

NEWSLETTER

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A Look at Topical Hoof Treatments

Do They Work?

Every tack shop and feed store has a shelf full of products billed as hoof conditioners. Some promise to heal cracks and chipping. Some extoll their moisturizing virtues. Others claim to toughen thin or sensitive soles, or dry out stubborn cracks. The ingredients range from petroleum based products, to lotion-like lanolin products, and drying agents like acetone.

The problem with any of these products is that the hoof has a very effective way of blocking absorption. All of the external parts of the hoof -- the hoof wall, sole material, and frog -- are essentially modified skin. Like skin, these structures have a permeability barrier. The barrier is designed to keep moisture, bacteria, and water soluble substances from getting in.

Susan Kempson, BSc, PhD, senior lecturer in Preclinical Veterinary Sciences in the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies at the University of Edinburgh, has published a study on the subject. In an article for TheHorse.com, she told Marcia King:

"My conclusion is that the horn has a built-in permeability barrier. As long as the horse has a well-balanced diet so that he

can produce good-quality horn, leave the hoof horn to look after itself."

Not only did she confirm the effectiveness of the permeability barrier -- she also drew some compelling conclusions regarding the effects of standing in manure. Says Kempson:

"The results were surprising. Heat, cold, and water had no effect on the permeability barrier. The sole and frog horn left in feces for two weeks disintegrated, and poor-quality wall horn was also badly affected. Good-quality wall horn was only marginally changed. Urine alone had little effect, but combining urine and feces had the same results as feces alone.

Rather than reaching for external remedies, hoof quality issues are best addressed from the inside of the horse, with appropriate diet. And good hygiene can never be overlooked! It's worth noting, too, that good circulation promotes healthy tissue. Horses kept barefoot have the added benefit of better circulation in their feet.

The abstract from Dr. Kempson's study is available from the National Library of Medicine website here:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9932089?ordinalpos=10&itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed.ResultsPanel.Pubmed.DefaultReportPanel.Pubmed.RVDocSum>

THE THOUGHTFUL HORSEMAN

That's My Horse #1

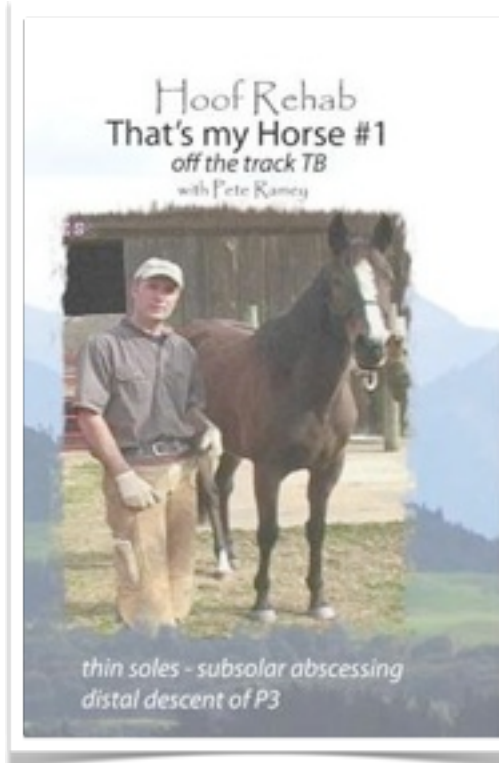
Pete Ramey's New 3 DVD Set

When I heard Pete had released this new set, I immediately ordered it. I'm big on instant gratification, and I was not disappointed; it arrived just 3 days later. I found the information contained in the set valuable and vindicating at once.

Pete takes us through 16 months trimming what he describes as a "splat footed" off track thoroughbred mare. We see his successful moments, and his frustrating moments, too; this is not only refreshing, but every bit as educational as only seeing what works.

I laughed aloud when he expressed his frustration with the mare's ground manners -- she was no picnic to trim, and I have to admit, it was nice to watch

someone else wrestling with an unruly horse...but more importantly, it was a valuable message for owners on their responsibility to prepare the horse to be handled by even the strongest hoof care provider.



In addition to showing numerous actual trims on this mare, Pete shows casting techniques, as well as boot fitting.

The grand finale was, for me, the explanation of the radiograph mark-up techniques Pete Ramey and Auburn University's Debra R. Taylor DVM, MS, DACVIM, have worked to develop. This in and of itself made the set worth the purchase price.

Order your set here:

<http://www.hoofrehab.com/ThatsMyHorse1.htm>

What to Request for Hoof X-Rays

As Pete's new DVDs explain, there are some new ideas when it comes to hoof x-rays.

If you're getting x-rays of your horse's feet, request the following:

- 1. Digital X-rays. The resolution is sharper, and your vet can provide copies via email or on a DVD for you and your hoofcare provider.*
- 2. The hoof should be marked with barium paste to make the following landmarks clearly discernible:*
 - hairline and angle at dorsal aspect for lateral view*
 - frog apex*
 - heel angle, from hairline to the ground*

“If it works for the horse...”

Most vets will support the decision to keep a horse barefoot...with that sneaky little qualifying phrase.

It's undisputed, even amongst vets and farriers, that a well-maintained bare hoof is healthy for the horse. Unfortunately, most vets and farriers will only truly embrace keeping a horse unshod if the horse already has good feet. Taking a bad-footed horse barefoot, on the other hand, goes against everything most of them learned in school. Thin soled? A shoe with a protective pad is the solution. Navicular problems? Eggbar shoes and wedge pads. Chronic laminitis? Backwards shoe, dubbed toe, wedge pads.

Certainly, some of these techniques can make the horse more comfortable temporarily. But the problem is never really solved; the pathology is never truly corrected, and in fact, most of these tricks ultimately increase the damage.

Show most vets a horse with thin soles and poor white line connection with a good barefoot trim designed to encourage sole growth and grow out flare, and they will usually exclaim that the horse is loading the sole, has no wall, and needs shoes and pads immediately. Rarely is the real issue -- which may include high carb diet, mineral imbalances, inadequate movement, excessive sole paring and trimming that allows the separation and distal descent to continue -- even explored. And actually striving to FIX it, and grow a good healthy foot, is not part of the treatment protocol.

Show most vets a horse with thin soles, underrun heels, and toes in the next county, and they will immediately express dismay that the toes have not been shortened from the bottom to correct the dorsal angle. Nevermind that doing so will thin the sole under the coffin bone even more, and the only way to fix this is to patiently take the toe back from the top, avoid the impulse to over-trim the underrun heels, and wait for things to slowly come back under the bony column.

Show a vet a horse with navicular disease, landing decidedly toe first to protect its heels, and the vet will recommend that the farrier begin experimenting with eggbar shoes and wedges. Encouraging the heels to de-contract, eradicating chronic thrush, and stimulating the development of the digital cushion and lateral cartilages never enters the equation.

Rehabilitating these cases using barefoot methods isn't simple, and it certainly doesn't happen over night. But it DOES work, where traditional approaches simply mask the problem for a period of time. A nailed on shoe has simply never healed a hoof problem. No element of the combination of diet, lifestyle, trim and hoof hygiene can be overlooked or ignored to succeed with barefoot, although it is possible to fudge a little here and there.

Is it easier to keep a horse shod? Some people seem to think so, and I'm sure that that is the reason the practice still thrives. I don't think it's easier. I think we've just created a "norm" that is incompatible with healthy barefoot horses. Small stalls, soft footing, "couch potato" horses, inappropriate feeds being pedaled by the big feed companies. Owners looking for a quick fix so their equestrian aspirations aren't set back. Owners with limited means to support a very expensive hobby. I'm sure veterinarians are, on some level, just trying to make it easier for the owners. It is not, I am convinced, in the best interest of the animal in question.

Maybe the fact that most horses are kept at boarding facilities, which enable absentee owners to fulfill their horsey dreams, is part of the problem. Go out 2 or 3 days a week, tack up and ride, and go back to your life. Let someone else worry about the unsavory details. But these aren't motorcycles; these are living creatures. It's not a flat tire -- it's a sick foot. Maybe we need to remind ourselves that this animal is required to be an athlete to accommodate our whims, even if all we do is take an occasional, leisurely trail ride. Maintaining a healthy athlete is, trust me, a whole lot more work than keeping a couch potato.

It still leaves me wondering why vets and farriers studiously eschew the possibility that we can heal the hoof, and even refuse to review the techniques. I know this works. So would they, if they just took the time to truly understand.

THE THOUGHTFUL HORSEMAN

Think Groundwork is Overrated?

Think Again.

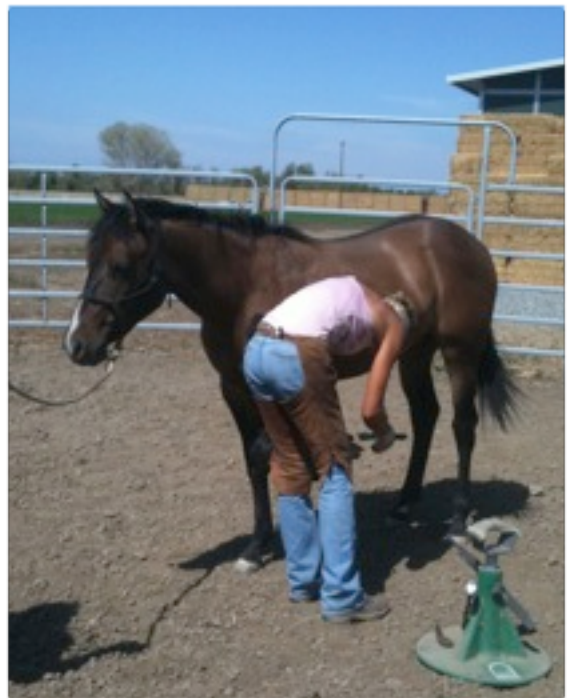
I just came back from a quick trip up to Patterson, California, to visit my good friend Michelle Smith and trim some colts. Michelle is a great hand, and as usual, has done an excellent job with these babies. These colts put a lot of the adult horses on my roster to shame in terms of ground manners and how well they stand for a trim. They're not perfect, but they are still babies...if every horse was this "not perfect", my job would be much easier! The funny thing is, Michelle kept apologizing for how bad they were. She holds her horses -- and horsemanship -- to an exemplary standard, and accepts nothing less.



Duke, yearling QH colt, is curious, but stands calmly while I trim a front foot.

Michelle captured some video clips of Duke, her yearling QH colt, and Lady, Tara Kelly's 15 month old QH filly getting their pedicures. Go watch...if your horse gives me more grief than this, you have work to do:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/MixerNigi>



Lady, 15 month old QH filly, was cool as a cucumber!

I last trimmed Michelle's mob in February, and even then, the babies were exceptional. All it takes is good, solid groundwork. In fact, you'd be amazed how many other "issues" suddenly disappear when you truly get control of the horse on the ground.

Need some help? Call me!

THE THOUGHTFUL HORSEMAN

About Maria Siebrand

& The Thoughtful Horseman...

With a background in the life science and pharma industries, and a determination to make life better for our domestic horses, Maria brings a science-based approach to horsekeeping, equine nutrition, and the field of barefoot hoof care. She offers barefoot hoof care services, nutrition consultations and diet formulation, and horsemanship coaching, as well as a line of supplements formulated to fit the typical Southern California equine diet.

Maria is available for clinics, lectures, and mentorships on barefoot hoof care and progressive horsekeeping practices.



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