

Okay, let's do politics. The problem with political discussions is they usually turn into heated debate. The nice thing about writing about politics is that you can fully present your view while the reader quietly reads. That is much easier. So this article is just that; no more and no less than my opinions about the politics of hoof care.

The study of feral horses and the remarkable hooves they wear has unlocked many of the mysteries that mystified the farrier world since the beginning. Chronic founder, white line disease, navicular syndrome and severe balance problems are easy work for a competent practitioner. Stamina, longevity, performance and lameness rehabilitation are reaching new heights. Natural hoof care is pretty simple on the surface. We listen to the hoof and trim on a regular interval so that the hooves never overgrow and can respond the way nature intended. This unlocks incredible healing powers. We provide quality riding boots for the owners to ride with as long as they need to. If the horse becomes comfortable being ridden barefoot; great! If not, that's okay too. Most of them do so very quickly, but we let the horse decide. The point is that the horse at least gets the chance to be bare when it is not being ridden and the natural movement and shock absorption optimizes health for the entire body. The health of the body and the lack of breakdown of joints, muscles, ligaments and tendons is the primary reason we do what we do.

Most natural hoof care practitioners have spent more time studying the science of hooves and horses' bodies, nutrition, care and locomotion than most traditional farriers or veterinarians would ever believe. We have turned ourselves into walking encyclopedias and we educate our clients so that they understand what's going on too. We study every defect in our methods and in the horses in our care and hone both to a razor edge. We strive to learn and improve our work every day. Why? We have been in a political fight and it is making us stronger. Not with horseshoers as you might think, but with each other!

Most of the early practitioners of "barefoot" trimming were studying very invasive trimming techniques that caused a world of hurt for horses. On top of that, there were no schools or training programs that taught better methods. Most of the "barefoot trimmers" were horse owners who had learned their craft on the internet from other people who had never trimmed horses. The methodology of natural hoof care sounds good because it is, but it was being done by incompetent people. Horse owners all over the world tried it and blood spilled all over the barn floors. Now almost every horse owner has heard one of those horror stories and that has turned life into a political battle for some of the most competent hoof care providers in the world and it will unfortunately be that way for many years to come.

What happened to those misguided beginners? Most of them got frustrated and moved on to some other thing, but new ones are being created every day. Some of them stuck to their guns and continue to carve away at the soles and bars, just knowing all the tenderness is coming from crooked bars, contraction and that pesky, thick sole that keeps popping back. They can't shake the methods they were taught because most of them have seen dramatic help given to foundered horses in the first months, but can't see that their trimming is causing their progress to "hit a wall". Some of them, however, have let the horses and science educate them and became very competent. If you are wondering how to tell the difference, just ask a horse in their care!

Another thing that makes us have to work to a much higher standard is that we are the new kids on the block. What if every time a shod horse took a bad step the owner swore to never shoe a horse again? That would force horseshoers to work at an incredibly high level of expertise; Right? You bet! That is exactly how

natural hoof care practitioners have to live life and that has been great news for the horses in their care.

Things are changing fast, now. Veterinarians, research centers and universities have taken notice of the healing powers of the natural hoof. Research is being done and new discoveries are being made every day. Veterinarians are calling in natural hoof care practitioners to founder and navicular cases all over the world. The American Association of Natural Hoof Care Practitioners has been formed to do research and to train and certify competent professionals. The fact that we were fighting for truth and that we worked so hard to be competent paid off, and it is growing out of control now.

What horseshoers don't understand is that none of this has to be a threat. The horror stories of the "misguided barefoot trimmers" and feelings of competition backlashed through the farrier world. Farriers who were trained to always allow horses to go bare during the off season were suddenly getting angry at the mere mention of a barefoot horse. Many of them now insist the horses must be perpetually shod. The longer a horse goes with continual year round shoeing, the easier it is for a natural hoof care practitioner to come along and triple the capabilities of the horse. There are plenty of horses to go around, for sure. Horseshoers should get training in the art and science of natural hoof care and beat us at our own game! Nothing would make me happier. But please take the time to learn. At least get my book and then study these articles as a start. We are no threat, and don't wish to be. We just want what we have seen is best for the horse, but it all seems like an impossibility to a farrier who hasn't seen it done right.

I remember when I would pull the shoes off my own horses and turn them out for the winter. I would check on them routinely and frown at the broken walls. I feared what would happen if one broke away too short to shoe. The horse would be lost, I thought. One at a time, they would scare me into shoeing them. By spring I would have most of them shod for just hanging out in a wet Appalachian pasture. It was those same horses that I put to work barefoot in rugged terrain without missing a step when I first started to educate myself about the natural hoof. Respectfully, to farriers, no matter how much you may know about shoeing and trimming, let me tell you there is much more to learn about barefoot rehabilitation! I've been there.

Now for the barefoot trimmers. Please don't add fuel to the fire..... Don't cut live sole. Don't put down farriers and vets; it just makes you look bad. Don't push a rehabilitative goal to the point that the horse is tenderfooted, because you can't help the horse at all if the owner doesn't let you come back! Don't pull shoes off of a trail horse unless you have quality riding boots to provide to the owner. You know that horse owners can rarely fit boots "out of the box" well enough to succeed with them. You have the same obligation to stock boots and founder pads as a horseshoer has to stock shoes and nails!! They are tools of your trade. Don't try to take the place of the vet; you're not a doctor. Don't cut live sole. Don't provide service to horse owners who won't steadily maintain their hooves. If every hoof you touch is maintained to perfection, you will never lack business. I promise. Oh yeah, and don't cut live sole.



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