

3 Simple Trim Secrets to Better Hooves!

by James & Yvonne Welz

What if we told you that you could make 3 simple modifications to your basic barefoot trim and solve many or all of the problems that you are having right now? Or if you don't have any problems, good for you—but would you like to know how to take a hoof from “good” to “absolutely fantastic?”

First, we'll assume that you are doing a basic “natural” barefoot trim: low heels, short toes, a rolled edge on the wall, passive bars, minimal sole trimming. That's a great start. In our work with hundreds of horses in our care, and countless owners across the country, we've found that there can be a huge improvement when a few simple changes are implemented on a regular basis. It is not really so secret, but **most** hooves start out with at least one of these three trimming issues:

1) Most hooves need a much, much larger mustang roll, from toe to heel.

Even though most people utilize some form of a mustang roll or bevel on their hooves, it is often not being used in a truly constructive way. This roll is not for “looks”—it has a very serious function, which is to relieve the peripheral loading stress on the laminar corium. A minimalist roll won't do the

proper job—remember, a mustang renews his roll daily! Your roll has to last until the next trim, so you'll either have to trim more often, or apply a roll that will allow that outer wall to remain unweighted until the next trim. Do this religiously for several months, and watch the positive changes in the hoof and coronary band! **Problems solved:** white line separation; white line “disease;” graveling; pushed-up, crooked, distorted hairlines; thin walls. **Improvements created:** tighter white line connection; smooth, even hairlines; thicker walls.

2) Most hooves need their toes shortened.

Some people leave the toes too long because they are afraid to shorten them, or think that the hoof will grow out with shorter toes—eventually. In our observation, this will never happen in typical captivity. While there are many formulas that you can use to shorten toes, one of the best rules of thumb is: **If the toe looks too long, it is too long!** The human eye is very good at observing balance. Take photos of your horse's hooves and be objective: do the toes look the right length? If they look long, start shortening them, and keep at it consistently. (Please note: shorten the toes from the FRONT only, do not reduce the sole!) **Problems solved:** long, oval-shaped hooves; flat hooves;

lack of concavity; long-term sore, tender feet; stumbling, underrun heels. **Improvements created:** rounder, wider, more symmetrical hooves; deeper concavity; greater soundness; more sure-footed.

3) Most hooves need their bars defined.

Most people know that the bars should be passive, and not bearing weight before the rest of the hoof. Bars share in the weight-bearing load, but to function properly, they must be well-formed. The bars are an extension of the wall, and you should be able to see the white line of your horse's bars, just like the white line of the wall. If you don't know where the bars are, you can end up in all sorts of trouble! A clearly defined bar gives you knowledge and control, so make it a habit to consistently shape and define the bars. **Problems solved:** poor frog growth; persistent thrush problems; contracted heels; lack of sole growth; stumbling; soreness on hard ground. **Improvements created:** wider heels and frog; fast, even sole growth, greater soundness on various surfaces.

No matter what your trimming level or experience, it is always important to consider what you can do to improve the hooves in your care. We hope you find these tips helpful.

1) Needs a larger roll



This lovely hoof has a very slightly rolled edge—but unless you can renew this roll daily, the hoof will benefit from a larger roll.



This larger roll ensures that the outer wall will not contact the ground first, and its benefits will last for weeks instead of days.

2) Needs shorter toes



At first glance, this hoof might appear okay, but if you think about the balance and load on the toe, it becomes obvious that the toe is way too long.



The same hoof after a trim to shorten the toe. It does take experience to know how far you can go in one shot; otherwise, take it slowly.

3) Needs bar definition



This hoof displays the common situation where the bars are passive, yet lack clear definition. Because of this, the trimmer may miss potential problems.



The same hoof after the bars have been clearly defined. With this kind of consistent trimming, the hoof will become sounder and healthier.

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