

# CARE OF HORSES' FEET

## IMPORTANCE OF FOOT CARE

The value of a horse depends on his ability to perform work. To this end, four sound feet are indispensable. Oddly enough, foot troubles and the necessity for shoeing are largely manmade.

The wild horse seems to have been practically free from serious foot trouble. But with domestication these troubles began to appear. The horse was brought from soft pasture to hard roads; from self-regulated exercise to enforced work; from healthy pasture to filthy housing where he was often made to stand in his own feces and urine or in mud; and from a light, self-limiting maintenance ration to the heavy, artificial diet necessary for work. Even the basically sound horse frequently breaks down under the artificial environment and misguided "care" of man. The horse with a conformational defect is almost certain to break down under the conditions imposed by domestication. The important points in the care of a horse's feet are to keep them clean, prevent them from drying out, and trim them so they retain proper shape and length. You should learn the names for the parts of a horse's foot. Each day, clean the feet of horses that are shod, stabled, or used. Use the hoof pick for cleaning. Work from the heel toward the toe. Be sure to clean out the depressions between frog and bars. While you are cleaning the feet, inspect for loose shoes and thrush. Thrush is a disease of the foot characterized by a pungent odor. It causes a softening of tissues in the cleft of the frog and bars. This disease produces lameness and, if not treated, can be serious.

Hooves occasionally become dry and brittle. Dry, brittle hooves may split and produce lameness. The frog loses its elasticity and no longer is effective as a shock absorber. If the dryness is prolonged, the frog shrinks in size and the heel contracts. Dry hooves usually can be prevented by keeping the ground wet around the watering tank. If the hooves of a shod horse become too dry, either pack them in wet clay once or twice a week after the horse has been used or attach burlap sacks around them. Keep the sacks moistened. After the hoof has absorbed enough moisture, brush on a hoof dressing such as neat's-foot oil, sweet oil, or linseed oil. Before each soaking with burlap, remove the oil.

Trim the feet so that the horse stands square and plumb. This will alleviate strain on the tendons and help prevent deformity, improper action and unsoundness.

The healthy hoof grows  $\frac{3}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch per month. If the hoof is not trimmed, the wall will break off and will not wear evenly. To prevent this, trim the hooves regularly, about once a month, whether the horse is

shod or not. Use nippers to trim off the horn; level the wall with a rasp.

Incorrect foot posture is caused by hooves grown too long either in toe or heel. The slope is considered normal when the toe of the hoof and the pastern have the same angle. This angle should be kept always in mind and changed only as a corrective measure. If it should become necessary to correct uneven wear of the hoof, correct gradually over a period of several trimmings.

Trim the hoof near the level of the sole - otherwise it will split off if the horse remains unshod. Trim the frog carefully. Remove only ragged edges that allow filth to accumulate in the crevices. Trim the sole sparingly, if at all.

Never rasp the walls of the hoof. This removes the periople, or thin varnishlike outer layer provided by nature as a protective coating that prevents evaporation.

An unshapely hoof causing uneven wear may make foals become unsound of limb. Faulty limbs may be helped or even corrected by regular and persistent trimming. This practice tends to educate the foal, making it easier to shoe at maturity. If the foal is run on pasture, trimming the feet may be necessary long before weaning time. Check the feet every 4 to 6 weeks. Trim a small amount each time rather than an excessive amount at longer intervals.

Before trimming the feet, inspect the foal while it is standing squarely on a hard surface. Then watch it walk and trot.

Careless trimming may strain the foal's tendons.

## REASONS FOR SHOEING

Shoeing is a necessary evil. Nailing an iron plate to a horse's foot does not make walking easier for him. The added weight of a shoe does not make for agility.

While the foot and leg are engineered to minimize shock and road concussion, shoeing only increases them. Nail holes made in attaching the shoe help to weaken the hoof wall and may provide entries for infection or separation.

Allowing a horse to wear the same shoes too long also invites trouble. Since the hoof wall grows out perpendicularly to the coronary band, the horse's base of support actually grows out from under him if shoes are left on too long. This transfers excessive strain to flexor tendons. Shoes worn too long grow thin and become loose, bend dangerously and may shift, causing shoe-nail punctures or "corns."

Shoes protect the hoof against excessive wear when unusual work is required. They provide better traction under unfavorable conditions of terrain, such as ice and mud. They help correct defects of stance or gait, often

making it possible for an unsound horse to render satisfactory service. Shoes may be used to help cure disease or defective hooves (contracted heels, thrush, divided tendons). They also may be used to afford relief from the pain of injured parts (hoof-wall cracks, bruised soles, tendinitis).

Shoe horses to be used on hard surfaces to prevent the wall from wearing down to the sensitive tissues beneath. A correctly shod horse is a more efficient performer. Shoes may be used to change gaits and action, to correct faulty hoof structure or growth, and to protect the hoof itself from such conditions as corns, contraction, or cracks.

Racing "plates" are used on running horses to aid in gripping the track.

Shoeing always should be done by a farrier who is thoroughly experienced in the art. Shoes should be made to fit the foot, not the foot to fit the shoe. Reshoe or reset at 4- to 6-week intervals. If you leave shoes on too long the hoofs grow out of proportion. This may throw the horse off balance.

## COMMON FAULTS CORRECTED BY TRIMMING

**Splayfoot** (front toes turned out, heels turned in) can be helped or corrected by trimming the outer half of the foot.

**Pigeon Toe** (front toes turned in, heels turned out opposite of splayfoot) can be helped or corrected by trimming the inner half of the foot more than the outer half.

**Quarter Crack** (a vertical crack on the side of the

hoof) usually can be corrected if the hoof is kept moist and the toes shortened.

**Cocked Ankles** (standing bent forward on the fetlocks-usually hind fetlocks) can be helped or corrected by lowering the heels. Cocked ankles will not occur if foals are allowed to get ample exercise and are not overfed, and the foal's heels are kept trimmed so that there is plenty of frog pressure.

**Contracted Heels** (close at heels) can be spread apart if the heels are lowered and the frog allowed to carry more of the animal's weight.

## HOOF CARE HINTS

Begin when foal is only a few months old. Keep feet well rounded.

Exercise foals on dry ground to allow natural wear. If kept in stall, rasp down every 2 to 3 weeks. Clean soles and clefts of frog frequently.

Do not pare out sole, just clean.

Do not trim away healthy frog unless there is clearly an excess. (See illustration B.)

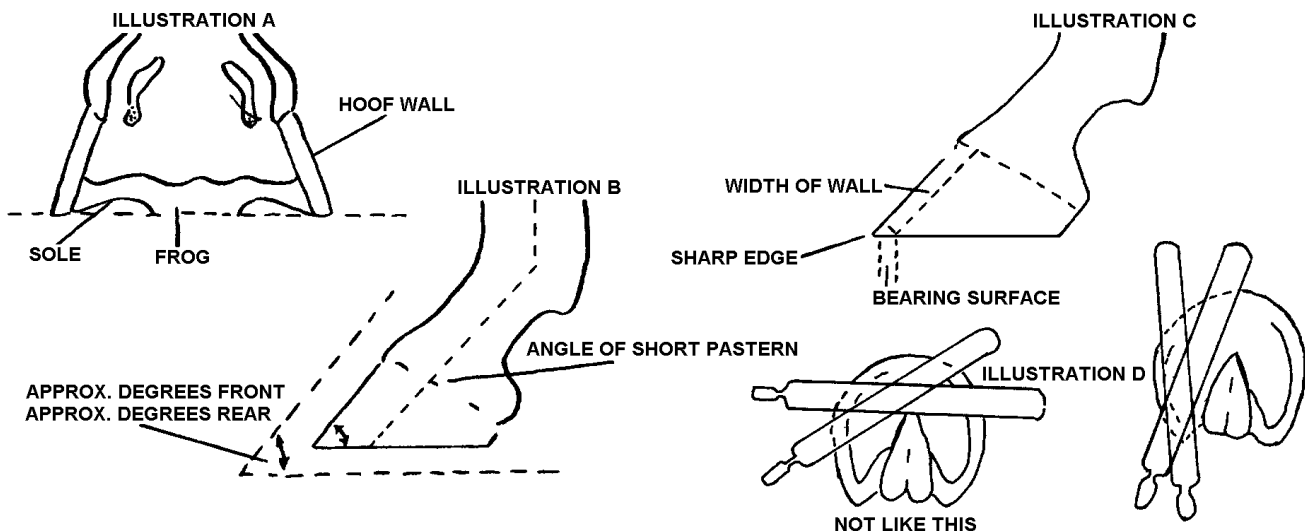
Keep foot straight with angle of short pastern. Front hoof-to-ground angle should be approximately 45° (See illustration B.)

Rear hoof-to-ground angle should be approximately 45° (See illustration B.)

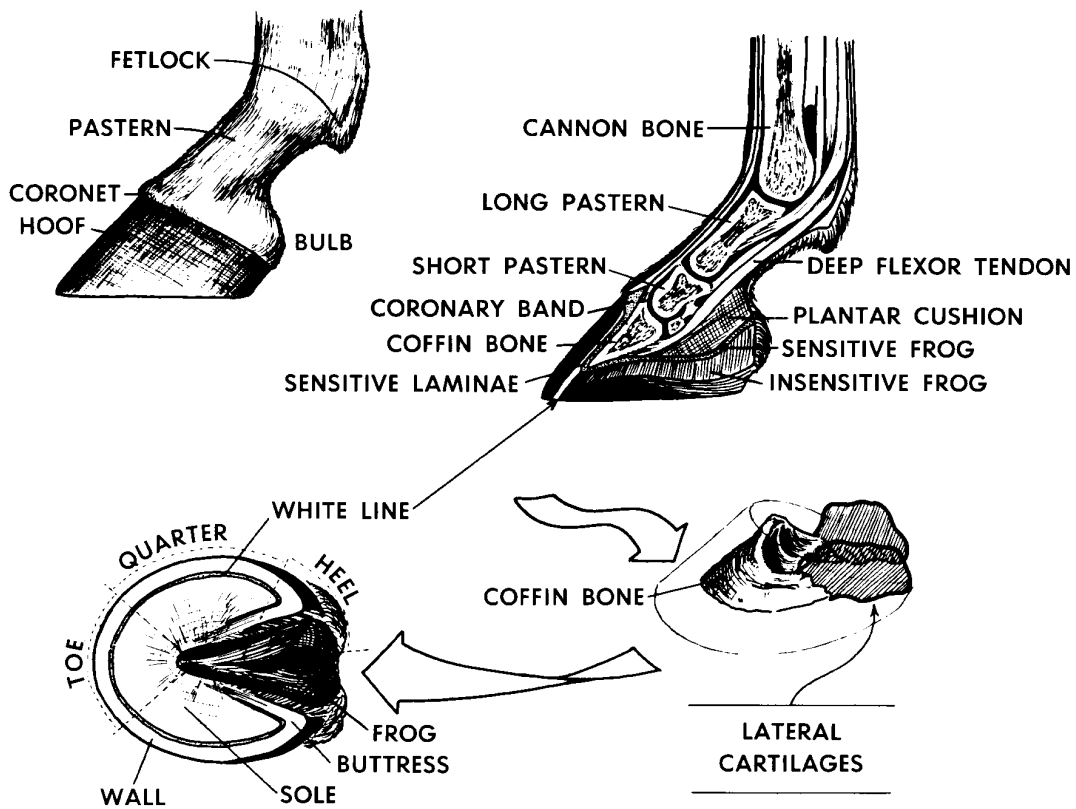
Rasp sharp edge of hoof wall to make bearing surface approximately true thickness of wall. (See illustration C.)

Do not rasp outside wall.

Always rasp in such a manner that the heel is included in each stroke. (See illustration D.)



### PARTS OF THE PASTERN AND FOOT



### FOOT INSPECTION

