



IRON AND NAILS - HOOF AND HORN

Dan Guerrero gives his thoughts on the process of horses going barefoot.

The success of a proper barehoof trim is not just about knowing what to take off, but more importantly, it's knowing what to leave on. Before you even think about taking those shoes off you need to educate yourself. You need to ask yourself, 'what do I have to offer my horse to make this work?' It is not as easy as simply taking off the shoes and riding.

When should the horse

have shoes? When the owner's requirements of the horse exceed the horse's personal ability. We then either boot the horse in service, or we put the shoes back on. Putting shoes back on is not failure. We all want to use our horses, and if they simply cannot handle a barehoof life style then we must not let our special interests get in the way of their well being.

Before you take your

horse's shoes off some preparatory thoughts should be:

Do I have the support of the hoof professional who has been caring for my horse, can I still call if I need help?

Do I have someone who knows what they are doing to trim for me?

Has my horse healed from any previous injury?

Can I offer an environment that can balance wet and dry conditions?

Will I be able put on and take off hoof boots if they are required during riding?

Will I be able to assist in the after care of thrush or white line treatment?

Am I the right the right size for my horse?

Is my horse a suitable weight to go barefoot?

Is my stony area going to be too harsh for my horse's feet?

Will I have enough time to help re-condition the feet?

Who can I trust?

This list can go on, but if you can answer positively to these questions you have a good start.

So where do you start? As you can see there are many things to consider, but if you have a very wet property know that it could keep your horse's soles soft, and soft soles have a very hard time on rough ground. Soles need dry surfaces to help promote sole and toe callous. Hooves need moisture, that is clear, but they also need the dry.

If your horse is overweight start the diet and conditioning process while the shoes are still on. Most overweight horses with bare feet do not do as well as they could.

Have the frogs thrush free before you take the iron off. Have them trimmed nicely, picked clean and disinfected a few times a week. Be consistent with that and the frogs will re-grow. If the nail holes contributed to white line disease or shelly foot, these issues need to be addressed. The best results will not be realised until these conditions are professionally treated and grow out.

Sole conditioning is something to prepare for. A mix of pasture, sand, pea gravel and flat hard standing is good. Or just use what you have, any conditioning is good conditioning. Take it easy at first and gradually re-establish the previous work level.

Most importantly, ask your farrier to spare the sole when shoeing. Your horse is desperately going to need it on "Liberation Day", the day the shoes come off. As long as the shoes are still on tight

and your horse is moving nicely, keep them on a couple of weeks longer than normal to grow extra sole and hoof height.

On the day the shoes come off discomfort will be certain if the feet are trimmed as if for shoeing. Managed dead sole is one of best sole guards there is. A good pro knows what to keep on and what to take off. Personally I like my horse to stand on hoof wall a few millimetres above the sole and then wear the rest, if that happens. This also gives the hoof professional good guidance as to how the horse likes to wear its hooves. The notion that barefoot horses only walk on their sole is simply crazy when the shoes first come off. In the beginning of shoeless life, if the horse can have hoof wall taller than the sole, allow it at first. If there isn't any, then your horse most likely doesn't need it.

Allow the horse to have some heel to stand on. Walking on the bulbs will promote abscesses. Horses

that have naturally low heels are fine since they most likely have walked that way since birth. I never tell the horse to walk on sole, they need to develop this callous first, however I will advise this; the shorter the hoof wall the more the horse self-maintains it and reduces the chances of hoof wall separations. The sooner we get the pedal bone to a six degree angle, the better the horse will take care of itself with just light maintenance.

As always, there are lessons to be learned from the past. Do not allow your horse to be under the care of someone who is making excuses for their improper over-trimming work. Abscessing, even in the newly unshod barefoot horse, is extremely rare if the preparation is correct and the trimming is minimal. If proper preparation is done well your horse should have a very short, or maybe zero, transition time. Abscessing just does not exist by way of good trimming, ever.

It is clear that barefoot

horses are performing far better today than in the past. Knowledge has increased, the training of trimmers is increasing. The notion of barefoot horses being a trend or a fad is over, long ago. The best hope for horse owners is to get the support from the professional they were using to assist them. One can never assume that a horse can never go barefoot, not when a proper preparation and a fair allowance of time can be given to the horse. After that should the horse not perform well, then maybe genetics has given us nature's final word and in that case again we either boot or re-shoe the horse.

When a farrier performs a top quality job for the horse, the horse will perform to the best of its ability. I believe firm talk with the owner regarding a hoof rest needs to be exercised more often. Shoes hide many problems that keep the horse going. It is high time to stop blaming the horse for having poor feet, it is almost never the case. Bad hoof care is usually the cause, and most professionals know this, although farriers and trimmers have to make the customer happy or they will lose them.

Farriers provide soundness with the aid of a shoe, it does a fine job nearly instantly. The trimmer has to achieve the same goal. At the end of the day owners really do not care how many tools or what method of trimming were used, they want a sound horse. It is time to start giving professional barefoot trimmers the credit they deserve, because they have to produce the end result without steel.

