

Ask The Expert

Q *My 9 year old mare has under-slung heels. Her farrier is the same since birth. He says that she has never grown a lot of heel and always wears it down. So three years ago, we put shoes on her feet to help her keep what little heel she is growing. Every six weeks, he trims and re-shoes her since she grows plenty of hoof. He always trims her toes back, but it does not seem that her hooves are becoming any less under-slung. Do you have any other suggestions?*

A Peruvians and Thoroughbreds are very alike in this subject. Both have a sloping shoulder to be able to reach far forward with their front legs and the angle of the hooves will follow the angle of the shoulder. They are born like that and they will die like that; it's just a part of their conformation. If we compare a Peruvian to a Quarter Horse, you will see very different angles: a steep shoulder angle and the heels will be almost perpendicular to the ground, but the hoof angle still follows the horse's steep shoulder angle.

The underslung heel does indeed grow forward. The more forward it grows, the more suspensory apparatus support you will lose. I trim the heels of every horse differently because each is unique. So don't try to grow an underslung heel because your mare can end up with a degenerative desmitis (injury or inflammation) of the suspensory apparatus and that condition is irreversible when it reaches a certain point. Each time the mare is trimmed, not just her toes should be trimmed, her heels should as well so that her hoof stays under her leg and her weight is supported, evenly centered on the hoof. I have seen many people that have made the mistake of not trimming the heel at all and had to pay a fatal price.



Jorge (Coco) Fernandez, Certified Master Farrier

Coco has forged over 48,000 horses over the past 17 years from a variety of breeds and disciplines. Of those, he has cared for the feet of hundreds of Peruvian Horses anywhere from maintenance trimming to extensive therapeutic shoeing. Here are his answers to your hoof care questions...



Under-slung heels are very dangerous to grow. The hoof capsule will grow forward, losing the support needed to stay healthy. Note the change in support from before corrective trimming and after.

Q *I ride my Peruvian gelding in rocky trails. All of my friends that I ride with, shoe their horses but I have been told that the Peruvian Paso shouldn't be shod. He does sometimes get sore after long rides in the summer. Should I shoe him? I am really worried that shoes will change his gait.*

A The Peruvian Horse gait is very sensitive to weight so if you do shoe your Peruvian Paso, it's important to use a very lightweight shoe. The only horseshoe that I use and recommend is the aluminum race plate, (brands: Thoroughbred or Victory, model: Queens Plates, no toe grabs). These are for racing in turf or grass courses, so they are lightweight and durable. Its not a common shoe on the average farrier rig or supplier but they can be ordered.

I have never had problems shoeing Peruvians with this type of shoe. I use these on many of the horses I shoe to protect them on rocky trails. I can pull the shoes the day before the show, they bring home tons of blue ribbons and on Monday, they go back into their trail riding shoes without missing a step.

Q *I have a 12-year old mare that I "rescued and it doesn't look like she had been trimmed in at least a year when I got her. Fortunately, she was underweight so her legs didn't have excess weight to carry but her pasterns are very long and dip more than I have seen in the other breeds that I am used to. We have trimmed her feet but is there something we can do to make her more comfortable and mobile?*

A Pasterns that are too long in any breed is not good. It's all about physics. If you look at a horse from the side, run an imaginary line from the knee down to the ground going through the middle of the bare canon bone. That line should be touching the end of the heel or be very close to them. If the horse's pasterns are too long, this line will be too far behind the heel. This type of conformation is very stressful for the suspensory apparatus because it is bearing all of the weight, without the help of the hoof. The suspensories will end up over weighted and eventually broken down. Usually, long pasterns come hand in hand with underslung heels, which is a disastrous combination.

To protect the suspensory apparatus from this type of conformation, I use a reverse aluminum shoe which is a shoe put on backwards to give extra support on the back of the heels and accelerate the break-over on those front toes. Another option is an aluminum egg bar shoe with a rocker toe. With this type of shoeing, you can compensate the poor conformation and the horse has a chance to stay sound longer.

I have had the opportunity to study wild horses conformations and they all have one thing in common: short pasterns. They need them to stay sound in order to survive in the wild; natural selection has spoken through their conformation.

Q *Is it true that horses with a lot of termino wear the inside of their front feet more and need to be trimmed more often?*

A In my opinion that theory doesn't make much sense because I see it in every breed and only the Peruvians and some Andalusians have termino. I call it "nursing foal imbalanced syndrome". When the foal is born, s/he is going to nurse 24/7. The position of their stance while nursing is with the front end spread wide open. This will make the inside heels (medials) take all the stress and will wear them down, putting the whole pastern balance and health at risk. In the wild, the horse herd moves about 25-30 miles a day. Traveling those distances wears the hoof down and levels up the imbalance of the hooves caused by the nursing position. When the mare is on a 5-acre pasture rather than a 40,000-acre meadow, we need to file down the outside or lateral part of the hooves to compensate for the lack of normal wear on the hoof. Remember that you only have 4-6 months to build the horse's hoof well before the pasterns' phalanges close up. I have plenty of champion Peruvian Paso Horses with lots of termino and their hooves are perfectly symmetrical, just like a pyramid because we built the balanced hoof foundation since day one.

Q *How are trimming Peruvians different from other breeds? A horse is a horse, right?!*

A It is very different to trim a Quarter Horse from a Peruvian Horse. The difference is in the angle of the slope of the shoulder. The Quarter Horse's shoulders will be very steep or perpendicular to the ground rather than the Peruvian that is more sloped or parallel to the ground. The angles of the hooves will follow the angles of the shoulders and an under-slung heel is not good (please see #1). Thoroughbreds are similar to Peruvians in this manner so a good racetrack farrier will probably do a good job trimming your Peruvian Horse. Racetrack farriers are very aware of the danger of the underslung heel and how to approach and correct it.

SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO: Ask the Expert, P.O. Box 1922, Santa Ynez, CA 93460, expert@peruvianclassified.com

**WE NEED
YOUR
INPUT!**

ISSUE #96: Jeff Marcum. The honorable Jeff Marcum has been breeding Peruvian Horses since 1971, judging them since 1981 and teaching others about them since 1979

and has kindly agreed to be the issue #96 expert for The Peruvian Classified. As both an exhibitor and judge, Jeff is well-equipped to answer your questions regarding presenting

your horse in the show ring, be it in hand, under saddle or even overall presentation. Please send your show ring presentation questions to Jeff today!

Ask The Expert



Q *I noticed that you talk about DSLD a lot in your seminars. How can hooves be related to DSLD?*

A Yes it can and I see a lot of that happening. Degenerative Suspensory Ligament Desmitis: a lot of people are confused and think that the last D stands for Disease but that is not so. Desmitis is an injury or inflammation of the suspensory ligament and not a disease, so lets treat it as such.

The Peruvian Paso Horse tends to have underslung heels because the hoof angle follows the shoulder angle, which is more sloped or closer to parallel to the ground than the average breed of horse. The more you grow the heel, the more support you loose. So instead of helping, you are damaging the suspensory even more. The same happens with horses with long pasterns, post legs and cow hocks.

Horses can be standing in the stall breaking down as we speak; long underslung heels cannot support the weight of the horse because of simple physics as I explained before. Small micro tears in the suspensory ligament start to happen because it cannot bear the weight coming down the leg. We need to stabilize these micro-injuries by giving the hooves/legs more support by trimming the heels properly and shoeing them with the reverse aluminum shoes or the aluminum egg bars shoes. When we sprain an ankle playing basketball, doctors immobilize the injury with a cast or brace and we will walk assisted by crutches or a cane for extra support so the injury has a chance to heal. We need to do the same with the horses; stabilize the injury with therapeutic shoeing and allow the horse to rest, giving the injury the time and opportunity to heal properly.

I have treated many DSLD injuries very successfully. Remember that once you pass a certain point, it becomes chronic and there is no return to healthy legs. If we don't help them and allow them to heal, the injury becomes chronic because the collagen repair cells will mutate several times trying to find the way to repair this injury. When the cells mutate, you have reached the point of no return and the injury becomes degenerative and chronic, forming excessive of scar tissue.

Educate yourself before you buy a horse so that when you are ready to buy one, you know how to recognize good conformation from bad.



Left to Right: Young horses with long pasterns, even if they are upright, must be cared for properly. Later on, if the horse's hooves are not cared for properly so that the weight bears on the feet, the pasterns will drop due to increased stress on the suspensory apparatus.

Q *Are Peruvian Pasos' hooves really stronger or tougher than other breeds?*

A I don't think that is true. Every breed has individuals with weak hooves and strong hooves. I believe strong healthy hooves are related to their conformation, nutrition and genetics. For example, a big horse on small hooves or a horse that doesn't get the right minerals or is from a bloodline that reproduces flat feet that bruises easily are all horses with "weak"

or "soft" feet. Each horse is an individual and you should care for them as such so if your horse's hooves need extra protection, do it!

Q *Can a good hoof trim really help a horse with leg problems and soreness? My horse is regularly sore and swollen after I ride him so my vet suggested that I put shoes on him but I don't see how protecting the feet can affect the legs. Any advice would be appreciated, thanks.*

A Leg problems and soreness are two very generic words. It's hard to answer this question because there are many possibilities... Mild laminitis, suspensory problems, arthritis, ringbone, navicular syndrome, post-legged conformation, flat bruised soles, sore sesamoids, tendonitis... Unfortunately, the list goes on. Like human athletes, horses can suffer from a wide variety of issues that cause lameness.