

HELP FOR THAT LAST FURLONG



Standardbred shoer says small improvements can pay off big at the track

By Pat Tearney, Managing Editor

Steve Stanley, who shoes Standardbred racehorses at the Red Mile in Lexington, Ky., likes to say that “little changes go a long way” at the racetrack.

“Anyone who knows racehorses knows that sore feet will stop them in the last furlong of a race,” he told attendees during a presentation at the International Hoof-Care Summit in Cincinnati, Ohio, earlier this year. “They start short-stepping, interfering. They can’t reach their level of maximum performance, and that

keeps them from beating horses they normally could. It’s the last part of the race where sore feet show up the most.

*“Sore feet will stop
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And if you can help them, that’s where the improvement will show up as well.”

Stanley described a particular case history that illustrates his point. It

involved a filly with a weak heel — one of the more common problems he sees at the track.

Weak Heel, Weak Showing

“She had weak heels, with not enough support in the back,” says the shoer from Versailles, Ky. “If you looked at where the shoe stopped, the rest of the foot and the hairline were sinking right off that ledge of support.”

Stanley defines an underrun heel as one on which the heel angle is 5 degrees or more lower than the toe angle. In this case, the weak heel had



NOT WELL-HEELED. The weak heel (upper left) in this picture was bruised and had a suppurating corn. The hoof wall had also remodeled due to the heel problem.



SHARING THE LOAD. Stanley trimmed the hoof to move the landing area back so concussion would be distributed over a larger area. He shod the horse with a Grand Circuit Stabilizer Plate to share the weight between the frog and the heels.

resulted in a corn in the medial heel.

“The heel of the hoof on the lateral side is being pushed in and forward at the same time and the sidewall is flaring out,” he says. “This doesn’t look like much of a bruise, but it became a suppurating corn. It abscessed. She was very lame. There

with the heels. He accomplished this with a Grand Circuit Stabilizer Plate with a rim pad.

“You could use a heart bar for this, but this is a racehorse,” he says. “A heart bar will affect the performance of a race-

horse. I use a lot of these Stabilizer Plates. They don’t affect the landing surface of the package, and I can run them back behind the heel to provide more support and also leave room for heel expansion.”

“I’m always trying to talk myself into putting more heel length under a horse...”

was a lot of trauma to those heels.”

Stanley says the first thing he tried to do in this case was take some of the stress of landing off of the heel area.

“I want to move the landing area back and increase the area that’s involved. I think if you do that, you dissipate the concussion of a landing over a bigger area,” he explains.

He also dressed back the toe a little. Stanley notes that in Standardbreds, he often sees 2 to 2 1/2 times the thickness of hoof wall at the toe that he does in the sides of the hoof.

“This one wasn’t too bad, but you have to dress that back and get the hoof into normal balance,” he says.

Share The Load

Once the landing area has been moved back through trimming, Stanley wants the frog to share the load at impact

There are times when the package may need a little help.

“Sometimes you’ll get a horse with a very flat foot and a proud frog sticking up out of it,” he says. “You’ll put your bar shoe together and set it on there and you can’t even get your shoe to touch the heels. I address that with a rim pad – of whatever thickness I need – to level that out and share the load between the frog and the heels.”

Stanley always keeps hoof-pastern

“Put two nails in there, tack it on, then walk around the horse,” he suggests. “Look at the horse. Look at the foot and think about what’s going to happen. You need to think about what’s going to happen to that foot you’ve just shod after a growth period.”

“More is more,” Stanley says, is related to a somewhat similar phase, “think big.”

“In getting the shoe back under the horse, I’m always thinking big,” he

“If you get that foot balanced and support the entire foot capsule, you will support the limb...”

alignment in mind when pulling the heels back.

“I like to tell the client that I need to get behind the bruises in a case like this,” he says. “I need to leverage behind where the foot is taking the stress. But hoof-pastern alignment is the key to minimizing stress in these structures at race speed — or in any other performance.”

More Is More And Think Big

One of Stanley’s mantras is the phrase “more is more.”

“That’s just a key for myself,” he explains. “I’m always trying to talk myself into putting more heel length under a horse. If I’m in between shoe sizes, I always want to go with the larger size.”

If Stanley finds himself in doubt, he takes a moment to observe and reflect.

says. “It’s easy to trim a foot, look at the perimeter hoof wall you’ve just trimmed, then shoe it. But you need to think about the hoof capsule above your trim, why it remodeled and where it should be. You need to think about what the hoof should have been like before all this remodeling started.”

A big part of what Stanley was trying to do in this case was provide more structure to support the entire horse. He left a lot of the heel of his shoe-and-plate combination sticking out beyond the heel bulbs.

“If you get that foot balanced and you support the entire foot capsule, you will in turn support the limb above that,” he says. “I always try to remember some advice I heard from Doug Butler (of LaPorte, Colo.). He said be a horseshoer, not a foot shoer.”



BEFORE AND AFTER. At left is how the horse was initially shod and at right is the after shot with the Stabilizer Plate added. Note the added heel support.

Think Bigger

In this particular case, Stanley had to think even bigger. After his initial shoeing, he says, the horse ran well for two races, but then began to experience heel problems again. Stanley decided

there was still unsupported structure behind the shoe and moved the heel back even further. The added support resulted in the filly immediately becoming sounder. He noticed that growth in the heel bulb area also improved once the

area received more support.

Stanley also credited Scott Morrison, the veterinarian who heads up the podiatry clinic at Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital in Lexington, Ky., for helping with a deep digital flexor tendon problem.



EVEN MORE SUPPORT. Stanley says his initial shoeing job, shown at left, didn't supply as much heel support as the horse needed. He later reshod the horse providing support even further back for the heels. At right, is a look at the package from the rear. Stanley says the changes resulted in a sounder horse, more uniform growth pattern and improved performance — as shown by the horse's victory in a big stakes race.

“He also recommended that we wedge her up,” he says. “We did. And it paid off.”
That it did. Wedged up and racing on

a healthier heel due to the added support and attention, the filly set a world record at the prestigious Jugette race in

Delaware, Ohio, earning a purse in excess of \$300,000.

Little things pay off indeed.

