

## Hoof care following Dr. Straßer – a new view on our method 2010 “Radicalism“ versus “effectiveness“ and “comfort“ versus ”bad compromise“

A rationale discourse by Chris Gehrman



Strasser hoof care specialists often find themselves under close scrutiny by the rest of the “horse world“. Time and again we get to hear that horses which have been trimmed following our method cannot walk well anymore, that they bleed while being trimmed, that they “walk like on eggs” etc. I find this both sad and futile. Furthermore, I can absolutely not confirm that horses that are trimmed correctly following our method have significant problems. On the contrary, it has been proven possible for many years that horses either get well or remain well and happy to walk and run once they are being introduced to our method of trimming. This goes for horses at customer’s stables, and of course for horses being treated at our hoof care centers, where they can benefit from the improved living conditions available to them.

For a long time I have tried to understand the phenomenon described above, in order to be able to find a solution to this discrepancy. The problem arises from a lack of precision during trimming, but also from the fact that the whole process of a hoof “getting well” again, i.e. becoming healthy, is not sufficiently well understood immediately after the education to become a hoof care specialist, i.e. by hoof care novices. Therefore, the whole process of a hoof “re-forming” itself is not taken into consideration well enough when the overall strategy for the hoof care for any given horse is contemplated.

Furthermore, we are generally confronted with the fact that a hoof care novice has not acquired the feeling for the fine nuances of trimming yet. Here we have a definite lack in the supervised trimming of horses for novices to this day. I would like to point out that it is my intention to scrutinize us, and our method, critically and even radically, in order to find out why we so often get bad publicity, even though we help so many horses. It is my conviction that only through thorough analysis of “what is” can we develop it further.

During the education to become a Strasser hoof care specialist we have learned the defining parameters for healthy hooves. 99,9% of the hooves seen during this time by the students do not concur with these parameters, i.e. are deformed in some way and thus not healthy. The hoof care novice trims, and afterwards the horse is lame.

This happens, because it is difficult to convey how to “play” with the correct parameters and how to both strategically and creatively diagnose each horse trimming wise, taking into account the *status quo* of each individual horse. To prepare a horse and its hooves for a process, and to start this process with a feeling for the horse is the correct and most beneficial way to be followed here. Until now we have probably lacked the ability to correctly and sufficiently take into account the processes involved in a “re-forming” hoof. Therefore, I have introduced the terms of “**progressive-effective**” **action** as well as the term of “**comfort**” within the Strasser hoof care method.

The following points have to be considered when making a differentiated diagnosis of a “patient horse”, if these new concepts stated above should be followed:

1. If the horse’s hooves are severely deformed, like in the case of founder linked with separation, I have to abstain from progressive aspects of trimming in order to get the coffin bone in a position parallel to the ground as soon as possible. Has a hoof with a steep position of the coffin bone regained some hoof mechanism, the correct position of the coffin bone has to be obtained as quickly as possible, in order to prevent the built-down of the bone and in order to make it possible that the new suspension in the lamina can develop as speedily as possible. Progressive trimming is in cases like this not beneficial – therefore, trimming has to be effective to 100%.

2. Are a horse’s hooves slightly off the parameters for a healthy hoof (for example rotation combined with heel contraction) I do not have to introduce all desired parameters at once. Instead, I can treat the horse in such a manner that it remains both able and happy to move. In such a progressive process I can see to it that the trimming-induced stimulation of the hoof provides adequate hoof mechanism. The widening of the hoof and the correction of the position of the coffin bone towards being parallel to the ground can then follow progressively and be stretched over a certain time period. Within our holistic perspective on hoof care it is – in a case like this – beneficial that the horse remains happy to move and that it does not tense up because of unnecessary pain. This also reduces the risk for colic and prevents the horse from losing weight and muscle mass. Furthermore, the horse owner will not have to deal with negative responses from within his or her immediate society. All this requires regular and sufficient movement of the horse in question. Experience with the therapeutic “automatic horse walker” that was developed by us at my hoof care centre indicates the strong relevance of the requirement for movement. The time period that horses have to remain in care at my hoof care centre has been significantly shortened since the oval “automatic horse walker” (24 m x 13 m) has been in use. In it, the horses walk some 15 km every day. Hoof abscesses have become rare, because many necroses are being absorbed through the increased blood circulation.

Like many of my colleagues I have come to realize that over many years the terms “clinic trimming” and “non-clinic trimming” have been and still are in use. This does and cannot exist! What does exist are horses that need frequent trimming and special circumstances because of their problems. One has to consider that a hoof care centre does provide more possibilities for helping a horse with severe problems, like for example more frequent trimming, improved observation, sufficient daily movement, varying grounds. What also exists are horses that remain healthy when they are trimmed in normal intervals following our method, because they have less severe problems or none at all. The trimming itself remains the same in its approach in both cases. The problem seems to stem from the fact that some of our colleagues do not know how to treat a horse with hooves that are contracted to a lesser or

“medium” degree outside of a hoof care centre, without experiencing problems in the process involved and without making compromises to our method.

During a discussion with Hiltrud Strasser I suggested to leave the heels 2mm higher in a contracted hoof, i.e. at 3,7cm. The reason for this is that the hoof, which is in the process of widening, will be able to come down by itself to the 3,5cm once it has widened. If I trim such a horse directly to the 3,5cm it will widen as well, and then the heels will be lower than 3,5cm. Dr. Strasser pointed out that if we teach that the correct height for contracted hooves is 3,7cm instead of 3,5cm, then some colleagues might leave these kinds of hooves **1-2cm** higher, instead of 1-2mm. This would then no longer have anything to do with Strasser hoof care, and of course Dr. Strasser is right in this.

If Dr. Strasser's suspicion is true, then it has to be assumed that there are not all of our colleagues who know what a heel at 3,5cm looks like – does it not? Would this indicate a lack in precision and knowledge, or just plain sloppiness, should something like this happen? Observation during the last re-certification events in October and November 2009 in Germany indicates that some colleagues seem to actually not be able to measure the 3,5cm from the lateral cartilage correctly and also do not seem to know when the coronary band crosses the heel at the right height. This would be a non-acceptable situation and would lead to the fact that some colleagues will leave heels 1cm too high out of fear that the horse might not be able to walk comfortably after trimming. For me, it is therefore an important aspect of our method to point out how vital this particular precision in hoof work is, among both veterans and novices among our colleagues.

Here an example to clarify the above: let us consider the case of a contracted hoof that has a sole that is pushed upward and a frog corium that is being pushed downwards, and that also has bars that are too high. If we trim this kind of a hoof to a heel height of 3,5cm, we will create a problem and will not be able to trim in a harmonious manner anymore. Should we leave the heel height of the same hoof at 3,7 or 3,8cm, we can then trim a correct scoop. Also, we can work on the sole and toe area so harmoniously that there will not be any bleeding through the tubular horn structure and the horse will be able to move without too much discomfort. This way, we also maintain the natural and much needed hoof mechanism. When the hoof then “relaxes” over a period of several months and the contraction diminishes so that there will be no more heel or heel buttress contraction, we can introduce the correct 3,5cm heel height. At this point, the horse will have a trained and elastic corium that will no longer produce **any** pain when widening.

Regarding the problems discussed above from another angle, it has to be established that the precise trimming of the bars (if necessary also all the way under the frog) has to have absolute priority. Horses will suffer if the heel is lowered to its optimal height, but even minute excesses of the bars remain unnoticed, thus producing pressure. The correct vertical position of the long pastern bones is the best indication of a correct trim. Re-trimming should be scheduled at the latest once the long pastern bones no longer remain vertical.

A further tool for the gradual and comfortable widening of a hoof is for example to reduce the scoop in its height (without compromising its correct place or length). Also the purposeful and temporary use of the Easyboot Glove or the RX as a therapeutic measure can be used to great benefit during the gradual and comfortable re-forming (i.e. widening) of a hoof. These boots provide the horse with an even ground. This lessens tension and pulling in the lamina during widening considerably, thus clearly generating less pain.

By using the strategies described above we have obtained outstanding results and thus gained much more acceptance at my “European Institutes for Horse Physiology” in Germany and France during the past two years. My hoof care centre is chronically overbooked since the past four years, even though we do not advertise.

Today we teach the “playful-creative” use of the parameters introduced by Hiltrud Strasser at the [equine-institut.com](http://equine-institut.com). We teach the understanding of the harmony of a properly functioning and healthy hoof, able to perform to its fullest. Empathy for the comfort of the horse underlines our precise work. We envision how the hooves trimmed by us have to be able to tackle both hard and soft ground as well as all kinds of gravel. The results speak for themselves; the speed and comfort for widening contracted hooves is increased and the horse’s joy to move is improved.

In order to optimise the hoof care specialist education in Germany, we will increase practice lessons in trimming by five days, starting from 2011. This will give us a total of 39 days of lessons, both theory and practice. Until now, there was a list of hoof care practitioners that could provide the students the opportunity to work and trim with their veteran colleagues. Regrettably we have had to notice that this system of “sitting in on a hoof care specialists work day” has been too superficial and has created a difference between the taught theory during education and what has been experienced by the students in practice during education. Today, we work with a team of colleagues who meet at least twice annually to make sure that we all speak the same language and are able to convey the practice of trimming on a high level to our students.

We are part of society and it is not in our interest to continuously “run into walls” everywhere. Gaining more social acceptance has to be emphasised as particularly important. Therefore, we wish for a precise progressive-effective implementation of the Strasser method, after all, we want to help horses. We will gain more friends within the “horse world” only by producing convinced and enthusiastic customers who recommend us because our and their horses are well and healthy.

Sincerely,  
Chris Gehrmann

Hellenthal, July 12. 2010

[www.equine-institut.com](http://www.equine-institut.com) (Europäisches Institut für Pferdephysiologie E.I.P.P.)  
German and French institutes for official training as “strasser hoofcare practitioner”/  
“podologue équin”)

[www.hufklinik-eifel.de](http://www.hufklinik-eifel.de) (the licensed hoof care centre in the Eifel region in Germany)

[www.heunetz.de](http://www.heunetz.de) (natural products for horse and rider – daily shipment to everywhere in the world)