

THE BARE BONES OF FARRIERY

Changing attitudes

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'Man has demonstrated over and over again that the last thing he wants are new ideas, even when they are desperately needed. Ideas are welcomed so long as they do not contradict theories on which scholarly reputations have been erected'.

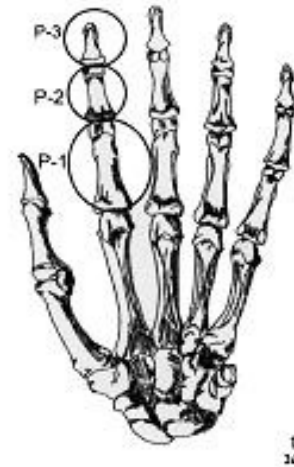
Louis L. Amour

Foot balance, although considered to be fundamentally about the animal's welfare, would also seem to be about reputations and livelihoods. The act of farriery is very much a practical act and many practitioners have thought horseshoeing starts on the anvil. Not so, theory is where it begins. Without theory, practice cannot be refined and farriery begins with hoof trimming and foot balance.

Medial-lateral balance is, at last, being discussed and farriers are attempting to analyse and justify what they do. Recently, I spoke with a fellow farrier and he told me of his conversation with a strong exponent of the T-square theory. He was asked "So, just what do you look at when you are assessing medial-lateral balance". The farrier gave his detailed reply. "Ah!" said the farrier posing the question, "So you do use the T-square theory", "No" was the reply. "The T-square is a tool, this is the theory".

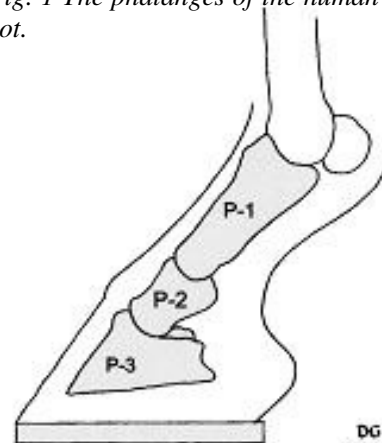
The hoof is situated at the distal end of the limb. It forms a robust outer casing, which protects the bones that are situated inside the hoof capsule. Effectively the hoof is just a thick layer of skin, with a form, which is being constantly modified through growth, wear, compression and concussion, as well as any act of farriery it may receive.

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Fig. 1 The phalanges of the human hand and equine foot.



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The bones of the limb share certain similarities and characteristics to those bones we have in the human hand and foot, with the horse in effect standing upon its middle finger.

The three of the joints commonly referred to as the fetlock, pastern and pedal joints share the same classification as those inter-phalangeal joints of the complicated with a controlled range of movement, which changes the relationship between the axis of each bone located either distally or proximally. This can be demonstrated quite easily by viewing our own hands.



Fig. 2 A handy demonstration of how ginglymus joints control the direction of movement.

If we were to hold up our right hand, palm away from us, we would see the tip of our first finger turning slightly to the right. Should we then turn our palm to face us the tip of that finger would tilt to the left and, finally, if we then bent that finger towards us it would, once again, tilt to the right. This exercise demonstrates quite clearly that, as the phalanges move, the relationship between the axes of each of the bones is under constant change; see "Do we trim to the right angle?" (August99). Another product of this demonstration that it legitimately proves that, as a theory, the T-square is nonsense, so why then should it seem to work?

Haydn Price & Rod Fisher, with their ground-breaking book, "Shoeing for Performance", provided us with both evidence and suggestion; the lead and the courage to look more closely at accepted principles as well as question our own daily practices. Written over ten years ago, at times it does show it's age, but amongst some of it's most innovative explanations is an illustration which is central to our understanding of why so many experts believe that farriers in general fail to trim enough off the lateral branch of the hoof wall. The illustration is of a symmetrical horse whose centre of gravity results in a greater force being applied to the medial side of the leg and hoof wall. This concept is then echoed much later on in the book, in a passage on corns, the writers say, "the inside heel is more usually affected since the pressure is greater here than on the outside, as the centre of gravity of the horse is midway between the legs". This almost constant loading of the medial side results in that which we should all be familiar with, compression.



Fig.3. The centre of gravity results in a greater force being applied to the medial side of the leg and hoof wall. After 'Shoeing for Performance', by Price & Fisher.

The magnitude and frequency of the compressive forces on both the limb and hoof is an aspect of farriery, which has been so little understood for all too long. Tony Gonzales, of "Proper Balance Movement" fame, has probably provided us with the best explanation of what compression is and does, when described compression as being a "closing force", a force that reduces.

Is it any surprise then, that so many experts have concluded that, that which is a natural phenomenon is a result of inept farriers? I think it is. Fortunately, there are farriers out there who are thinking and questioning. The truth will be found.

Two such farriers are Gene Freeze and Ernie Gray, both from the USA, and it is because of their work on medial-lateral balance and handedness that I know a better universal understanding will be found and that one day it will become everyday knowledge.

"A new idea is first condemned as ridiculous and then dismissed as trivial until finally, it becomes what everybody knows".

Wm. James

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