



The stallion advantage

by Andrew Bowe, B.App.Sc, Master Farrier

www.barehoofcare.com

Photos courtesy of The Mayfield Barehoof Rehabilitation Centre

Stallions usually have first class hooves.

They are not often the subject of insightful hoofcare articles. Just feed them like a horse and they will grow good hooves... Actually, it's a combination of constant movement and being an 'entire' horse that produces the hooves nature designed.

Being 'entire' means that stallions have a biological purpose to their existence and they generally enjoy great health and have magnificent coats that shine like no other equines. Hooves are made of keratin just like hair, so in reality are simply an extension of their coat. Healthy coat equals healthy hooves.

On the move

Stallions are naturally inclined to move more than other horses. It appears that the total daily mileage is the missing link between domestic horses and their wild cousins. Movement stimulates the hooves.

Stallions are always on the job; keeping their mob moving and fighting off any competition.

In a perfect world all stallions would get to live with their mob. But in the confines of domestication this happens very rarely, and stallions are instead nearly always kept separate from their mob and kept in solitary.

There will still be plenty of movement, even if only around the perimeter of their paddock or straight up and down a fence line. When the mob of geldings will be sleeping in the sun, the stallion will still be at work.

Hoof management

Management of stallion hooves is predictable and usually straight forward. Constant movement over paddocks has the effect of wearing hooves flat, which if left untrimmed, tend to develop flares.

Bare-hoof care is not so much about lowering the heels and toes, but is mostly concerned with trimming the quarters down to the level of the sole plane and rasping the outer wall away from ground contact at 45° to remove flares and maximise hoof capsule integrity.

See photos 3 and 4

These photos show a typically flat stallion hoof before trimming and a trimmed hoof that is sculptured through the quarters and outer wall to facilitate function.

Excessive wear

The issue most likely to arise with the hooves of stallions is not growing enough new hoof to cope with excessive movement, especially if they are living on abrasive ground.

A whole of body approach

To counteract excessive wearing, new hoof growth can be maximised by supplementation with a 'complete' hoof food. There are several products on the market that contain essential amino acids as well as a broad spectrum of minerals and vitamins.

The effect of excessive movement is amplified if body soreness prevents correct biomechanical action. A classic example of this would be a thoroughbred stallion that raced young (and hard) and sustained permanent sacro-iliac damage for his efforts. He may be unable to move his hind legs with full action, but instead will be inclined to slide his hooves across the ground, thus wearing the heels away excessively.



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Not only can this lead to extremely low heels with a correspondingly overworn and tender frog, but it also sets up 'reversed angles' whereby the hind hooves are less steep than the front hooves which means the hind quarters are less capable of driving the horse forwards.

Fortunately, if a stallion is ridden, he will usually hold and carry himself quite well, even in spite of old injuries. Excessive, incorrect wear is mostly a paddock problem.



Assuming that the stallion is an old fashion kind of guy who still gets to meet his date in 'person', during the breeding season his front hooves should be barefoot and well rounded with no sharp edges that could cut a mare.



Although shoes may seem the only practical solution for stallion hoof protection, barefoot tips are a good compromise if they are mostly wearing away the toes

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Handling stallion feet

What about handling stallions for trimming?

In terms of handling legs for trimming, stallions are mostly well trained and yield lightly to pressure. But if they get annoyed with proceedings and push comes to shove, they can bite or kick better than any mare (or gelding). They should be trimmed by experienced operators.

However, there seems to be an increasing number of horse owners who are doing their own hoof trimming, which means that a lot of stallions are getting trimmed by inexperienced operators. This is not so much of a technical problem because stallions usually have such healthy hooves. It's just that they don't respond well having their legs handled by indecisive, nervous or slow trimmers. Stallions are busy people who don't have time to stand around all day while someone takes forever to trim their hooves. They just want the job finished right now so they can get on with their important work of pacing that fence or giving that mob of geldings over there the evil eye.

Stallions can sense insecurity from way off in the distance. If you are an inexperienced owner trimmer, get in and get the job done and don't worry too much about polishing the hooves to perfection. That way you won't push the boundaries of a stallion's patience and when you are busy with the trimming gear you won't have time to be insecure.

Protection options

It's a simple equation: when hooves wear faster than they grow, they need protection.

Shoes may be the only practical solution for hoof protection in the paddock (although barefoot tips are a good compromise if the hooves are mostly wearing away at the toes).

Hoof boots may not be an option for hoof protection in the paddock. Stallions are notorious for trashing boots, especially if they are pacing a fence and turning hard at either end.

But what about the breeding season? What about when a stallion is serving mares? (assuming of course that he is an old fashion kind of guy who still gets to meet his date in 'person').

The front hooves should be barefoot and well rounded with no sharp edges that could cut a mare.

A stallion simply can't be wearing shoes when serving mares. Back shoes are okay, but definitely no front shoes allowed.

If a stallion is wearing shoes in the paddock, they probably should be removed immediately before breeding commences and not go back on until he has served his last mare (unless there are several weeks in between 'appointments').

If he has had a good diet and been well supplemented with 'hoof food' prior to the breeding season, his hooves should be strong enough and growing fast enough to last the distance.

Hopefully the extra curricular activity of breeding season will reduce the amount of paddock pacing!

Passing on their genes

As an aside, if you are assessing a stallion for conformation as a breeding prospect, be aware that a number of conformational defects can be disguised by corrective shoeing. When checking, be sure to pick each hoof up and see that the shoe has been centred around the frog. It is the frog that points the true direction of a limb. In addition, the presence of any ringbone or unilateral sidebone may indicate long term imbalance that may be conformation related.



In a perfect world all stallions would get to live with their mob



With experienced farriers, stallions are usually quite easy and well behaved to trim. Trouble only seems to arise through complacency (the author is speaking from repeated experience), such as absent mindedness going straight from a mare heavily in season to up close and personal with a hot blooded stallion. Not a good move!

No matter who is down under with the trimming gear, caution should be exercised and a stallion should be held by a competent and attentive handler when his hooves are being trimmed. Mobile phones should be kept out of reach of the handler.

Common sense should also prevail and stallions should not be brought into a place where they may have other things foremost on their minds; places such as

close to mares or the area where they are bred. Stallions are probably best trimmed in their own living quarters.

If a stallion is familiar with either a chain or a rearing bit for handling, then use it for trimming. But use it respectfully. One of the pet peeves of farriers is when a horse holder jerks a chain or a rearing bit without warning or finesse when the farrier is somewhere underneath the horse!

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