



Barefoot Story Transitioning Gray

An Easy Barefoot Transition for this Houston Police Horse

by Greg Sokoloski

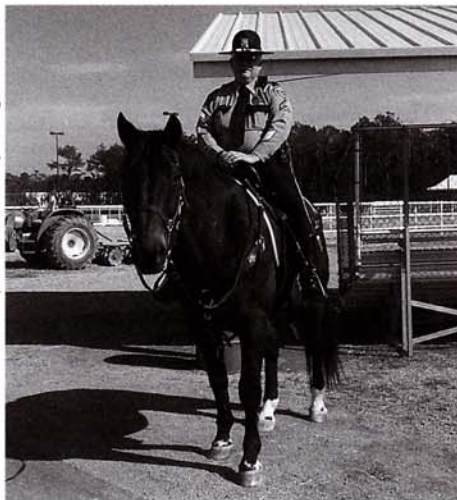
The Houston Police Mounted patrol started using unshod, barefoot police horses in 2004. Starting with one horse and with each successful barefoot working police horse, we have since eliminated the use for metal shoes. In the early stages of 2004, I was the only Officer trimming the horses. I was generally given the frequently lame or "last chance" horses, and I personally had very little knowledge on the shod-to-barefoot transition process. There was very little if any long term turnout at our old 3 acre facility, and a feeding program that was not conducive to healthy hooves, with very little fiscal resources for hoof boots. At the beginning of our barefoot journey, each of the horses that had their shoes pulled were going through a lengthy and painful transition process; however, this gave us the opportunity to continue to learn and get better with each horse.



"Gray" is a 16.3 hand bay Hanoverian gelding who had never been lame, despite being shod most of his life.

Luckily, those in charge at the Houston Police Department recognized the benefits of our barefoot program and supported us by providing the necessary resources for our program to be a continued success. The department allowed two officers, Officer Danny Pryor, and Officer Scott Berry, to enhance their knowledge of hoof form and function and become AANHCP certified barefoot trimmers. Probably the greatest testament of departmental backing we have received with our barefoot program was the planning and construction of our new state of the art facility that was specifically designed with the barefoot horse in mind. We have also received great support from private individuals and companies that have assisted us in obtaining the EasyCare hoofboots that the horses needed to make a successful transition to barefoot. Finally, we have learned and changed our

All photos courtesy Greg Sokoloski



Gray has been the partner of Officer Dennis Spradlin for 8 years now.

feeding program, and with all these resources in alignment, we have proven that any horse, no matter the breed or age, can be successful without metal shoes.

Gray has been the best all-around police horse at our facility since joining the unit in January of 2001. Gray is a 19 year old, 16.3 hands, registered Hanoverian gelding. Gray's owner, Felicia Bures, purchased Gray from Germany as a third level dressage horse. The only issues with Gray was his big movement, which could be intimidating to novice riders. He was also pin-fired in both fronts, due to suspected suspensory problems. Gray had lived a life in Germany like many prized dressage horses: shod all his life, stalled all the time, and arena and show work was all he knew. I evaluated Gray and found a great thinking, calm, and physically well-built and beautiful horse. He passed all his vet checks, went through police training with ease and has been a stalwart police horse in all aspects of police work. He is assigned to Officer Dennis Spradlin. Officer Spradlin has been with Gray for 8 years and has ridden Gray since day one of his time as a police horse, and both make great partners.

We had no lameness problems with Gray, even though he had been shod most of his life, and lived a very unnatural life as a horse. Gray's vet records indicated no issues that would have indicated a need to take off his metal shoes and go barefoot. The decision had been made that all current and future Houston police horses were going to be worked without metal shoes and worked barefoot. We have learned that we were greatly enhancing the lives of our beloved mounts, and knew we could get more longevity from our horses by having them all barefoot. Gray's metal shoes were pulled April 2, 2008,

at the age of 18, and his natural trim started.

With all the necessary steps now in place (Officer Pryor and Officer Berry are certified AANHCP trimmers, greater turnout and the availability of using the Parsons Mounted Cavalry at Texas A&M horse pastures, a better feed program, and EasyCare boots) before pulling his metal shoes, Gray has not missed a day of patrol, a big event, or been down for lameness. His hooves look great, he looks great, and although he is not the same big muscled-up 11 year old of 8 years ago, he is extremely happy and begs all visitors for his treats. Gray is also funny in that he seems uncomfortable being turned out in the herd. He is more comfortable being in his run and stall, where he is catered to, and not having to fend with the herd for his meals—typical behavior for a horse stalled all his life.

Much of our equipment and tack for the horses is purchased through donations by private individuals and companies. If you would like to make a donation to the Houston Police Department Mounted Patrol, please feel free to contact me, Officer Greg Sokoloski, at Gregory.sokoloski@cityofhouston.net and I will advise you on how to make a donation.

About the author: Gregory Sokoloski, Police Officer, City of Houston, Texas, Assigned to the Houston Police Mounted Unit since 1984



Gray's front (above) and hind (below) hooves. He's not missed a day of work since going barefoot in April, 2008.



The Horse's Hoof, News for Barefoot Hoofcare