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A photograph of a rider in a dark helmet and jacket jumping a chestnut horse over a red and white striped obstacle. The horse is in mid-air, with its front legs tucked and its back arched. The background shows trees and a clear sky.

# BUILDING A BETTER BASCULE

Improve your horse's jumping form with this progression of three exercises from World Champion hunter rider Peter Pletcher.

**By Peter Pletcher ■ Photos by Kevin McGowan**

**B**ascule. You've likely heard the term when riders are discussing a horse's jump. But what does it mean? Picture a dolphin jumping a wave: The bascule is the round arc its body makes as it reaches the apex of its jump. Now picture a top hunter curling over a fence, his back rounded upward as he stretches his neck forward and down (much like the dolphin) with his knees jerked high.

That arc, or bascule, is rewarded by judges in the hunter ring. That's because it not only is beautiful to look at, but it is also the safest, most efficient way to jump an obstacle. When your horse's back, withers and shoulders are up, he's free to bring up his knees for maximum clearance.

To achieve that bascule, your horse must reach his hind legs deep beneath his body as he thrusts off the ground, then he must round his neck and back as he arcs over the jump.

For some horses, a good bascule comes naturally. For others, it can be hard because it takes strength and flexibility. It can be easier for a horse to jump with his back flat and often with his neck and head up rather than down. He may still be able to lift his front legs out of the way, but his topline will look stiff, even inverted.

As you'll see when we start the jumping exercises, this can result from your horse pushing off the ground with his hind legs lagging behind his body, rather than reaching deep beneath it. Doing so weakens his thrust off the ground and puts his trajectory *forward* (hence the flatness) rather than *upward* so he can arc over the jump.

**Want to improve your horse's bascule? My series of three progressive over-fences exercises, plus some collection-based flatwork, will help you do just that. Here, my horse is jumping through the second exercise, a square-oxer-to-oxer combo.**

The good news is that you can improve *any* horse's bascule. In this article, I'm going to give you a progression of three over-fences exercises (plus some flatwork) that will help you do just that. Practice these exercises consistently, and you'll see a marked improvement in your horse's jumping form.

## First, the Flatwork



**Your horse's bascule begins on the flat. On a 60-foot circle to the left, I've lightly taken back with my left hand to ask my horse to slightly yield to the bit in that direction. My outside (right) leg applies light pressure to prevent his hips from swinging outward and to maintain the "forward" into my hand. As a result, his back begins to round, his withers elevate and his weight shifts rearward. That hind-leg reach beneath his body is what he'll need when he leaves the ground in front of a fence so he jumps upward and round.**

*Note:* Due to space limitations, for the purposes of this article I will assume that you are reasonably proficient at finding a distance to a jump, can count strides down a line and understand basic collection on the flat. Ready? Let's ride!

### First, the Flatwork

Before we start jumping, you'll introduce the roundness required for a good bascule on the flat. Why? A good bascule actually starts there.

For your horse to reach deep beneath his body with his hind legs in front of a jump, he needs to be cantering in a round, balanced frame as he approaches it with his back, withers and poll elevated and his weight rocked rearward over his hindquarters. His hindquarters are his engine: If he's dragging himself along on his front end, he loses power in his hind end.

I'm not talking about dressage-like collection in the hunter ring. But as you can see in the photo above, you will be doing an exaggerated degree of collection

at home on the flat before we tackle the over-fences exercises so your horse learns to round his topline and elevate his withers as he shifts his weight rearward, and gains the elasticity and strength to do so.

Outfit him in his normal tack, using protective leg gear if that's your norm. I like to use a snaffle whenever possible to keep my horses soft, confident and relaxed, but you can use your usual bit. (I will caution, however, that when it comes to biting, less is best; "more" can often cause more problems.)

Warm up your horse. Once he's relaxed and responsive, introduce the basics of collection by asking him to compress his body as he flexes his head and neck from side to side. Not only is it easier for him to yield to the bit laterally than it is in a straight line, but doing so also helps supple and strengthen his back.

At an active posting trot, establish light contact on both reins as you track left on a 60-foot circle. Softly take back with your left hand and move your right hand slightly forward until you can see your horse's left eye. Use outside leg pressure as needed to keep his hips from swinging outward and to maintain impulsion as he compresses his body into your light bit barrier. (With repetition, you'll actually feel his back rise into your seat as he compresses, raising his poll, withers and back as he rocks his weight rearward.)

Hold the contact until he gives—you'll feel less pressure in your left hand. As soon as he does, immediately reward him by releasing your yielding aids.

Allow him to trot normally for several strides and repeat. Reverse these aids to counter-bend him to the right. *Tip:* Your horse will naturally be stiffer in one direction than the other. Spend more time on his stiff side than on his softer side to help even him out.

Repeat at the trot until your horse is readily bending and counter-bending from your aids in both directions. (This could take a day, or days or longer depending on his degree of education and suppleness.) Then graduate to the canter and repeat the exercises.

When he's consistently bending and

counter-bending at the canter, you can graduate to the jumping exercises.

### Exercise 1: Three-Jump Gymnastic

I love gymnastics, which involve setting multiple jumps in a row. This gymnastic exercise will encourage the basics of a bascule as it teaches your horse to use his body effectively and to think for himself. It also will help build his strength, balance and confidence.

Your job? To keep your horse straight and forward but to otherwise stay out of his way. That's the bonus—he does all the work and you get to focus on yourself.

In this gymnastic, you'll set three small jumps. Their height need not be more than 2 or 3 feet (you can adjust the height based on your horse's and your comfort levels). It's the distance *between* the jumps that's key: A tighter-than-normal distance will encourage him to compress his body, rock his weight back and get his hind legs under him so he jumps upward and can build on his bascule, rather than merely hurtle himself forward and jump flat.

Make the first jump a crossrail—you'll trot in to keep your horse quiet and relaxed. Set the second jump as a low vertical, slightly higher than the crossrail, about 18 feet away, which is one stride when you trot in. Follow it with a slightly higher vertical about 21 feet away—a tight one stride at the canter. *Note:* If your horse has an unusually long stride, you may need a bit more distance between jumps two and three. However, don't make it too long—you want him to compress his body, not get strung out and reach.

Warm up using the bending and counter-bending flatwork discussed earlier. When your horse is relaxed and responsive, establish a rhythmic posting trot with light contact. Guide him on a straight line to the center of the crossrail. Keep your eyes up and on the next jump as you keep your horse centered and balanced between your reins and legs. If you were to look down, you'd inadvertently tip your upper body forward, which would cause your horse to shift his weight forward in an effort to balance beneath you, defeat-

## Exercise 1: Three-Jump Gymnastic



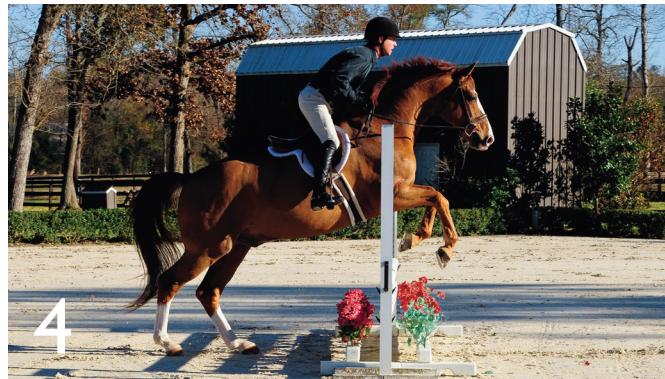
A straight approach to the first element of this gymnastic is key. Here, I've established a rhythmic, active trot and am using slight right rein and left calf pressure to keep my horse from drifting to the left so he'll jump straight over the center of the "X". A crooked horse can't stay balanced; a straight horse can.



My correction worked—my horse is perfectly centered over the X as he leaves the ground. And thanks to our balanced approach, he's able to use his hind legs fairly effectively. His knees are up, as is his neck. But look at his back: It's not just flat—it's inverted. That's what this exercise and the ones that follow will fix.



I remain balanced and centered over my horse as he canters the single stride to the second fence. My "stay-straight" contact remains light. My role now is simply to guide him while letting him figure out what he needs to do on his own.



While my horse's knees aren't the best over this tiny vertical, look at what's happening to his back as compared to Photo 2: Thanks to the tight distance, he's had to rock his weight over his hindquarters and compress his body, which is causing his back to round—exactly what this exercise is designed to do!



Completing the final tight single stride has further compressed his body like a slinky toy, rounding his back as his hind feet reach even farther beneath his body for the takeoff.



See how his body has an upward trajectory at this final element? That's the building block to a good bascule. And that's what you will begin to feel as your horse repeats the exercise a couple of times or for a couple of sessions and begins to understand the rock-back concept. We'll now build on that with Exercise 2.

## Do Practice, Don't Overdo

Here are some do's and don'ts to accompany the over-fences exercises:

- DO wear a helmet any time you jump or flat your horse.
- DON'T jump (or ride) alone. Not only is this key for safety, but having a friend on the ground will help you assess your horse's progress and enable you to set jumps without having to dismount.
- DO repeat any or all of these exercises two to three times a week. Incorporating them into your normal schooling routine will accelerate your horse's strength and progress.
- DON'T overtrain. You could sour your horse or make him sore. Building a better bascule is hard work; he'll be using his muscles and body in many ways he hasn't before. If he does an exercise well two or three times, reward him by allowing him to stop. You don't have to drill anything 15 times to make progress.
- DO listen to your horse. If he starts pinning his ears, swishing his tail or becoming reluctant to jump, he may be sore (or you may be overdoing it!). Give him a few days off from jumping, then you can start again.
- DO seek the help of a reputable trainer should your horse fail to show at least incremental progress (such as relaxation, confidence) as you incorporate these exercises into your schooling routine.

ing the purpose of the exercise.

Post to maintain your rhythm (counting "one, two, one, two" if you need to help maintain it) until he leaves the ground. Follow his motion with your reins and upper body, maintaining light contact with his mouth so you can keep him balanced through the exercise. Avoid hurling your body forward, which would force *his* weight forward, which is counter to our goal. Also avoid falling behind his motion such that you're pulling him off balance with your reins and body. Grab mane if you must to stay with his motion and avoid snatching him in the mouth.

As he lands, bring your shoulders back and stay centered above him. Keep him straight to the center of the second jump, but avoid helping him otherwise—let him figure out the exercise. Follow his motion over it, and repeat over the third fence.

Repeat the gymnastic several times and assess. If your horse is anxious, slow your trot to the crossrail. If he's lazy, establish a more energetic trot to it. If his pace is working, ask yourself, "Is he starting to back himself off the third jump, now that he's familiar with the tighter distance?" If the answer is yes, quit for the day. If not, find a good spot to quit. Incorporate the

gymnastic two or three times a week into your schooling sessions until your horse is relaxed and confident throughout. This could take one day or a week or more. Only then is he ready for Exercise 2.

### Exercise 2: Oxer-to-Oxer Combo

In this exercise, you'll set two square oxers two tight strides apart. This is a natural progression from Exercise 1: There, you let the tight distances rock your horse's weight back as he jumped low verticals. Here, the tight distance not only will build on that "rock-back" message, but the oxers' width will encourage your horse to arc his body over each jump. As with Exercise 1, your job is to get your horse to the jumps straight and balanced but otherwise to leave him alone to figure out what he needs to do.

Set your oxers 33 feet apart with each about 18 to 24 inches wide. If your horse has an extra-long stride, you may need to add about a foot. I usually set the height at 3 feet or 3-foot-3. Set yours at a height that's comfortable for you and your horse; it's the width and tight distance that do the work here.

Warm up using the flexion flatwork,

followed by Exercise 1. When your horse is relaxed and responsive, establish a balanced, active canter with light contact. By active, I don't mean fast. I mean that you have his weight rocked back so you can feel him pushing off from his hind legs. He'll need that energy to build on his bascule and to get through the combination. If you were to let him fade before the first jump, you'd make getting to the second jump hard for him.

Guide your horse straight to the oxer, maintaining his rhythm by counting "one, two, one, two." The canter is a three-beat gait, but I have students use a one-two count to maintain a steady rhythm.

Ask your horse to wait for a slightly deeper-than-normal distance—so he has to rock back as he leaves the ground—by sitting up with your shoulders slightly ahead of your hips and keeping your eyes up and looking ahead to the second oxer.

Follow his motion in the air with your hands and body, remaining balanced and centered above him as he lands. Sit up and keep your shoulders slightly ahead of your hips as you keep him straight between your reins and legs. Otherwise, leave him alone as he negotiates the tight two strides, then rocks back to jump up and over the second oxer.

Thanks to the tight distance, once your horse understands the exercise (it'll take a time or two or more) you should feel him compress his body before the second jump then rock back and spring off the ground up and over it. His improved jump will have more thrust and energy than a flat-backed jump will. If he still feels strung out, he may have a short stride and need a tighter distance between the two oxers. Or he may lack the energy he needs coming into the first jump. Try increasing his canter stride (not speed), and do the combo again. If that doesn't work, shorten the distance by a foot or so and try again. If he's getting to the second oxer too quickly, slow your approach to the combo.

*Note:* It is key that you allow your horse the freedom in his neck and head to use his body in a true bascule. If you were to get left behind his motion and snatch him in the mouth, you'd be inadvertently

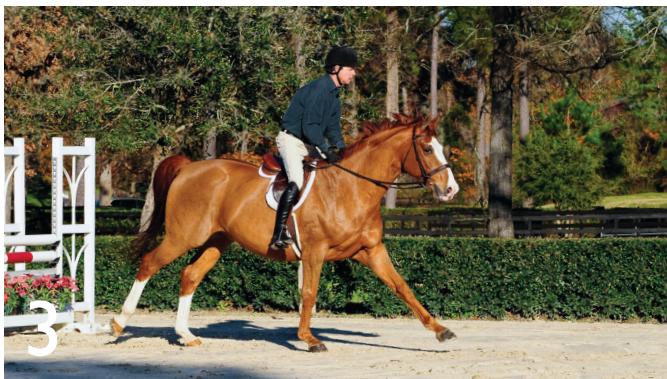
## Exercise 2: Oxer-to-Oxer Combo



I established an active canter into the compressed two-stride oxer-to-oxer line. This will help my horse push off from his hind end with enough energy to jump well and will carry him through the exercise. I've contained the energy with light contact, which is also helping my horse to balance. I'm also using slight right rein and left leg pressure to counter the gelding's tendency to drift left.



Jumping the center of the oxer, he reaches deep beneath his body with his hind legs to thrust himself upward, over the jump. Look at his back now! No inversion here. You can see how the oxer's width is causing him to reach forward and down with his head and neck. He's doing it all on his own (as you can tell by my reins), thanks to this exercise.



I allow the gelding to reach through the first of the two strides before the second oxer. I'm not sending him any signals other than to stay straight. If he needs to back himself off, the tight distance will cause him to figure it out on his own.



Sure enough, I feel him begin to compress as he sees the second oxer coming up. All I'm doing here is keeping a feel with that right rein to prevent him from drifting leftward ...



... as he completes that stride and sets himself up for the oxer. Just look at the compression in his body as his legs prepare to drive deeply beneath it ...



... and he pushes himself up, over the oxer with his topline rounded as he reaches down and forward with his neck and head. As you and your horse become more relaxed and confident in the combo, you'll feel the extra spring off the ground and in the air as he rounds his back over the jump.

## Exercise 3: Single Ramped Oxer



The ramped oxer is what I call “continuing education.” You get to build from the small verticals in Exercise 1 to the square oxers in Exercise 2 to an oxer that adds the finishing touches to your horse’s jumping form. The oxer’s shape, with the front rail lower than the back one, encourages him to lift his knees and shoulders as he rounds his back and reaches down with his head and neck. Just look at that bascule!

To ride the exercise, canter through Exercise 2 first, then loop around to the oxer. Be sure to steady and balance your horse through the turn, then maintain your rhythm on the approach. Enjoy the jump and your improved hunter performance as your horse takes what he’s learned with these exercises and applies it to the show ring.

punishing him for it. If that should happen, grab mane to be sure to stay off of his mouth over each oxer.

Repeat several times, until your horse is relaxed and comfortable, and is rocking himself back before the second oxer. If he is anxious, go back to Exercise 1, then try again. Be patient: It may take more than one session for him to understand the combo. Then move on to Exercise 3.

### Exercise 3: Single Ramped Oxer

Our final exercise is a single oxer—but not just any oxer. The key is to “ramp” it, meaning the front rail is lower than the back one. The ramped shape will help refine the shape of your horse’s improving bascule because the oxer’s width and higher back rail will encourage him to pull up his back and knees as he reaches forward and down with his head and neck. And, thanks to the previous two exercises (and flatwork), he’s gaining the knowledge, strength and flexibility to do so.

Set the single oxer so you can canter the combo in Exercise 2, then loop

around for an easy approach. Aim for a height that is comfortable for you and your horse. Set the back rail at that height, then set the front rail at least 3 inches lower. You can always raise both rails as you and your horse get more comfortable. Place the standards about 2 feet apart.

Canter through the Exercise 2 combo, then sit up and steady your horse as you balance through the turn to the single oxer. Since it is a single fence, you’ll need slightly less energy than you did to the combo. Maintain a soft, balanced canter on the approach, using the one–two count if needed to maintain the rhythm. Keep light contact with your horse’s mouth and keep your shoulders upright and just in front of your hips to encourage him to keep his weight rocked back. Avoid getting ahead of or behind his motion, which would alter his balance and rhythm and your ability to see a distance.

Allow the distance to happen out of this rhythmic stride by maintaining your light rein contact until your horse leaves the ground. Follow his motion over the oxer, then steady and balance him when he lands. If he jumped it well, give him a pat and quit for the day. If you missed the distance, assess and adjust. (Got there too fast? Slow down. Not enough horse? Add energy to his canter.)

As you can see in the photos, the progressive nature of these exercises pays off: Your horse will take what he learned from the previous exercises and use it at this oxer. You’ll feel him power off the ground as he raises his back and lowers his head and neck. With time and repetition, you’ll build his best possible bascule. 🐾

**Peter Pletcher** has been training hunters and jumpers for more than 30 years. He’s ridden to numerous national titles and won championships at all the major shows. In 1991, Peter piloted Uncle Sam to win the President’s Cup at the Washington International Horse Show and has represented the U.S. in numerous international World Cup competitions. In 2002, 2004 and 2007, Peter won the coveted World Champion Hunter Rider title at The Capital Challenge Horse Show. He was selected in both 2005 and 2007 to represent the United States in the World Champion Hunter Rider Team Challenge at the World Cup in Las Vegas, Nevada. In 2010, he was selected to participate in a demonstration of Hunter Derby Classics at the World Equestrian Games in Lexington, Kentucky. In 2015, he reached the USHJA Elite \$1 Million Dollar Club for total money earned by a professional in recognized U.S. Equestrian Federation divisions. In addition to his own success, Peter has coached his clients and their horses to numerous national titles and honors.

Peter trains out of his PJP Farm in Magnolia, Texas, with the help of assistant Diane “Bean” Douglas.



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# 10 Hoof-Care TIPS

Farrier Chris Volk explains strategies that promote hoof health—and help you avoid emergency calls—if you make them part of your routine care.

**H**ealthy hooves are literally the foundation for everything you want to enjoy with your horse. Getting his hooves into top shape and keeping them that way isn't time-consuming. It's just a matter of building healthy-hoof practices, like the 10 I'm about to describe, into your daily management routine.

## **1. Pick out your horse's feet.**

This may sound pretty basic, but it's the single most important thing you can do for his hooves—and I encounter a surprising number of owners who think picking out the feet is the farrier's job. Your horse gets a head start on healthy hooves, and you get a chance to take early action on many common hoof problems, if you pick out

his feet ...

- before each ride to remove any stones or small objects lodged in his feet before you add your weight to the situation and to check on the condition of his shoes.
- after you untack him in case debris has gotten stuck in his feet during the ride.
- when you bring him in from the pasture at night to check for objects in his feet or for turnout injuries.



- before turnout the next morning to check for heat and pulse (see below), remove manure and check for signs of thrush (more details on that below).

Each time you clean your horse's hooves, take an extra couple of minutes after you've pried out any packed debris to gently clear the crevice of the frog and scrape any remaining bits of matter off the sole with the tip of the pick. You want to be able to see the sole's entire surface to spot thrush or puncture wounds so finish the job with a stiff brush. Some hoof picks come with brush attached, or you can buy a brush separately and inexpensively.

from the cleft of the frog. Later, the frog becomes cheesy in texture.

Although thrush can eventually cause lameness and significant hoof damage, its early stage is simple to treat. Use an over-the-counter remedy recommended by your farrier or veterinarian—follow directions carefully—and make sure your horse's stall is clean and dry. If you normally bed with straw, consider a change to more absorbent shavings. Some horses—especially those with upright, narrow feet with deep clefts that tend to trap more dirt, debris and manure—are predisposed to thrush even when well cared for. If you



## DAILY CLEANING

**1.** Picking out your horse's feet at least twice daily is a big step toward healthy hooves. Working from the heel toward the toe, use the hoof pick's point to remove debris packed against the sole.

**2.** Next, clean the crevice on each side of the frog and (gently) the cleft of the frog.

**3.** Scrub away smaller particles with a stiff brush.

**4.** A clear view of the sole and frog is your opportunity to spot such problems as thrush or puncture wounds.

## 2. Establish what's "normal."

While handling your horse's feet to pick them out, notice their temperature. When everything's OK, they'll feel very slightly warm. Take a moment to locate the digital pulse with two fingers pressed against the back of his pastern. You're interested not in the rate of the pulse but in its strength under normal conditions. Check the frog, which has about the texture and firmness of a new rubber eraser when it's healthy.

Don't be alarmed, though, if everything else looks OK but the frog appears to be peeling off—most horses shed the frog at least twice a year, sometimes more often. Your farrier's regular trimming of the frog may have prevented you from noticing this natural process before.

## 3. When picking out the feet, look for signs of ...

- **thrush.** The first clue to this bacterial condition is a foul smell and dark ooze

think your horse has an early case, ask your farrier to check.

- **puncture.** If a nail or other object pierces your horse's sole and then falls out, the entry wound will probably be invisible by the time you pick his feet and you'll be unaware of it until it causes an abscess. But in some cases, the object remains in place to be discovered when you brush the last bits of dirt from the sole. **DON'T PULL IT OUT.** Put your horse in his stall (protect the punctured foot and help the foreign object stay put with wrapping and duct tape or with a slip-on medication boot), and call your veterinarian right away. An X-ray of the foot can show how far the object has penetrated and which structures are involved. (If you pick your horse's feet out regularly, you'll find the problem within a few hours of its occurrence.) Then your veterinarian can remove the object and advise a course of treatment.
- **cracks.** Some cracks are superficial, others can worsen, involving sensitive hoof

structures, without appropriate shoeing. One cause of a crack is a hoof abscess, which breaks out through the coronet band at the top of the hoof, creating a weak spot in the hoof wall that must be attended to as it grows out. If you notice a crack, call your farrier and describe its location and size so he can decide whether it needs attention now or can wait until the next regular shoeing.

- **abscess.** If your horse's digital pulse feels stronger than usual and/or his foot is warmer than normal to the touch, the cause could be an abscess inside the hoof from a badly placed shoeing nail, a bruise or an overlooked sole puncture. Your routine check can alert you to the problem and get your veterinarian or farrier involved before your horse—probably at least slightly lame already on the abscessed foot, which throbs from the pressure of increased blood flow to the infected area—is in even greater pain. (If you find increased heat and a stronger-than-usual digital pulse in both front feet, and if he's shifting uncomfortably from foot to foot, call your veterinarian immediately. These are signs of laminitis, an inflammatory condition that can cause severe hoof damage—and, if not treated promptly, can even be fatal.)

#### **4. Schedule regular farrier visits according to your horse's individual needs.**

Although six to eight weeks is the average, there's really no standard interval for trimming and shoeing. If your farrier is correcting for a problem such as underrun heels, a club foot or flare in the hoof wall, your horse may benefit from a shorter interval. If everything looks fine, but you notice that he begins forging—striking the back of a front hoof with the toe of a back hoof (you'll hear a metallic sound)—in the last few days before his next shoeing, ask your farrier whether a shorter schedule might avoid the problem—possibly four to five weeks in the summer, slightly longer in the winter.

#### **5. If your horse is shod, check his shoes each time you pick out his feet. Look for:**

- **risen clinches**—the ends of the nails your farrier trimmed and clinched (bent flush with the outer hoof wall) at his last shoeing are now sticking out from the hoof. This is a sign the shoe is loosening, probably because it's been in place for several weeks. He can injure himself if the risen clinches on one foot brush the inside of the other leg.
- **a sprung or shifted shoe.** When instead of sitting flat on your horse's hoof, the shoe is pulled away and perhaps even bent, it's sprung. If it's moved to one side or the other, it's shifted. In either case, the nails in the problem shoe can press on sensitive hoof structures when he places weight on the foot.

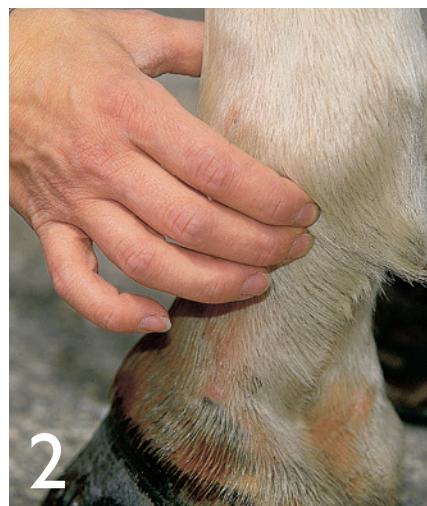
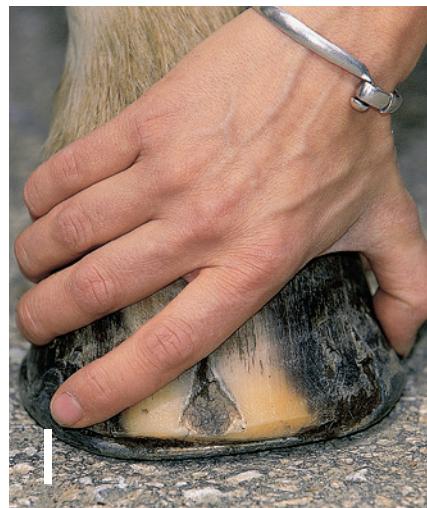
#### **6. Learn how to remove a shoe—yes, you!**

Many farriers are glad to teach clients how to do this (and may even have used tools you can buy inexpensively). If you can remove a sprung or shifted shoe, you may save your horse unnecessary pain and hoof damage and make life easier for your farrier or veterinarian.

#### **7. Help your horse grow the best possible hooves.**

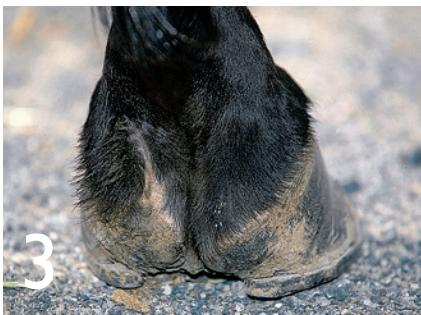
Some horses naturally have better hooves than others. Your horse may already be producing the best hoof he's capable of, or the following steps may enable him to do better.

- **Fine-tune his diet.** Ask your veterinarian whether your feeding program is appropriate for your horse's needs.
- **Add a biotin supplement to his ration.** (Ask your farrier for a recommendation). Some hooves benefit from these supplements, others show little change. Plan to use the supplement for six months to a year. That's how long it takes any benefits to show up in new hoof growth.
- **Give him consistent exercise.** Work



#### **DAILY HOOF CHECK**

1. Feel the hoof for heat, an early sign of an abscess or, if it's in more than one foot, founder.
2. Check the digital pulse: A stronger-than-usual digital pulse signals inflammation in the foot, possibly from a misplaced shoeing nail, stone bruise, abscess or founder.



## REGULAR MONITORING

**1. Risen (or popped) clinches are a signal to call your farrier, if he's not already scheduled to come soon. This hoof also has a superficial crack running down the front. The farrier will check to make sure it's growing out properly.**

**2. A sprung shoe like this one, which is already pulled away from the hoof wall, needs replacing before it loosens or the nails re-enter the hoof wall and hit a sensitive area.**

**3. An injury to the left bulb of this horse's heel eventually grew out into a healthy hoof. Frequent monitoring ensured that the vulnerable area was always supported by appropriate shoeing.**

on good surfaces, especially at walk and trot, increases circulation to your horse's hooves and promotes growth.

## 8. Avoid the "summer cycle" of alternate soaking and drying of hooves.

Your horse's hooves can adapt well over time to conditions that are consistently dry or consistently damp, but hooves suffer when the environment fluctuates between wet and dry. Unfortunately, this is often the situation during the very months when you want to use him the most: late spring, summer and early fall. Evening turnout—a summer strategy to avoid biting insects—puts hooves in prolonged contact with dew-soaked grass. They swell and soften with moisture, much as your fingernails soften after hours in water. Back in a dry, hot environment during the day, the hooves dry and contract. With repetition of this cycle, horseshoe nails loosen as their holes through the hoof wall enlarge slightly. Such summer activities as work, stomping flies or (if your horse is restless) walking the fence accelerate the loosening. Pretty soon you're asking your farrier, "Why can't my horse keep his shoes on?"

There are a couple of things you can do to minimize this pattern:

- **Cut back on summer turnout time.** Try to reduce by a few hours the time your horse spends standing in a dewy nighttime paddock or stomping flies outside during the day.
- **Reduce moisture absorption** by applying Tuff Stuff® to the lower two-thirds of his hooves before evening turnout. (But pass up conditioners that leave the hoof feeling oily. They can actually soften hoof wall if used frequently.)
- **Avoid unnecessary baths.** Sponging the sweat off your horse after schooling works just as well without causing him

to stand in a puddle for half an hour or more. Save the full-scale bath for just before the show.

- **Shorten his summer shoeing schedule.** A lost shoe often means hoof damage, which escalates the cycle of summer shoeing problems. Spacing your farrier's regular visits a week or so closer may prevent emergency calls.
- **Toughen his soles** with a daily application of Venice turpentine.

## 9. Try not to turn out in deep, muddy footing.

Hours of standing in mud may encourage thrush or scratches (a skin infection in the fetlock area). Mud is hard on shoes, too: The suction of deep mud can drag off a shoe already loosened by alternating wet and dry conditions. Mud also makes picking up his feet a harder job. If your horse is slow about getting his front feet out of the way, he may end up pulling off the heels of his front shoes because he's stepping on them with his back toes.

## 10. Protect your horse's hooves during hauling.

Without covering for his heels, he can easily step on the edge of a shoe and pull it partially loose—then spend the remainder of the journey standing on the nails of the sprung or shifted shoe. Another vulnerable area is the coronet band: the rim of tissue at the top of each hoof that generates new hoof-wall growth. Injury to this area (for instance, if he steps on himself while struggling to keep his balance in a moving trailer) can interrupt hoof growth in the area below the affected spot. The solution: Either old-fashioned shipping bandages and bell boots (large enough to cover the bulbs of your horse's heels and the backs of his shoes) or good quality full-coverage Velcro™-fastened shipping boots reduce the likelihood of these problems. 🐾

*Based in Washington, Virginia, AFA Certified Journeyman Farrier **Chris Volk** cares for performance horses—hunters, jumpers, dressage horses and eventers—from Olympic to local levels. He was a team farrier for the Canadian Equestrian Team and traveled with the team to the 2006 World Equestrian Games in Aachen, Germany and the 2007 Pan-American Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.*



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