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HOOFBEATS

By Pat Murphy, Contributing Writer

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Horse enthusiasts who attended the annual meeting of the Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Association heard some welcome news. Mr. Jaime Jackson, the featured speaker, is a renowned practitioner of natural hoof care. He is a clinician, researcher, author, and expert on wild and domestic horse hooves. His theory is that horses thrive physically, mentally and emotionally in an environment that takes into consideration the most basic elements of their natural world.

His books include *The Natural Horse-Lessons from the Wild*, *Paddock Paradise* and *Horse Owners Guide to Natural Hoof Care*. They have also been translated into Spanish, German, Danish, Polish, Czech and Italian.

In his presentation of what he feels is “good horse-keeping,” Jackson revealed that he started out as a farrier, and became motivated to try to find the answers to some common hoof problems. After seeing so many horses with unsound feet, he set out on a journey to study wild horses in the U.S. Great Basin. Observing their behavior and habitat, he was especially impressed with what strong hooves they had and their apparently glowing health. “They were living longer and not suffering from the hoof maladies that plague horses in captivity. Navicular syndrome, founder and laminitis have been problems in many riding horses,” he said.

After experimenting with different ways to trim the hooves of domestic horses, in 1990 Jackson believed that he had found the answer and stopped shoeing horses entirely. Instead, he began giving them the wild-horse trim. He wanted a thick sole, straight walls and a roll at the bottom, with an arched dome inside. He found that it could also enhance the healing process in serious hoof conditions. He advocated that along with the wild-horse trim, feeding a more natural diet and changing their physical living conditions would promote

better health.

Says Jackson: "Riding in harmony with the natural gaits is good. Working horses hard can bring on hoof problems. He details his system for providing safe, humane, living conditions. One uses the horse's natural instincts to stimulate movement and other healthy behaviors."

Since horses survive best if kept in their natural environment, he frowns on box stalls or a little corral. Rather, he suggests a series of pathways with various stimuli such as strategically placed feed, water holes, some sandy-rocky paths, and a place where they can have social interaction. He also suggests a natural diet without molasses and with limited alfalfa, rather than irrigated pasture.

Jackson's studies have taken him all over the world and he reports that more and more horse owners in Europe are trying his barefoot methods. He created and is the Executive Director of the Association for the Advancement of Natural Horse Care Practice.

At the evening meeting of the Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Center, Jackson told of an interesting assignment with the Houston, Texas, Mounted Patrol who was having lameness problems with their mounts. They converted to his natural methods of hoof care, and problems disappeared. Now, the entire stable of 38 police horses are either wearing hoof boots or going completely barefoot and performing their duties successfully.

Some of the horse owners who were at the meeting that advocate going the barefoot route are Gail Knight, who has a Kiger Mustang; Judy Adams and Lucy McCarthy, who show reining horses; and Shirley Scales, who rides a Missouri Fox Trotting mule. One would surely guess that the mule riders would be quite successful on these hardy-footed steeds.

We have also heard that noted Cutting horse trainers have been experimenting with going bare foot, as well as, Olympian - Charlotte Bredahl with her dressage horses. Susie Snow says, "My Norwegian Fjord carriage horse has always been barefoot." It may not be for all horses, depending on the type of work required of them, but it may very well be worth a try.

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Guest speaker Jaime Jackson and Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Association president David Hunsicker.
Courtesy Photos



Jaime Jackson with one of the Houston, Texas police department's Mounted Patrol Horses.



A “paddock paradise” in Moncalvo, Italy, owned by Luigi Borgis’s barefoot boarding facility.



A barefoot trim on a half-Arab horse in Santa Ynez.

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