Barefooting your Horse

By David Jones

"Riding a horse is not a gentle hobby, to be picked up and laid down like a game of solitaire. It is a grand passion. It seizes a person whole and once it has done so, he/she will have to accept that his life will be radically changed."
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Enabling your horse to be barefoot is also not a hobby to be picked up when convenient. It is a continuing endeavor that you must work on in partnership with your horse.

Horses in the wild condition their hooves by the minute so they are constantly ready to travel across any surface. While domestic horses do not have the same urgency, they also need to condition their hooves in preparation for crossing whatever surface their rider needs. Because they are confined, by humans, to a smaller area with less exposure to varied surfaces, they need human help to keep their hooves ready to travel.

Hooves in the wild become tougher, thicker and calloused through continued exposure to rugged terrain. Domestic horses don't travel the same distances and also are generally on gentler surfaces. For this reason, domestic horses need to maintain as much thickness and toughness of sole as they can. Paring and thinning the sole takes away the protection they have developed. Think of us walking over stones in socks versus boots. Which thickness will feel the sharpness and which protects?

Horses kept in a wet environment such as grass pasture will allow the hooves to take on excess moisture and get softer; which is okay as long as they are ridden on a similar surface. When their now-softer hoof must travel across sharp stones they will not have the toughness they need and they will appear "ouchy." This "ouchiness" is only their reaction of not putting all their weight on a sharp stone in order to protect their soles from damage. They are not lame; just sensitive and protective as we are if put in the same situation. Take your shoes off and walk across sharp stones...do you put your full weight on the sharpness, or do you flinch so as not to cause damage? Horses are the same. Mustangs typically live in desert regions and their hooves are dry and hard to travel painlessly across stones. They cover approximately 25 miles per day over rugged terrain.

Ideally, horses should be kept daily on the same terrain as they will be expected to travel with a rider, but this is seldom possible. Rubber boots are a temporary solution just as we use shoes and boots on our feet. When boots are not used the unconditioned hoof is left unprotected.

Hoof Armor is a cyclically permanent (per trim) solution in that Hoof Armor will protect the hoof giving it a chance to grow thicker for protection and also protect against excess moisture which could make the hoof soft. With a good, balanced conservative trim to keep the hoof walls from getting long and chipping (just like our fingernails and toenails), Hoof Armor will enable your horse to be barefoot and conditioned for any surface you need to travel over.

The "Ouchy" Horse Versus the “Lame” Horse

By David Jones

Imagine walking across the kind of sharp stones commonly found in driveways with thick soled boots. Now, imagine walking (or actually try it) with only your socks on. I guess what you would do in the latter case is try not to put your weight on your tender feet. If you did come down hard it might hurt and it may damage the sole of your foot.

I don't know if these are your memories, but they are mine and also plenty of country kids'. When school let out in Spring they first thing we did (well, maybe the second) was to take our shoes off. However, the first time we hit the street and walked over stones, we appeared contorted trying not to put our bare feet in contact with the sharpness. Our heads bobbed up and down in a subconscious attempt to not hurt. Interesting how lifting your head seemed to help avoid putting your weight down? Didn't work though. It took a long time then to carefully go a short distance to avoid hurting the soles of our feet. As summer progressed the soles of our feet became calloused and tougher...maybe somewhat thicker. Very soon we were able to run (we seldom walked) over the sharpest stones with little discomfort. Why was that? Because our feet soles became more like shoe soles...tougher, thicker and calloused.

So, were we lame in early spring when we first took our shoes off and walked across a surface we weren't accustomed to? Did we think we couldn't ever go without shoes or boots? Did we think we had to stay on the grass or sand to avoid our feet being damaged? No, we "toughed it out" and kept at it until the soles of our feet adapted to be tough enough to travel over the surfaces we wanted to go over. We kept our feet dry as possible because we learned that a wet foot is a soft foot. But, still we chose the easier surfaces if possible when barefoot. We walked on the edges of driveways rather than on the sharp stones. We avoided walking on broken glass, etc. We protected the soles of our feet from damage by not walking over sharp surfaces if we didn't have to.

Why should we expect our horses be different?

The role of HoofArmor is to protect the sole of the hoof until it can become thicker and tougher and allow the horse to travel across reasonable surfaces...as we do.

Hoof Armor: The All-Season Hoof Protection

By David Jones

Winter

After lots of years of farrier work I know that each season has its own challenges as far as traditional hoof protection - horseshoes and rubber boots. I'm sure horse owners are aware that in the northern U.S. most horses will have their shoes pulled for the winter. In the snow belt I remember pulling shoes in October and saying goodbye to the horse until May. With three feet of snow on the ground it was "out of sight, out of mind". Some farriers up north spent the time making horseshoes for spring; some went on welfare for the winter. Rubber Boots are temporary protection and, besides falling off, will retain moisture.

There is a reason for pulling shoes...they come off. If the snow doesn't pull them off, the mud will. Also, if they do stay on snow will ball up under the hoof by catching on the interior ledge making upside-down snow cones which make it very difficult and dangerous for horses to walk. Unless hooves are trimmed throughout the winter, they will be chipped and broken in spring. I remember trying to put toe-weight shoes and pads on Saddlebreds in spring...not much left to nail to.

In contrast, Hoof Armor will protect the hoof throughout the winter. Nothing to fall off, nothing to make snowballs and a preventative for chipping provided the hooves are trimmed regularly. The non-stick surface prevents snow from sticking and also keeps excess moisture from weakening the hoof. Any snow that packs in the hoof ends up coming out in the form of a puck!

Spring

When we're just done dealing with Winter's excessive moisture, along comes a wet spring. Here again, Hoof Armor protects the bottom of the hoof from excessive moisture just as the periople, the shiny coating which naturally grows on the top surface of a hoof, seals out excessive moisture. Probably the worst for hoof health is alternating wet/dry periods. This leads to brittleness and small cracks. Hoof Armor allows the hoof to maintain its internal moisture level by protecting the sole. It is similar to the protection the periople affords the rest of the hoof.

Summer

Next comes summer and maybe a drought. The hooves dry out and try to shrink. Have you ever watched a fresh hoof trimming laid out in the sun? It goes from hoof shaped to a shrunken pretzel shape. A hoof would do that too, if it didn't have the periople to help maintain the existing moisture in the hoof. Hoof Armor in this case, assists the sole in keeping ground moisture levels from negatively effecting the hoof so it remains healthy throughout the dry periods.

Autumn

Autumn can again be excessively wet but the anti-microbial elements in Hoof Armor will help prevent bacteria from attacking the hoof. White Line Disease can be made up of any combination of over 40 fungi, aerobic bacteria or anaerobic bacteria. Hoof Armor has been used to cure White Line Disease and even toenail canker in an elephant. Hoof Armor, along with regular natural hoof trimming, is the way to keep hooves in top shape year-round.

Hoof Armor History

I find that nature's design is what is best. Understanding how to apply nature's design to the domestic horse is key. Not being shod, wild horse's hooves provide an excellent example of how a horse's foot should look. By covering many miles a day, over all kinds of terrain and eating a varied diet they keep their hooves, and teeth for that matter, in condition. Then man, in his infinite wisdom, pens a horse up and does not allow his physiology or personality to be preserved and then wonders why the horse develops behavioral issues.

David Jones, the inventor of Hoof Armor, originally went to college for Psychology and Engineering. Unusual combination; I know. At about 15 he came to own his first horse. The mare was actually purchased for his sister and after the little mare threw her a few times she became David's. I guess that is how the love story began. As an adult, David again owned horses. He too had a farrier who put shoes on which then fell off just when he wanted to ride. David decided to attend farrier school himself! Once graduated from Farrier school and shoeing horses is when the Engineer in David decided that there had to be a better solution and he began the journey to the creation of Hoof Armor. It was 1999 when the formulation began and David's Hoof Armor Patent, which he wrote himself, was awarded in 2002. Since then proving Hoof Armor's ability to sustain its claim was the goal. It was during the 2007 Great Santa Fe Trail Race that David came to know Jason Stasiuk who after two days of racing with boots gave up on boots and switched to using Hoof Armor. Jason has been using Hoof Armor since then and most recently applied it to Cytron, an Arabian, who ran with CeCi Butler Stasiuk aboard, in the 2011 President's Cup Race in Abu Dhabi and placed 20th out of 32 finishers and 100 entrants. An amazing accomplishment for rider, horse and crew! Hoof Armor was also used at the 2010 World Equestrian games on endurance horses out of DJB's (Darolyn Jane Butler) stables. An endurance rider from Sweden also used the Hoof Armor at WEG for a total of five (5) riders. None of the horses experienced any lameness or hoof issues. Hoof Armor was used at Tevis Cup 2012 on a Morgan called Jazz for 55 miles. Unfortunately, the heat got to his human Tera who suffered from heat stroke. Fortunately, Jazz passed all vet checks with straight A's and his hooves were in excellent condition with Hoof Armor as his hoof protection. Tera and Jazz were the first rider and horse duo to ride at Tevis barefoot! Then at the 2013 FHA 100 Pat & Memphis (Tennessee Walker) took 1st Place in the Light-weight division.

David felt that if Hoof Armor's effectiveness could be substantiated in the endurance venue, over some of the toughest courses, and it has, then we could rightfully say to horse owners that Hoof Armor is a viable product for barefoot horses.

I too believe in doing what is natural for the horse. I am sure there are those who will disagree with me and that is okay. I am not suggesting Hoof Armor to the exclusion of other options that are today available, just that Hoof Armor is a viable, simple alternative which certainly supports hoof health and provides today's equine community with a cutting edge product. Hoof Armor combined with a very natural trim that leaves the sole intact is a very natural alternative.