

Know foot, know horse

OUR EXPERT

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The foot plays a critical role in equine health and welfare. This fact, combined with the significant impact that farriers and owners can have on hoof health, has resulted in the veterinary practices within the XLEquine group launching a campaign.

Called 'Keeping one step ahead', the campaign is supported by World Horse Welfare and aims to encourage vets, farriers and horse owners to work together to improve hoofcare and keep horses sound.

The hope is to promote close collaboration between these parties so horses receive the very best of care. This will be achieved by member practices forging a closer working relationship with farriers through a series of seminars and workshops and by educating horse owners.

Improve your knowledge

The old adage 'No foot, no horse' remains as true as ever. However, through the campaign we want to change this to 'Know foot, know horse'.

An information booklet for owners has been produced and XL member practices will be running training workshops.

Find out how a new campaign is aiming to get owners, farriers and vets working closer together, for the good of the horse

The EquineSkills Foot Care courses will help owners understand the anatomy of the hoof and its surrounding structures and find out how this information relates to their own horse.

These sessions will cover:-

- Being able to spot basic diseases of the foot;
- Understanding what you can do to keep your horse's feet healthy;
- The different types of shoes that are available and when they should be used;
- How to perform basic procedures, such as applying a poultice;
- Assessing penetrating injuries to the foot.

The influence of technology

Advances in diagnostic imaging have given new insights into the causes of lameness and have enabled vets and farriers to develop solutions that maximise equine welfare and positive outcomes.

A thorough understanding of the equine foot is required as this forms the foundation of both diagnosis and treatment.

This is as important in the management of a chronic laminitic pony that has not received the correct treatment to the international equine athlete requiring fine-tuning of his foot balance.

The first example has obvious implications to equine welfare while the second is concerned with optimising performance.

The unique structure of the foot is closely related to its function and allows the 500kg of the average horse to be carried at speed over varying terrain.

At a gallop the horse puts double his weight through his foot, a structure that is less than 15cm in diameter, twice every second.

The foot is a complex structure composed of a hoof capsule encasing the pedal bone, navicular bone and part of the short pastern bone.

It has a series of tendons and ligaments that provide stability and function but also connects the foot with the muscle bulk of the upper limbs.

There is a fine network of blood vessels, together with a complicated pattern of nerves.

A small abnormality in any one of these structures can on its own cause lameness or set off a downward spiral of events within the foot that ultimately result in lameness. It is for this reason that foot issues make up the vast majority of all lamenesses seen.

Issues that can occur within the foot include abscesses, canker, pedal bone fracture, hoof imbalance, cracks, laminitis and navicular syndrome. And the list goes on.

Although some of these problems cannot be avoided, the majority can be reduced through good management and farriery.

Basic measures of management such as picking feet out thoroughly on a daily basis and regular farriery attention are often all that is required.

Good farriery is vital

When talking about foot care it is imperative that we look at the valuable role played by farriers.

The UK is lucky to have a large population of trained farriers that work to a high standard.

These standards are safeguarded by the rigorous training, apprenticeship and examination programme overseen by the Farriery Registration Council and the Worshipful Company of Farriers.

Regular routine trimming and shoeing is vital for foot health and a good working relationship between farrier and vet will reap huge rewards.

This relationship benefits the day-to-day care of the horse's foot and is critical when a lameness issue has been diagnosed and a treatment plan is being drawn up that requires remedial farriery.

Close collaboration at this stage between vet and farrier, each having an important input,



Courses are being held to boost owners' knowledge of hoofcare issues

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ensures the horse stays the central focus of attention and receives the very best of care.

The key features of this are good communication and an understanding and appreciation of each others areas of expertise.

Some of the common conditions that require remedial farriery include caudal hoof pain, coffin joint osteoarthritis, sidebones, laminitis, hoof wall cracks, sheared heels and fractured pedal bones.

Obviously, each case is viewed on its merits and differences in approach occur depending on the age of the horse and his particular job, together with the stage and progression of the clinical condition. ■

● XLEquine is the equine division of XLVets, a group of independent practices. For more information, visit: www.xlequine.co.uk.

The booklet 'Keep One Step Ahead' is available to purchase at a cost of £2.50 per copy. To order, visit the website above.

EquineSkills Foot Care courses cost £40 per person and will be held around the UK. For a full list of dates and venues, visit: www.equineskills.co.uk.

Learn online

World Horse Welfare, which is supporting the campaign, has compiled a series of short, online films aimed at improving horse owners' knowledge of hoofcare issues. You can view the films at www.youtube.com/horsecharity.

