

The Shoeless Paradigm

*Presented by KC La Pierre at the National Equine Forum, Royal Society,
London on 22nd March 2007*

The desire to leave the horse barefoot has been in existence for hundreds of years, since man first discovered a need for horseshoes. Horseshoes then, as today, were viewed as somewhat of a necessary evil. In the beginning, it was a matter of survival.

Still today, many view horseshoes as necessary for performance, others as a therapeutic tool, and still others as a means of survival. The truth be told, all these reasons still exist today. Shoes in many situations do become a necessity. What needs to be taken into account is today's horse owner, and that the world of the horse has evolved. The advent of the computer and world communication has spurred a new era of domestication, where the horse owner's compassion for the animal out weights their instinct for survival. Barefoot, and the move towards what is natural, is often a display of this desire. In today's world, "Shoeing is no longer the necessary evil; it is a lack of knowledge that makes shoeing a necessity, that is the true evil."

Over the past three decades, there has been a growing movement aimed at meeting the needs of those horse owners that wish to provide for their equine wards in a more natural way, the evolution of Natural Horsemanship. The state of going barefoot, or the act of shoeing one's horse, should be viewed as that person's understanding of how to provide what is best for their horse. The problem arises when a lack of education or better stated a lack of understanding exists. All too often, compassion dictates the horse owner's actions. This in itself can lead to disaster, whether one chooses to go barefoot, or to apply the latest development in shoeing. "Compassion without knowledge and discipline is kith and kin to the wild fire; compassion alone consumes massive amounts of energy leaving little of worth in its path."

It is my belief that today's horse owner, and their thirst for knowledge, coupled with their desire to show compassion has brought to a head the need for a new science. Mankind has seen this occur in the past, at the turn of the century, and the birth of the industrial era. The science of that age, Static mechanics, no longer sufficed and we saw the development of a new science, Kinematics mechanics. Understanding Kinematics was necessary for the development of the faster moving machines of the time. Today, I believe we are in need of a new science of hoof care, one where a paradigm exists, where none previously existed. This new science will responsibly meet the needs of today's horse and horse owner.

The importance of having a paradigm in the practice of any science is critical. Without a paradigm, our efforts are based on presumption, opinion, and conjecture. Shoeless, not barefoot, represents a paradigm for the treatment of the equine foot, not for going barefoot. A true science is based on a model, the paradigm. There are rules and guidelines to be followed. It is based on fact, this allowing for the development of theory, model and method. There has been no true paradigm for the treatment of the equine foot. If in fact, a paradigm did exist, horse owners would not be abandoning the conventional Farrier practice for the promise of something more.

Barefoot can and does bring with it problems, with the greatest problem being that many of the barefoot practices base their practice on the feral horse. This practice cannot work for the domesticated horse as there are laws of nature that dismiss this practice, the most obvious being $F = M \times A$ (force = mass x acceleration). The practice of using

the feral horse disregards the need for the establishment of a valid science. So where do we go? A paradigm for the treatment of the equine foot does exist, and I am certain it is only the first of many to come.

The paradigm that I developed and teach is Applied Equine Podiatry. The definition of this science is: Applied Equine Podiatry is the conscientious study of the equine foot, always striving to expose it to proper environmental stimuli, making every effort to promote proper structure and function, as we attempt to achieve high performance. It is accepting that the horse has the innate ability to heal itself, provided the correct environment exists.

The paradigm of Applied Equine Podiatry finds its foundation in the following:

Do no harm can only be practiced with a strong understanding of the equine foot, and the application of all principles. Applied Equine Podiatry is a science for the treatment of the equine foot, and should not be considered exclusive to the shoeless horse. Whether to shoe or not to shoe is not the question. The question is how do we provide the correct stimulus for the development of proper structure, function, and performance while protecting and safeguarding the welfare of the horses in our care.

- Structure + Function = Performance

- The horse has the innate ability to heal itself.
- Correct pressure is the stimulus for correct growth.
- Utilize time as a dimension in the positive treatment of the equine foot.
- Do no harm.