**Performing a Hoof Test**

**Identification of the Issue**

One of the most challenging tasks a farrier will have to perform is to exam a hoof for a particular source of pain. Lameness due to hoof pain can have a very elusive answer. Although emergency situations and severe injuries should always be dealt with under the supervision of your veterinarian, there are many superficial, sore spots that can be identified by having your farrier perform a basic hoof test. Hoof pain can range from something as simple as a stone catch in a crevice at the bottom of the horse’s foot (i.e. analogous to a small pebble in your shoe) to a deeper bruising of the hoof tissue (i.e. a painful stubbing or stomping of your big toe). In many instances, a thorough hoof test can also help in early detection of more serious conditions, such as Navicular Syndrome (heel pain) or Chronic Laminitis (toe pain).

A tool most used by farriers & veterinarians to help identify hoof pain is the *hoof tester.* This tool is designed to place a concentrated amount of force/pressure on a precise targeted area of the hoof capsule. Most hoof testers will have a 2:1 handle length to jaw length ratio. This allows the user to apply a maximum amount of concentrated pressure, by exerting the least amount of force per squeeze. However, pressure alone is not the only ingredient to developing a feel for the hoof tester. A methodical approach with a set squeeze rhythm is the key to the hoof tester becoming more than just a pain pincher. The main function of a hoof tester is to gauge sensitivity and tolerance and not to simply illicit a pain response. Any horse, even with the healthiest of hooves, can react negatively when there is too much forced or random pressure applied.

**Some common findings…**

As a general rule, it is a common practice for a practitioner to always establish a baseline reference by testing/flexing the sound hoof first. This will allow for a good gauge of the horse’s normal tolerance to that particular pressure, so that a better pain level judgment can be made.

**The hoof test can reveal:**

* Tender/ sensitive soles.
* Bruising (superficial trauma).
* Stone Catch Irritation (seat of corn area).
* Abscesses (subcutaneous deeper bruising).
* Bad Horseshoeing Nail Injury (pinching or quicking).
* Collateral Cartilage Arthritis (side bone).
* Laminitis (early stage).
* Navicular Syndrome.

**NB:**

Keep in mind, if you notice your horse showing some signs of discomfort, it’s always a good idea to check his feet first. Many issues can be resolved when they are detected in their earliest stage. It’s amazing how much an in-depth examination can reveal. More often, a hoof pick and a hoof tester can be two of the most powerful tools in your hoof care arsenal.