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Trimming for Natural Toe Angle, Heel Length, and Toe Length

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Article Summary: Method for determining a hoof's natural Toe Angle, Toe Length, and Heel Length.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most perplexing mysteries haunting the hoof care community down through the ages has been the determination of a hoof's natural *Toe Angle* (T°). Among hoof care professionals, T° is "set" by regulating *Toe Length* (TL) relative to *Heel Length* (HL).

Heymering's interesting 1991 survey of hoof angles dating from the Ancient Greeks to the present, cites numerous authorities espousing countless conflicting theories for determining T° .¹ They range from Xenophon's "High [angled] ones that keep what is called the frog well off the ground" (500 B.C.), to LaFosse's low-angled hoof "because it will oblige him to press upon the frog, which is the natural point of support for the flexor tendon" (1754), and everything in between. Put to the gauge, any given horse subjected to these broad criteria could be endowed with a T° ranging from 35 to 65 degrees!

Of course, this diverse spectrum of T° formulations is inseparable from the practitioner's manipulations of TL and HL. As every professional is fully aware, we can raise T° by lengthening HL and shortening TL, or lower it by the opposite actions. And precisely because

this leeway — T° as a function of HL and TL — exists in every domestic hoof, is there this manifest disagreement over how exactly TL and HL should be coordinated together to arrive at the "correct" angle, T° .

Natural hoof care practitioners have in recent years begun to unlock the mysteries of natural toe angle based on the wild horse hoof model. The question all have asked is whether the organic relationships uniting T° , TL, and HL, in the wild hoof, can be identified and nurtured in the domestic hoof through natural trimming strategies?

This article provides my insights on the subject and includes highly specific trimming recommendations. It is assumed that the reader has already established a solid foundation in natural hoof care procedures as described in my book, *Horse Owners Guide To Natural Hoof Care* (2002). Other source materials are also cited in this article, and the reader should refer to these as well.¹

T° , TL, AND HL DEFINED

We begin by defining T° , TL, and HL as they are used today by natural

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¹Henry Heymering, CJF, *The Proper Hoof Angle*, The International Equine Resource Center, www.horsehoes.com (go to articles section).

¹For a complete list of related articles in the SRP Natural Hoof Care Series, go to www.star-ridge.com