

A Lame Story

In 30 years of riding I had never been directly involved with laminitis, it was some thing that happened to other people's horses. In June 2003 that was about to change and also set me on a path I would never have anticipated, or chosen at my age!

In the later part of May, my wife's Arabian mare, Fetra, threw a shoe and pulled up lame. No big deal, but after a two week layoff she seemed worse not better. Our farrier Chris, announced that it looked like she had sub-clinical laminitis and he had seen it often around the Arabian Gulf when the heat and humidity kicked in. He pulled the front shoes and suggested we cut her food to hay and water for a week or two...she'd probably pull out. He pulled the rear shoes also and then left for his homeland of Australia and had a car accident that assured he would not be returning for some time.

I now fully understand the distress and desperation of a horse owner who watches as this disorder slowly but steadily cripples your horse. My wife, who is a certified equine massage therapist, felt helpless and hopeless to the extent of tears. Our local vets are basically small animal practitioners and were of little or no help.

We first turned to a friend who is a holistic equine specialist and solicited her help. She invited us to join a Yahoo group called "Healthy Happy Horse", where she had published a small e-book which had material on laminitis. We knew, vaguely, that laminitis was often associated with grain overload, but we now discovered the relationship between the digestive system and laminitis. Fetra at this time had been on a light dosage of Fast Track, a livestock pro-biotic. We now supplemented a Cell Tech Spectrabiotic in the hope of jump starting the digestive system. We also introduced MSM as a natural anti-inflammatory along with therapeutic doses of Farriers Formula in the hope of encouraging new hoof wall growth.

None of these showed any apparent affect on the horse's condition. In retrospect, the introduction of the Spectrabiotics was a good thing, however as we found out later, the Farriers Formula was Alfalfa bases and may not have been the best idea. But, we now entered the period of various abscesses and the hoof wall below the coronary band was soft and rubbery. On one visit our vet cut deeply into the sole to try and relieve an abscess. Having inflicted a fair amount of pain on the horse she was now lamer than ever. We decided no more vets!

The next couple of weeks found us surfing the internet for any hopeful information we could find. We tried just about everything; Three different homeopathic remedy's, Co-Enzyme Q10 (more expensive than gold dust), magnet boots, a formula of herbs called Formula 11 and a lot of prayer. Some days we thought we saw improvement only to see relapse the following day. Fetra's condition oscillated like a yo-yo as did our hope.

We are now facing another problem. It had been over eight weeks since Fetra's last trim. and our farrier was laid up in a hospital in Australia. Then came the break in our luck. Our equine specialist friend suggested we might do the trimming ourselves till we got a new farrier and recommended we look at a book by a guy called Jaime Jackson

On hearing the name, my wife Debbie, announced that she had a book by Jaime on her shelves. The copy of "The Natural Horse" was extracted and became compulsive reading over the next few days. With a name "Google" led us quickly to The Star Ridge site and the HOG, the red book and the two supporting videos were ordered and sent by courier to a friend in the US who

was about to return to Saudi Arabia. The material arrived and all of our spare time for the next three days was devoted to study. The Red Book in particular, had our heads spinning as we reviewed all aspects of our horse management.

Having watched both video tapes three times I scoured the stables and gathered together a set of old tools and commenced my first trimming. With a few breaks to reference the H.O.G. I had all four hooves done in a lightning two and a half hours. To say my rasping was cautious would be an English understatement. I'd like to say that she stepped away from the trim more comfortably, but the truth is that we could see no discernable difference. I was already looking at a hoof in a different manner. Most noticeable at this stage was that the coronary band was soft and mushy for half a centimeter below the hair line (see pic)



Fetra's hoof after the first trim

When the lameness had set in we have confined her to her stall, not wanting to move a hurting horse. We now started moving her. She was hand walked for 15 minutes, three times a day, albeit in fits and starts. She was three legged lame so she would take a couple of steps and then stand there for a minute or two. She was also returned to the running pen and the company of other horses. This was summer time so the horses are turned out from dusk till dawn and brought in during the hottest part of the day.

About 3 days later is when we started to see improvement. Her heels were now short and on our sands the frog was fully engaged. One of the most noticeable aspects of her transition over the next few weeks was that her frog grew flatter and wider. She steadily improved and was back under saddle, walking out, in Sept. In Oct she was back into light work at all three gaits and recommenced her dressage training.



Hoof in September – Note heavy roll vs. DTA

The laminitis event left rings around both front hooves. Above these rings the hoof proceeded to grow at a steeper angle. About this time, Nov, I arrived in Arkansas to study with Jaimie, who of course, explained to me about the “healing angle”. Fetra has been trimmed to maintain the healing angle since then. Of course below the laminitic rings we got deviant toe angles. Although she was moving soundly, her solar dome remained shallow and she was flat footed by comparison with our other horses which were all now on the Natural Trim.

By May the laminitic rings had reached the base of the hoof wall and were trimmed away. When she came due for her trim in June, low and behold, she had started to develop some concavity. Five weeks after her previous trim, the toe now had a tight white line round to the quarters. The hoof wall had maintained its mustang roll, which is typical for our horses moving in this sand. And the sole behind the toe was not only more concave, but showed the hardness and scratch marks which I see in our other naturally trimmed horses.

One of the consequences of reading the “Red Book” is that during last winter, the fencing separating our six running pens was opened up, at alternating ends. We now have a large running pen with the old fencing creating baffles. Although we had, not unexpectedly, a few bites and bruises as the pecking order was established, the horses now have the benefit of more space and more company. The horses definitely get to move around more in this herd environment, and it’s even been quite entertaining watching some of them “strut their stuff” as they challenge each other. Turn out has now been maximized. They still have to be brought in during the heat of the summer days, but during the winter they are out almost 24 hours a day.



Happy horse – happy owner (Deb with Fetra)

We believe that Fetra’s recovery is directly related to Jamie’s work, but she’s not the only one of our horses to have benefited. Half of our horses at the stables are now barefoot and our horses have the strongest hooves that they’ve ever had. The results of this trimming technique have been so satisfying, that I intend to continue and I am pursuing the AANHCP certification. Most recently we had another success in our sister stable in Dhahran, but that’s another story...