DISCUSSION

THE BARE BONES OF FARRIERY
Connecting the evidence

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"Words carry with them chain reactions, like a stone that is thrown into a pond".

When I first set down my plan for determining A P Balance (Issue No. l Forge94*),* I knew I was entering into a debate and embarking upon a journey. What I didn't know was if any one would read or take notice of what I had to say. The debate had already been started and others were to join. The issues, which have featured prominently in this open discussion, have been the natural balance technique (four point shoeing) and the T-square Theory. There is opposition to both those schools of thought and exponents of those two plans have sought to defend their own doctrine, so who is right? One thing is for sure, there can be no progress without opposition but if we are to bring about a new revolutionary understanding, we need to cease all haphazard opposition and start connecting the evidence.

Gene Ovnicek, a farrier from across the Atlantic, whose name is closely linked to the natural balance techniques, is someone who is being listened to. He took part in a debate organised by the Bedford, Reading and Wealden Districts of the NAFBAE on the 22nd May 1999 (a report may be found in the August issue *Forge).* Mr. Ovnicek questioned and even doubted the validity of the two main and generally accepted principles applied in farriery today.

- The pastern should line up with the dorsal hoof wall.
- Medial-lateral balance is achieved by using the cannon bone, pastern and heel bulbs as a guide.

The response to this type of questioning has been mixed, with the messages coming from the higher echelon in our industry being far from clear and at times down right confusing.

The official response to my own line of questioning directed at the T-square Theory has been that "until the day arrives when someone can identify exactly the horses and times that it does not work and accurately describe how we should trim them, the WCF will both teach and examine to the T-square standard".

Mr. Martin J. Deacon FWCF reinforces this stance *(Forge* April 2000) by saying "when the practical application of the T-square is put to the test scientifically with both the force plate and the Mac Reflex system it shows most emphatically that those horses with poor medial lateral balance relative to the T-square gave poorer readings on both the direction of force and the limb activity".

Whilst I would not presume to challenge the data provided by the force plate and the Mac Reflex system, I would challenge however some of the conclusions which I assume have been drawn from such information. Facts are often open to interpretation and may not always reveal the whole truth. For example, it can be both statistically and scientifically proven that people with small feet are less likely to be literate - a statement which makes one wonder about one's own shoe size, until it is realised that the majority of people with small feet are, in fact, babies and children. We need to remember although the facts are the facts; the truth behind them can change with a different line of questioning.

Many well-known and respected practitioners have, within this journal and through the pages of the popular press, reiterated certain common observations.

- When the hoof is assessed with the T-square prior to trimming, it is quite usual for the lateral side to be viewed as high and that often the T-square rule cannot be achieved without artificially raising the medial side.
- During the acts of progression, it is not uncommon for the hoof to land lateral side first, resulting in concussion, with the medial side then being subject to compression.

Although I agree that which we see daily may not be theoretically ideal, my own views differ from those who advocate the T-square Theory, in that they then try to change the hooves they are confronted with, where as I try to manage the hooves that I work upon. As radical as it may seem, I believe farriery is primarily about management and not about correction.

DISCUSSION

"Grant as the serenity to accept that which we cannot change, courage to change the things we can and the wisdom to know the difference"

Many of the secrets and myths surrounding hoof balance would seem to remain unexplained but sometimes just a word or a phrase can open up a whole new understanding and break new ground to reveal a new truth.

Dr. Gail Williams, speaking at the BEVA / NAFB&AE Conference at Stoneleigh, provided us with two invaluable phrases, "Magnitude of load" and "Frequency of load". On their own their importance may not seem too obvious, they may even appear to be throw-away lines without depth or true meaning but link them to other words, such as concussion or compression and their importance becomes more apparent.

For a long time now foot balance, although recognised as being the very essence of good farriery, has been something shrouded in mystery, something secret and personal, something that made the difference between a good horseshoer and a good farrier.

Somehow we need to work our way through this mystery, chaos and confusion to establish some rules or guides that we can all rely on. One of the ways that we can do this is by finding out how the limb works and the best way to do that is to take it apart. Which is precisely what I have been attempting to do, in the February issue *Forge* 1997, I looked at the mechanics of joints. The joints are **not** like door hinges and the horse's legs are **not** like the legs of a table.

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Authors are at last beginning to recognise that the limbs we work upon are three dimensional but there is a fourth dimension which they fail to take into account - time. We have to consider habits of stance, the acts of movement and progression, growth and, of course, the changes to the hoof, which are brought about by these influences. Foot trimming has to accommodate for all these effects, which are instrumental in changing the form of such a plastic structure.

The mechanics of movement are complex and are related to an animal's individual conformation. Despite the uniqueness of any horse, however, its gait is influenced by natural laws, which facilitate forward motion with minimum effort. This means that as speed increases, the limbs tend to converge in order to centralise support and minimise the shifting of weight from side to side, to off set any body roll. It may not be important to know how much or how little the limbs converge but it is important to know that it does happen.

The bones lie in a three-dimensional position and during the acts of progression; the limbs are drawn towards a mid-line of travel. However, during stance and particularly the act of grazing the hooves are placed much further from the mid-line and it is this which is the very crux of our dilemma.

The problems involved in finding acceptable definitive guides to foot trimming are wide ranging. Nevertheless wild horse studies suggest that those hooves which are a reflection of conformation and movement manage very well and it has to be said that these are the horses that haven't even seen a T-square!

"Ripples will continue to cross the pool long after the stone has been cast".