

No Feet, No Horse

MMR hosted expert horse shoer Lanny West in January for an informational Hoof Health Clinic. Eighteen attendees learned how the horse's feet are formed and how trimming and shoeing techniques can affect health and performance.

He spent years studying the mechanics of equine feet, after training a horse that was 'always a little off.' He has spent the last seven years fixing some of the worst problem feet in California.

"The most common issues I see are due to people trimming hooves the way they did when horses had miles of pasture and all winter off," he says. "Pasture wears down the toes, time off grows the heels. And, they didn't scoop out any live hoof just to make it look pretty."

Today's longer toes and shorter heels change the angle of the foot and increase stress on the hoof. And, unlike wild horses subject to natural selection, years of breeding for looks rather than good feet has produced lots of feet issues.

The good news is that most horses just need a correct trim to help them stay healthy. "Most horses should be trimmed more upright to support the bone structure," he noted, "But remember that these changes can take years of good trimming."

The most important thing according to Lanny, is to remember each horse may need something different. You must pay attention to what the horse is telling you when he walks. MMR farrier Rick DeLapp attended, and likewise practices a similar philosophy.



hoof cross section

(Top) Lanny points to the coffin bone in a cross-section of a healthy mustang hoof. This bone should be even with the hairline. When the live sole on the bottom of the hoof is carved out by a shoer, support for the bones is eliminated and they immediately shift forward until the tip of the toe bone (shown at the bottom left of middle photo) painfully touches the ground. Making matters worse, the current trend towards long toes and short hooves creates a more stressful angle for the hoof bones.

Three Rules of Natural Healthy Shoeing



1. Never let anyone carve out live sole from the hoof.
2. Shorten the toe and grow the heel to achieve an upright hoof.
3. Always let the horse tell you what it needs. Every horse is different.



bones of the hoof (back view)

The horse below has been slightly 'off.' To fix this, Lanny has trimmed the near toe and set the shoe back on the foot to support the sole and heel. MMR Farrier Rick DeLapp will continue this trend and re-apply natural



one foot done

balance shoes until she is more upright. Her attitude and performance improved immediately after all four feet were done.



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