

Barefoot Trimming

Trimming Insights

by James Welz

My trimming decisions are based on a combination of my past education, trial and error throughout many years, and some theories I have developed along the way. It is not enough for me to see a technique work—I need to know how and why it works.

The theories that form the basis for my trimming decisions were featured in my article in THH 27, “A Different View of Hoof Mechanism.” This article provided a “cliff notes” summary of these theories, which I hope to expand upon further in future articles. For now, I will examine their practical application.

Like many, I often trim using my instincts. When you are trimming in the field, it usually isn't necessary to explain your decisions, or to describe your course of action. So while I gave much thought to the cause and effect of trimming techniques, I gave little thought to the continuity of exactly what I did—how it related to steps that could be communicated to others. It was not until I began giving clinics, that a pattern began to emerge. This article will describe the way I currently trim, and will hopefully provide helpful information for owners and professionals from all backgrounds.

Target the problem area

The first thing I do with a foot is assess what the biggest problem area is, and work from there. I locate areas of deviation from normal, and consider those to be my target areas to correct. The steps below are provided in an ordinary and logical sequence, but I will often work out of sequence when addressing problems. Note: each separate hoof is trimmed individually and uniquely. One of the biggest errors people can make is to attempt to trim hooves to “match.” Each hoof will have its own different problem areas to work on.

1) Heels

The typical first step in my trimming is to establish the desired heel height. In most cases, and certainly with a healthy hoof, heels are trimmed to just above the level of the live sole. Live sole, or new sole, is usually quite easy to distinguish from the flaky old sole. I am quite insistent about keeping the heels to a comfortable height: it does no good to over-shorten the heels and cause the horse to stand on its toes.

2) Wall

From the solar surface, I even out the wall as needed. This includes removing protruding walls (wall overstand). Some horses that don't work on hard ground can tolerate a slight wall overstand, while others cannot—I judge this by the stress lines in the hoof wall, and the coronary band connection.

3) Bars

I am very picky about trimming bars. When trimming bar, ONLY the bar should be touched. One of the biggest mistakes that people make is to trim sole at the same time as they trim bar. Another mistake they make is to not touch the bars at all, with the idea that the bars will magically take care of themselves. If the walls need trimming, the bars probably need trimming, too. Bars are an extension of the wall—neither the walls nor the bars should bear too much weight. The same signs of peripheral loading that I can now readily recognize in weight-bearing hoof walls, are also becoming apparent in weight-bearing bars. The bar has a distinct function, which I believe is to limit excessive hoof mechanism, and in order to perform their function, they must be shaped properly.

Bars should taper with the concavity of the hoof, and should bear weight only in the very rear portion. I trim the bars separately, fairly straight, and flat on top. I have had the best results in hoof health when the bars are trimmed to end at the mid-point of the frog. This corresponds with the location where the bar laminae end.

The rear of the bar and heel form a weight-bearing platform of support, or “heel purchase” area. I decided to encourage this after I

observed that most wild horse hooves demonstrated this characteristic.

4) Sole

I want soles to be as thick as they possibly can be. Horses with excess built-up sole will usually present flaky growth that can be “trimmed” with a hoofpick. In most cases, the only sole that is trimmed is a blending in of the area of the trimmed bar. However, when I trim this area, I trim it in a very slightly convex shape, rather than concave. As outlined in my previous article, this matches the actual shape of the underside of the coffin bone, which is really a complex S-curve. The overall concavity of the hoof is evident in the toe area just in front of the apex, which is an area that is not routinely trimmed. I also want soles to be uniform in thickness and not have lumps or unevenness that will cause problems on hard ground.

5) Frog

I usually do not trim the frogs very much, as I want them to be as full as possible. I do, however, trim out the frog's central sulcus, to make sure there is no area for infection.

6) Mustang Roll

My reason for applying the mustang roll is to

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A first time trim (by me) on a 2 yo Quarter horse gelding. The before and afters, all front left, look more dramatic because of the initial excess hoof, but aside from the wall stress and bruising of the quarters from the overloaded walls, these are pretty healthy feet. Notice the relieved quarters in the last photo (scooping)—this is a natural trimming result, which also corresponds with the pushed up hairline at the quarters. With consistent trimming, this will smooth out.

Before



After



Another first-time trim on a fairly healthy hoof (left front), which looks less dramatic because less hoof is removed. But this is no less important! Just like the first example, it is consistency in correct trimming over time which will increase the health and improve the form of these hooves.

relieve areas of stress that show up in the coronary connection, and reduce peripheral loading. I have found that the mustang roll, correctly applied over time, will create a thicker hoof wall, greater concavity, and a full, robust, healthy coronary connection.

The first step of the mustang roll is to address the toe. If the toe is too long, I shorten the toe from



Above: this is the straight back cut I do first, to shorten overgrown toes. If you try to shorten AND round at the same time, you are more likely to make mistakes. Below: this hoof did not have overgrown toes, so it is simply rounded. Here I am, "beveling the bevel."



Before



After

the front (never from underneath, as that would remove toe sole). To start, I apply a 90 degree straight cut to back the toe up until I reach the desired location. Then this cut is rounded off evenly, and from there, the top and bottom are beveled a couple of times until the roll is smooth and rounded (beveling the bevel). I roll the entire outer wall, **toe to heel**. When the mustang roll is applied to the entire foot, a natural scooping of the quarters will appear, without any need to trim for that specifically. It is already in the hoof!

The mustang roll effects are so powerful that trimmers can often achieve fairly good results simply by applying a mustang roll combined with short heels and short toes. This kind of trim is often generically termed a mustang or wild-horse-style trim. However, I believe that trimmers will find even greater success by trimming the bars very carefully and precisely as needed, encouraging a heel purchase area, and shaping the sole out from the bars in a very slightly convex shape. In my experience, these elements increase soundness and hoof health.

Notes

Terrain considerations: I've recently traveled around much of the central and western parts of the U.S. and consider the various terrain to be well-suited to trimming to a mustang model. In wet parts of the Northeast and Southeast, as well as other countries, things may be a little different. Nonetheless, I believe it is paramount to minimize the peripheral load on the hoof wall. With hard ground, this means a bigger mustang roll. On softer ground, watch for stress lines in the hoof (sure signs of peripheral loading) and relieve that wall.

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Measurements: I don't use any measurements when I trim. While originally intended to be useful teaching aids, measurements often cause problems.

Tools: I frequently use power tools to trim, but they are inconsequential to the way I trim. I consider them tools, nothing more and nothing less. I perform the same trim with hand tools or power tools.

It is easy to write down a list of trimming steps—deceptively easy! What is so difficult is conveying the decision process involved—what to remove, when and why, as well as what **not** to remove. It really only takes a few days to learn how to trim a hoof—then it usually takes a few years to learn how to make the complex decisions necessary to trim well. And then, you better to be prepared to keep learning, because that never ends.



Heel Purchase Area



Above: This hoof belongs to a 5 yo gelding that I have trimmed monthly from birth. His feet are so sound, he can be easily ridden over rocks without any conditioning for it. Notice the wide heel bulb—there is no dip at all. This is a very healthy hoof. The "heel purchase" area is clearly visible in a hoof like this.

About the author: James Welz graduated in 2001 from North America's first available year-long barefoot hoofcare professional course (ESHOP/Dr. Hiltrud Strasser). Since then, he has trimmed for a client base of 200 horses per month. These horses (the best teachers) continued his education, which was also greatly influenced by wild horse hooves and the work of Jaime Jackson and Dr. Robert Bowker.