

NEWSLETTER

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Bobby's Story

Bobby is a poster horse for the detrimental effects of aggressive trimming.

When I first met him back in December 2008, it had been four weeks since his previous trim, and I immediately made the decision that he needed another four weeks of growth before there was anything at all to be done. He was completely flat-soled, his heels had been mechanically "opened", and his collateral groove depth was frightfully shallow at both heel and frog apex. His frogs were a mess, hacked out at the heel, full of thrush, and clearly painful.

Bobby had some obvious hoof pathology, heel contraction being the most profound. It's a hoof form any barefoot trimmer would strive to correct. But his previous trimmer was using a completely invasive technique, and dubious "ideal" parameters that essentially ignored the position of the internal structures to try to give Bobby perfect feet. Collateral groove depth and uniform, adequate sole coverage -- the cornerstone of a healthy hoof -- were ignored. Power tools were used to trim not only wall, but sole. Instead of growing a healthier foot, Bobby suffered unnecessarily, often lying down for long periods of time for days post trim, and finally developing what was likely a combination of laminitis and pedal osteitis in response to the heavy-handed techniques.

In addition to a far-too invasive trim, we learned that Bobby is insulin resistant, which heightens his susceptibility to laminitis. Along with hoof hygiene and a good, conservative trim, it was important to address his dietary needs.



Bobby stands gingerly on his overtrimmed feet in December of 2008.

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Ten months later, Bobby has developed a healthy layer of calloused sole that is showing admirable concavity. His frogs have been treated aggressively for the painful thrush infection, and are now tough and healthy. A pronounced laminitis ring caused by the final invasive power-tool trim finally grew out this past trim. His heel height, which appeared excessive 10 months ago in spite of inadequate collateral groove depth, becomes more appropriate every trim. (I hate to think what his foot would have looked like if the heels had been trimmed to the 1 1/8" from hairline to ground that this type of trim usually strives for -- it was bad enough!) His heels are still contracted -- there is a long way to go before we could call these textbook feet. But Bobby is sound and happy, gaiting down the trail, often bootless.

I implore both owners and trimmers to put the horse's comfort before the goal of perfect hoof form. There are dozens of horses on my roster that came to me after idealistic and invasive trimming very nearly foundered them. Conservative trimming that respects the integrity of the sole and considers the horse's immediate needs will get you farther faster than wounding the horse in an effort to speed changes. Remember: Pretty Is as Pretty Does...there is nothing pretty about a horse in too much pain to move! Don't ever let anyone convince you that pain is necessary to heal the hoof. A horse that doesn't want to walk -- or for that matter, stand up -- after a trim will never grow a healthy hoof!



Top row, Bobby's left front foot in December 2008. These pictures were taken FOUR WEEKS after his previous trim. His soles were translucent. His heels had been "opened" with a Dremel tool. His frogs were full of thrush, and looked as if they'd been hacked in half. Note how close the apex of the frog is to the front of the foot - his toe has been brought back almost all the way to the tip of the coffin bone.

Bottom row, Bobby's left front at the end of October 2009. Not a textbook hoof, for sure, but this foot works just fine for him. He is still a bit guarded during his trims - I'd have liked to have taken that toe back more and made that bevel nicer, but he definitely tells me when he thinks I'm done. Can you blame him??

Fall Colic Prevention

Fall in Southern California can be a treacherous time for our domestic horses.

The hot, dry days and dramatically colder nights are often associated with colic. What can we do to mitigate our horses' risk of colic? Here are a few suggestions.

Keep plenty of fresh, clean water available. Automatic waterers are okay, but if you can, provide a large bucket as well. Most horses will drink a gallon or two at a time if they have access to a large bucket or trough, where an automatic waterer may or may not refill fast enough to accommodate this. Clean buckets, troughs and automatic waterers frequently. To encourage the horse to drink, even during cold nights, feed loose salt mixed in with the horse's ration. This allows us to monitor the horse's salt intake much better than a salt block. It also ensures that the horse's sodium requirement is met; a lack of sodium in the diet leads to dehydration. The maintenance requirement for an average size horse (not taking exercise or sweating into account) is 10 grams of sodium per day, or 25 grams -- about 1 ounce, or roughly 2 tablespoons -- of regular table salt (sodium chloride). A little too much is better than not enough, but introduce it slowly until your horse develops a taste for it. This is one of the most inexpensive insurance policies against dehydration and subsequent impaction colic.

The horse's digestive system is designed to have a constant trickle of food. Wild horses eat constantly, and eat a wide variety of vegetation. Our domestic horses are on a much stricter, and unfortunately, less healthful regimen. Feeding two large hay meals per day is the standard in most boarding facilities. Finding ways to make these two meals last most of the day and night takes a little creativity on the owner's part, but the benefits are well worth the additional effort. Slow feeders are one way to solve this problem; even if you only make it to the barn to distribute one meal per day this way, the horse's gut will thank you. Check out some of the options available on the Paddock Paradise blog here:

<http://paddockparadise.wetpaint.com/page/Slow+Feeders>

I've been using 5 "buffet" size bags from BusyHorse.com for my 4 geldings, but just recently added 3 more bags for a total of 8. I was amazed at the difference it made -- it took them four hours to eat their morning ration when it was distributed between the 8 bags around their 100' X 150' pen. The same amount of hay lasts less than an hour and a half when fed loose in their 4 barrel feeders!

A little extra effort is a very small price to pay to prevent a life-threatening colic episode. An ounce of prevention, as they say...

Jerry Tindell Horsemanship Clinic

November 20 -22, 2009

How many times have you said, "All I want to do is have a nice, fun ride!"

Jerry Tindell is great at enhancing the horse and rider experience, not only providing solutions for long-standing or difficult problems, but creating new opportunities for safe and secure, totally fun riding experiences. Jerry will be back in Ramona conducting a horsemanship clinic at the Deals' in Ramona on Nov 20-22, 2009. We will also be exploring obstacles/challenges and having lots of fun! Come camp out with your horse and create that partnership you've been wanting. An awesome Thanksgiving or Christmas gift for someone you love!

Call Mary for more info (760) 315-0638 or email at mary.deal@att.net



What's New in Hoof & Horse Care on the Web

Equine Cushings and Insulin Resistance Yahoo! Discussion Forum Celebrates 10 Years & 8000+ Members

Founded by Robin Siskel, and co-owned with Dr. Eleanor Kellon, this landmark internet resource is a model I'd love to see emulated in many fields. What began as a small online bulletin board for horse owners seeking information to help their PPID or IR horses is now being called the largest "field trial" in history. Read about this phenomenal group, and the brand new website they've launched, in the press release here:

<http://thoughtfulhorseman.com/BarefootHoofCare/ECIRpressrelease.pdf>

New Articles on SaferGrass.org

Kathryn Watts, BS, a private contract agricultural researcher and consultant, runs one of my favorite internet resources on the subject of appropriate hay and forage for horses. If you've never been to the site, go now. If you've seen it, but not lately, go back. There are a number of fantastic new articles, plus a brand new video section:

<http://www.safergrass.org>

Hoof Rehabilitation Protocol

As prescribed by Debra R. Taylor DVM, MS, DACVIM, Ivy Ramey AHA Member, and Pete Ramey AHA Certified Farrier. This is the hoof care protocol of the future.

<http://www.hoofrehab.com/HoofRehabilitationProtocol.pdf>

Paddock Paradise Blog

Looking for ideas to create the optimum environment for your horses? Jaime Jackson's Paddock Paradise pioneered the concept. Now, there's a blog chronicling the successes and failures of horse owners implementing their own versions of the Paddock Paradise. Find information on slow feeders, fencing, and more:

<http://paddockparadise.wetpaint.com/>

Riding Out: Some Things to Ponder

Trail riding is probably the best thing for a horse's mind.

It introduces new sights and sounds, requires the horse to move over varied terrain at varied speed, and engages the horse's natural instinct to roam. For those same reasons, though, trail riding can present some challenges.

One of the most common "problems" I hear about are horses that will happily go out on trail with other horses, but balk at the idea of heading out solo. Similar is the horse that will wander familiar trails calmly, but refuses to take a new trail, or a trail beyond the range he's accustomed to. While it's always a good idea to ride with a buddy for safety's sake, the fact that your horse lacks confidence in YOU is a problem that shouldn't be ignored, and needs to be addressed.

The first place to work on this is, as always, on the ground. If your horse isn't totally focused, soft, responsive, and willing in your groundwork, you can't expect him to be those things with you on his back. Besides being the basis for riding, good ground manners give you something to fall back on (hopefully not literally!) should things get a little beyond your abilities in the saddle. There is no shame in hopping off of your horse and working him through a bad moment from the ground if you feel your safety is in jeopardy! Nothing destroys a horse's

confidence in you like a wreck that could have been avoided.

The point that gets missed again and again is the relationship between horse and handler. If the horse perceives you as fair, consistent, trustworthy, and regards you as a leader worth following, all things are possible. If, instead, he sees you as unsure, timid, easily intimidated, or rude, aggressive, and a bully, he'll look out for himself any way he sees fit. The horse must see you as someone with whom he quite literally

No matter what the lesson is, it's critical to reward the horse when he gets it right. The first time he does what you're looking for quietly and calmly, immediately end the session, with lots of praise and petting.

trusts his life. Confidence, kindness and competency win that vote. Aggression -- whips and spurs used with anger -- does not. And a fearful rider/handler -- even just a little fearful -- puts far too much pressure on the average horse; not only must he take care of himself, but now he's responsible for YOU, too.

Establishing your leadership on the ground and from the saddle on familiar territory, then, is the obvious first step. But it doesn't guarantee that your horse will accept your decisions in every

situation, so what to do when those occasions arise?

As many of the great horsemen would advise, try to make your idea the horse's idea. In any situation, use your imagination to make the undesired behavior more work, either physically or mentally, than simply moving forward.

If there's room, put the horse to work in a circle. Ask for a good pace; trotting is usually good. When he's soft and responding well, let him walk, and point him back at the place he balked. Don't do so timidly -- ride a good, brisk walk forward, focus far ahead, and *expect* him to go. Encouragement in the form of the tail of your mecate or dressage whip if you feel even the slightest hesitation is perfectly acceptable; in fact, being a little proactive can work even better. If he still balks, go back to the trotting circle. When he finally makes it, don't turn it into a 3 hour trail ride. Instead, ride a short distance, praising him lavishly the whole way, and then head home. Tomorrow you can go a little farther.

Herd bound or barn sour behavior is another common problem. Putting the horse to work when he's close to his buddies or the barn, and allowing him to relax and walk quietly when he's away gives him incentive to want to leave his comfort zone. Riding a "star pattern" is another good technique: instead of riding out and going for a long ride, ride out a short distance, then come right back, work briefly close to home, and ride out again. Repeat this sequence

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until your horse goes out the gate quietly, and walks back in equally relaxed. The idea is to have the horse associate coming home with more work than going away, and also to teach the horse that going out the gate doesn't always mean a marathon trail ride.

Some horses are naturally confident and brave, while others have a high startle response and seem to spook at everything. Always remember that if the horse is truly afraid, punishing him makes the situation even scarier. A horse's natural reaction to a scary situation is to flee, which essentially translates to moving his feet. Allowing that to happen -- going with the horse, but controlling where those feet go -- will help the horse relax and take him out of "flight" mode. The next thing a frightened horse will do is become curious about what scared him. That usually means turning to face the scary thing, and often even approaching it again. Use these behaviors to your advantage, instead of battling them. Let a frightened horse work in a fast circle. When he's ready to stop and take a look, sit quietly and pet him. He might need to go again...that's fine...back to the fast circle. Any time he slows his feet and focuses on the scary thing, offer plenty of petting and praise.

It's important not to give up and let the horse "win", because then, he has effectively, in his own mind, trained you. But don't ever make the mistake of regarding this as a battle of wills; keep a calm, pleasant attitude. There is never a place for anger when handling horses. And no matter what you find yourself working through, keep yourself and your horse out of trouble. Be smart about the situations you put yourself in. Take things gradually, accept small successes instead of demanding giant ones, and pretty soon you'll have a horse that will go just about anywhere you point him!

Bucking and kicking out, rearing or acting willful is no more acceptable when you're working with a horse from the ground than it is under saddle. Let it go on the ground, and don't be shocked when you find yourself riding the same behavior. A single playful buck - well, okay - but if it happens every time you ask for more life, it's already an issue. On the lunge line or in the roundpen, ask the horse to move forward. If he offers to buck, slings his head, or just pins his ears, drive him forward harder. If it happens a second time, your reaction should be SERIOUS. No need to touch him...growl, pin your ears (I swear you'll find a way to do this), and smack the bejeezes out of the ground behind him. Attitude is NEVER ACCEPTABLE. Watch a herd and see what happens when the low horse threatens the alpha as the alpha drives him away!

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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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P.O. Box 181472

Coronado, CA 92178