular use of iron shoes was not evident until after 1000 AD. We can be certain that over this period there have been accepted methods of hoof care and methods that were not proven or did not fit into the standard of the time.

Presented here are some of the changes we have seen in the more recent past and how they pertain to equine hoof care in the Pacific Northwest. Below are just a few of the many new trim methods developed in the last 10-15 years:

Some of these methods are used still used successfully; some have fallen by the wayside. Each method may have worked very well for the person who developed it, but may not work as well for someone else.

When considering a new method, determine its origin. Many of these studies are observations and opinions with little or no science to back them. Also, keep in mind that our Northwest wet season can provide over-hydration for up to nine months, while the dry season causes under-hydration for three months. This does not match most—if any—of the study conditions. When it comes to metal hitting the road, good basic shoeing principles backed by experience and common sense will carry the day.

With all of the information available online, the farrier is now faced with a client

Name and Origin of Trim	Trim Method
Four Point Trim <i>Based on a study of wild horses</i>	Hooves are trimmed to match the wear on the horses in this study, namely wear at the quarters of the foot. Horses studied were bearing all their weight on four points on the foot: the heels and two points at the quarters of the toe.
Natural Balance Trim <i>Based on a study of wild horses</i>	Wear at the toe of the study horses was similar to the "rocker toe" sometimes applied to modern horseshoes. This trim applies the rocker toe method and led to the Natural Balance Shoe.
Ducketts Dot <i>Based on a study of hoof x-rays</i>	By using a specific measurement of the sole surface, farriers determine the point of coffin bone and trim the hoof to maximize balance and breakover.
Strasser Trim <i>Developed in Europe by Dr. Hiltrud Strasser</i>	Radical trim method involving an extremely short trim, and practitioners had to sign an agreement never to use shoes again. This method didn't gain much popularity in the U.S., although it did see some use in Canada
unnamed general trim <i>Developed by Dr. Stephen O'Grady</i>	Trim the foot to the widest point of the frog, rasp the toe to a length of 3¼ to 3½ inches and maintain a smooth transition from hairline to toe
Natural Barefoot Trim <i>Developed in Arizona</i>	Similar to the trim above, with the addition of the "mustang roll" (rounding the outer wall of the hoof)

who wants the horse trimmed to specific guidelines developed by someone who said all horses should be done *this* way because

"it's more natural." But all horses are not created equal, and one method will not work for every horse.



Pictured at left: part of the collection of ceremonial horseshoes in the Norman Castle at Oakham, Rutland, UK. Traditionally, any peer of the realm or monarch visiting Oakham for the first time must forfeit a horseshoe. Originally these were real horseshoes; later it became the custom to have a special, elaborate (often outsized) shoes made specially for the presentation ceremony.

Photo and anecdote by Simon Garbutt

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After many years of working under a horse, trying many “new and better” ideas, I have come up with a few things I would like to share:

- If your horse performs to your satisfaction barefoot, don't shoe it
- If your horse needs boots to be comfortable, shoe it
- Always trim to the widest point of the frog
- If the frog becomes engaged, hoof health improves dramatically
- Heel width is more important than heel height
- A hoof that does not hit the ground flat may be exactly right for that horse
- If you look hard enough, you will find a problem
- If you constantly look for something better, you will never find it
- If it works the way you are doing it, leave it alone, it might be just right
- Increase the weight-bearing surface of the foot
- Trim the heel to move it back as far as possible
- Maintain a smooth transition from hairline to toe
- Long heels cause more lameness issues than short heels
- Wedge pads should be used as little as possible
- Maintain a toe length that will ease breakover
- Horseshoes don't get sucked off in the mud, they get stepped off
- One bad trim can hurt a horse for many months
- If a horse pulls a shoe with a rider on board, it is likely pilot error
- Most nervous horses have nervous owners
- Hold the lead rope, not the halter
- Everything we do with our horse is not natural
- Horses do have club feet; one is not just steeper than the other
- Telling your farrier you ride every day is like telling your dentist you floss every day
- Just because Grandpa did it that way for thirty years doesn't make it right
- If you can almost pick his feet up, wait to call until you can
- If you want it done like Bubba did it, hire Bubba
- Every horse is good until it proves otherwise
- The owner, the farrier, and the vet must work as a team to maintain the health of the horse

Larry Davis started work as a farrier on the east coast in 1990, returning to his Northwest roots in 1996. He maintains an active farrier practice in Whatcom County. For more information, contact Davis Hoof Care at (360) 366-7494.

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