

Goldilocks & The Three Bars...

by James & Yvonne Welz

This article is about **moderation**. Everyone knows the story of Goldilocks: she encountered situations that were either too much, too little, then finally just right. One of the problems with barefoot trimming is that, when making trimming decisions, many people fall into the trap of only two categories: too much or too little—and both of these are extremes. When one direction doesn't work out well, some folks go the completely opposite direction! A more sensible approach is to locate the middle ground.

Both trimming too much AND trimming too little can be considered extreme versions of trimming, and can have dangerous consequences. Undertrimming and overtrimming—in the right hands—can be used as advanced “tools” but are not appropriate techniques for the majority of barefoot trimmers.

Some people do go a bit moderate with their decisions, but still cause themselves many of the same problems of the extreme directions. Even slightly overtrimming has the consequences of leading to a “micro-management” of the hoof, which can often create a very unnatural hoof form. And slightly undertrimming the hoof can cause a slow degeneration in form over a long period of time—but once identified, the hoof may need to be rehabilitated all over again! How frustrating is that?!

What is the answer? What is the practical advice for making the best trimming decisions? Depending on your background and your education, you may have a framework of knowledge for what is “too much” and what is “too little.” That's a great start. If you don't have that, one fantastic exercise is to practice trimming the **FULL RANGE** on cadavers. Use at least 3 cadavers: overtrim the first one, undertrim the second one, and then find a “just right” trim for your third hoof.

Of course, with cadavers, you don't have feedback from the horse on what is “just right”—and that's a crucial part! What is a “just right” trim? First, a sound horse should be totally comfortable in its feet, and a lame horse should be improving. Second, using photographs & measurements to track progress, you should see an improvement in hoof form over time. This includes structural integrity: the walls should get thicker, the heels should get wider, the outer walls should be smooth and flat, without slipping or ripples/ridges.

For a start, we've provided some photo examples of bar trimming. The “just right” photos demonstrate the place where the horse was very comfortable, while the bar provided its full functional support to the hoof.

All photos ©The Horse's Hoof



Horse #1: left front, spanning many years. These photos provide an extreme example of possible variations of bar trimming.

Note that “just right” does not mean this is a recommended length for all bars—it means this is the length that serves this particular horse best in a functional, health-promoting way. So “just right” can indeed be different for different horses.

Horse #2: left front, over several years, providing a more subtle example of bar trimming. In the second photo above, the bars have been left too long and are starting to curl up onto the sole—and would soon be growing over the sole (if left untrimmed), causing harmful effects. Any concept of “don't touch the bars” would have been a detrimental one in this situation. It's important to take any generic recommendations with a grain of salt and provide **THAT** **HOOF** with the trim that it needs, that day.