

A. P. BALANCE

Are odd feet normal?

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Farriery extends beyond the application of metal shoes and the redressing of hoofs. We are technicians, who are entrusted with the care of protecting and preserving the soundness of the hooves we work on. To fulfil our obligations to both owner and horse, it is our duty to be thoroughly familiar with all aspects, which influence our task.

In the January issue of Forge magazine I presented to the membership observations which I believe have an important bearing on the formation of the horse's hoof conformation. Horse owners and riders have long since been aware that horses are right or left handed and yet to some farriers and vets it would seem to be one of the best kept secrets. Odd feet cannot simply be put down to bad farriery, nor can it be assumed that good farriery, no matter how soon started can correct such a deep-seated problem, the origins of which could lie in the pre-birth physiology of the animal.

The horses I described in the January issue displayed non matching front hooves due to favouring a singular stance whilst grazing, however that is not to say that all horses with odd feet graze in such a manner. But it would be fair to assume that their hoof conformation is formed by similar attitudes either congenital or acquired and we need not look far for other examples.

The grazing stance is only part of a range of movements and postures favoured by any particular animal, although whilst these unlimited movements and unique attitudes may remain undocumented, the horse's gaits have merited particular attention. In this issue I would like to impress upon the reader how during the asymmetrical gaits, leading legs and non leading legs subject influences on the formation of the hoof structure and that the grazing stance (Some odd, but not so strange feet), bares a remarkable resemblance to the leading leg, non-leading leg configuration (Fig. 1).

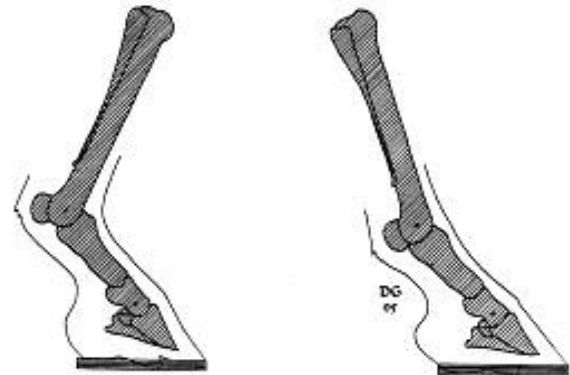


Fig.1 A diagrammatic view of the skeletal structure during the grazing stance.

As the horse canters or gallops, the phases of movement are such, that as the non-leading leg lands, it does so with the aid of the opposite hind limb (Fig. 2), the weight of the animal being distributed between the two. The effects of this sequence of events are that although the compression to the heels of the hoof is reduced, the toe is subject to full weight bearing.

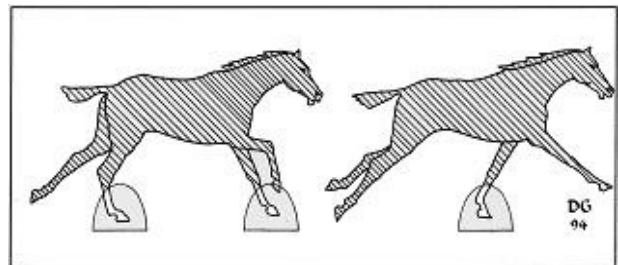


Fig.2 The gallop: Right leg lead. Near fore, non-lead leg landing followed by phase prior to leading leg landing.

However the leading leg lands supporting the full weight of the horse throughout the entire stance phase of the limb, the body mass pivoting over the stationary hoof (Fig. 3).

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Left to their own devices, all horses tend to have a preference to lead with one particular limb, which riders also find more comfortable. However the continuous favouring of one particular lead, results in the hoof of the lead leg taking on a flatter form, whilst the hoof of the non-lead leg assumes an upright rotated conformation.

To summarise, we need to appreciate that there are those horses, who by being naturally uneven or one-sided will be inherently lame, unless the constant attention to detail is honoured by both the owner and farrier in the maintenance of hoof balance. Although we have to accept there will always be some unlevel or mechanically unsound horses, there are exceptions that prove the rule. Racehorses who are afflicted by this big foot little foot syndrome, seem to manage quite well providing the flat hoof or leading leg is on the inside of the circuit. So, are odd feet normal? Only you can answer that question.

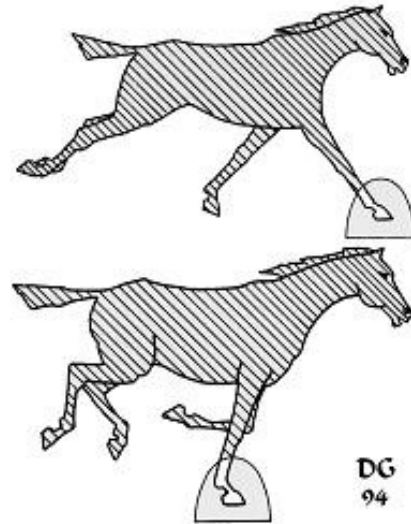


Fig. 3 The gallop, right leg lead, the off fore lands and the bodymass rotates over the hoof-capsule.

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