

Small Victories by Bruce Daniels



Figure 1. October 1982. Extreme rotation allowed the hoof capsule to rise above the coronet.

Every once in a while each of us has a victory. Sometimes it is a big one, but more often it is a little picky one. Whatever the size of our achievement, we need the morale booster. Shoeing horses seems to be a life of long, hard days interrupted by assorted disasters. For example, you might hear that the 2:05 knee-hitting trotter you put your super. "hit-nothing-but-the-racetrack" shoes on just went a mile in 1:55; but as your head swells to a size eight, you find out they had to pull both shoes and he went the mile barefoot. Or you learn that the bad-footed horse you got a super fit and a nice drive on was lame for two days after you shod him. Or you recall the time you put silicone under aluminum pads, and two days later the horse was too sore to leave the barn.

But I'm not talking about the defeats. I want to talk about the victories. I don't mean the dumb-luck victories, like the shoes that stayed eight weeks on the horse that always pulled one off every Saturday night. No, I'm talking about the victories that were thought out and



Figure 2. Because of the extreme discomfort the mare was in, we arranged to have Dr. Varnold block the leg.

carefully planned, done well, and that were successful. Those are the bright spots in our working lives that keep us trying harder. Sometimes the victory is solving an interference problem, or comforting a lameness by proper shoeing. Whatever they are, these moments are the real highlights of our careers.

I had a situation like this come up last October. I had seen the problem before and felt confident about the outcome. A woman who is a nationally-rated barrel racer had her mare injected in the stifle, and the treatment failed. The stifle went from bad to worse and eventually the mare couldn't bear much weight on the leg at all. The condition became chronic, and the mare foundered in the opposite foot. The foot didn't develop merely a slight rotation; the entire forward half of the hoof capsule sloughed and slipped over the coronet. The mare was then hauled to a large animal clinic where the attending veterinarian advised the owner to have her put down.



Figure 3. After rasping down "everything that sounded hollow," the actual hoof removal began.



Figure 4. With about 90 percent of the hoof capsule removed, seemingly dead laminae were exposed.



Figure 5. In an attempt to regenerate the sensitive laminae, the foot was painted with venus of turpentine, covered with cotton, and then wrapped in vet wrap.

Now, the barrel racer's husband is not squeamish about putting down a horse. As a matter of fact, he does that for a living—he's in the dog food business. But, in this case, he felt there had to be a better way, so they put a pile of wood shavings in the trailer and hauled the mare to my shop. I could work the front of the hoof capsule up and down about one-eighth of an inch. When it was moved in any direction it gave the mare a great deal of pain. We made arrangements with a local veterinarian to block off the mare's foot so that I could remove all the loose tissue.

I believed that there might still be some life in the corium, and if the dead laminae could be softened, perhaps the foot would regenerate itself.

The next day I went to the farm with the veterinarian and began what proved to be a successful treatment. The veterinarian blocked the area of the mare's foot to be worked on and he stayed for awhile in case heavy bleeding occurred. I removed all of the dead tissue. When I was finished, the only part of the horn that was still attached was about 1½" of the heel, and about the same on the bars. Everything else was taken off. There was no bleeding; in fact, it looked as though the sensitive laminae were dead. At that time, I found out that the hoof had been treated with formaldehyde, which made everything feel like a piece of wood. I believed that there might still be some life in the corium, and if the dead laminae could be softened, perhaps the foot would regenerate itself.

The next step was to paint the whole foot with venus of turpentine and wrap it in cotton and vet wrap. I put a roll of gauze under the frog to bear the weight, and finished the wrapping. Well, the mare stood sound, but that may have been because her foot was still blocked off. The next day the foot was still sore, but in a week, the mare was out eating grass.



Figure 6. February 1983. After four months, growth had started down from the coronet and out from the sensitive laminae.



Figure 7 Although the hoof had been shaped up, it still had the mare standing on the sole and requiring soft bedding.



Figure 8. April 1983. Seven months from the day her hoof capsule had been removed, I was able to get a shoe on the foot. It was nailed to the soft scar tissue (stratum internum) but it stayed well. The dark filler was a plastic wood mixture.

I saw the mare about once a month, from October through April, and only changed her bandages. By that time we had stopped using vet wrap and had begun using Elastoplast. The vet wrap couldn't stand the hard use.

The new hoof had started growing down, and, at the same time, scar tissue from the sensitive laminae was growing outward. The scar tissue was soft and corky, but it did protect the inner area.

In April, I thought I could get a shoe on the mare and keep what she had grown from breaking up. It wasn't a great job, and for the most part it was nailed to the scar tissue, but it stayed tight.

Because of the original stifle injury and its complications, I don't imagine that this very athletic mare will ever see a show ring again. She will probably be bred. But what is important is that she is alive, and that at no time during this treatment was this mare in any extreme pain. That was a victory for all of us.

