

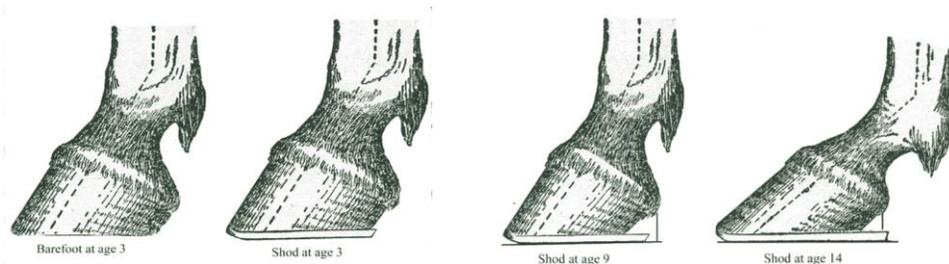
## Applied Equine Podiatry – A new science?

By Tom Bowyer DAEP MIAEP Licensed instructor

As a horse owner myself I was becoming intensely frustrated with the results I was getting from the majority of farriers I used and desperate to do the very best for my horses I did some research into the possibilities of going shoeless. Initially we stuck with our farrier who gave them a barefoot trim with some unfortunate results which led me to question whether someone who knew more about going shoeless could do a better job. What I intend to do in this article is to try and explain to you my reasons for choosing this particular path – The science of Applied Equine Podiatry.

The Institute of Applied Equine Podiatry was founded by Dr KC La Pierre RJF MEP PhD.

KC, a practicing farrier for over 23 years and concerned horse owner, continually found that, it didn't seem to matter how good a farrier you could be, it was inevitable that the hooves of an older horse would exhibit massive changes in shape from the hooves they would've had as a youngster. For example: Under-run heels, long toes, and a lack of inner wall to nail into (making larger nails, quarter clips and toe clips a necessity). Sound familiar?



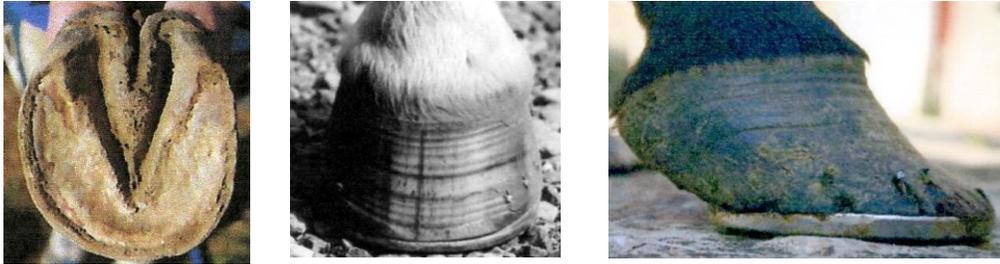
Dissatisfied with this never-ending battle KC trained under a master smith in a blacksmith museum with the logic that if he were able to make the best possible shoes for the horses in his care he would be more than able to effectively combat these recurring pathologies of the foot.

It was whilst working under the tutelage of the master smith that the formula **Structure + Function = Performance** was ingrained in him. He was encouraged on a daily basis to break things down to the simplest denominator and determine how things worked before forging them. He did this by asking three simple questions:

- What structures do I have?
- How does that structure function?
- How do I want it to perform?

After KC's time at the blacksmith museum he returned to shoeing horses and applied a variety of shoes but with the same results as before, forcing him to the conclusion that the shoe was not the answer and that, therefore, the answers must instead

be found on the inside of the hoof capsule. This is the first critical difference between AEP and the conventional way of looking at hooves. KC stopped looking at the shape of the HOOF and instead started considering the health of the FOOT.



In an attempt to solve the problem he decided to ask those three simple questions (Structure, Function and Performance) in relation to the horse's foot.

Firstly let's look at **Structure**. There are seven structures of the foot that we regularly address, these are:

- The frog
- The sole
- The heels (or the angle of the bar)
- The bars
- The quarters
- The toe
- The Ungular cartilages

Next we have function.

If I were to ask you to list 'What **Functions** we want from the equine foot', you might come up with a list that looks something like this:

- Traction
- Locomotion
- Circulation
- Shock absorbency
- Energy utilization
- Protection

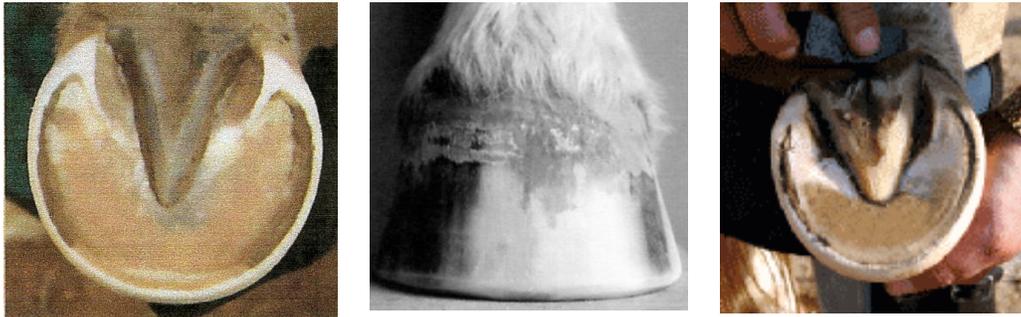
In fact, every one of these (with the exception of circulation) is actually an attribute we would assign to **Performance** and **not Function**.

For us to be able to find out the true functions of the foot we need to break things down much further and look at each of the seven structures individually. Each of those structures has its own function and this is what KC set out to discover.

After many years of evidence based research and many hundreds of dissections we now have, what we believe is, an accurate model of the horse's foot: What its structures should look like when they are correct, where they belong and what each of their functions are: In short - Applied Equine Podiatry based on The Suspension Theory of Hoof Dynamics and the HPT Method™ (High Performance Trim)

Interestingly, a very fine balance exists within the foot with each individual structure being dependant on the health and correct function of all of its adjoining structures. If, through domestication, we inhibit the correct function of any of the structures of the foot, you will lose much needed structure and compromise performance; more importantly you risk damaging the long term health of your horse.

**Many of the pathologies we see today in the equine foot are as a direct result of shoes and incorrect trimming, neither of which in any way promote correct function of the horse's foot.**



The science of Applied Equine Podiatry is so much more than simply a trim. The trim is very important as it is bio-mechanically accurate; we trim the hoof capsule to be in balance with the foot of the horse (see KC's work on 'The suspension theory of hoof dynamics' for more details) and not by relying on guesswork and pastern angles etc. The trim itself can be very easily taught and most importantly it is non-invasive. We never remove healthy structure to balance bad structure. Hugely more significant however is the application of the science between each trim. The trim is only one of the tools we use in the application of the science.

Time, the environment and owner commitment are also critical. What this means to us as horse owners is that we are now empowered to be pro-active in the quest for the perfect foot as long as we adhere to the following principles.

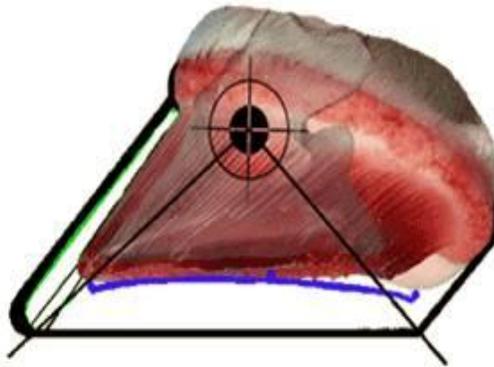
- Structure + Function = Performance
- The horse has the innate ability to heal itself (providing that the environment is conducive to the healing)
- Correct pressure is the stimulus for correct growth
- Utilize time as a dimension in the positive treatment of the equine foot
- Do no harm

‘Do no harm’ is a phrase often mentioned by hoof-care practitioners but it can only be practiced with a strong understanding of the equine foot and, therefore, a knowledge of what would constitute ‘harm’ in the first place. Applied Equine Podiatry gives us that knowledge.

It really is whole horse hoof care. I like the analogy that a person couldn’t complete a marathon if they were ridiculously unfit, you would need to train to a suitable level of fitness first. The foot is no different. You need to take the time to get a healthy foot under your horse and the benefits will speak for themselves. Similarly, if you don’t put the time in doing the exercise it’s no point blaming your personal fitness trainer that you’re not getting fit, even if you do now have a, shiny, new pair of Nikes! (other footwear is available!)

AEP demands a much greater degree of commitment from the horse owner if you are to be successful on this path but the rewards are there for the committed.

In 2005 / 2006 KC consulted at Simon Earle’s racing yard and with the changes they made to their environment and training regime, based on his suggestions, took Saucy Night from a horse who had, up until that point, never even passed another horse in a race, to a horse who was winning his races, shoeless and over jumps. With the help of AEP Saucy night became the first horse in the UK to win a race, shoeless, under professional rules.



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