

Megan's Nails

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(The names in this story may have been changed to protect the innocents. And maybe they have not been changed at all)

When I am not hanging with my herd, feeding them, doing the dishes or sleeping, I can sometimes be found under a variety of horses in deep study of and care of their hooves. Hoof trimmer is a more accurate title than one I was given recently. "Equine podiatrist" was the term used. "A what?" I said. "How about

a barehoof practitioner?" I added and the conversation drifted off onto more important things, like the drought.

Well one night the phone rang and I had the following conversation with Megan. "My friend has recommended I call you because she has convinced me to leave my horse barefoot and you may be able to trim his hooves for me". Megan had instantly scored two wins with me. Firstly she didn't want to reshoe her horse and she understood the importance of regular hoof trimming, care and maintenance. We chatted about her plans for Sunny, her horse, and I suggested to her as I do to all new clients, "you can trim them yourself you know". She forthrightly replied, "I don't think so and when you meet me, you will understand". Not only had Megan scored two wins, she now had my curiosity aroused.

A couple of days later the three of us, Megan, Sunny and I, met. Megan extended her hand and I went to shake it. She avoided my hand and said to me, "These are why I don't want to trim my horses hooves" referring to an immaculate set of two toned blue, glossy and perfectly shaped fingernails. I was afraid to touch them because they looked so perfect. But we shook hands, had a laugh and continued on to the horse.

Sunny had pretty good hooves and now after several monthly trims they are even better; although my first trim note says "set up trim-little split on L/H-thinnish soles-was shod till 8 weeks prior". The last entry on Sunny's sheet records "light trim-half cosmetic, half maintenance-redo in three weeks-longish walls due to soles shedding (esp at quarters)-toes worn well due to lots of riding". 9/10.

This last trim was at Megan's request. She had a dressage test coming up and wanted Sunny's hooves to look immaculate. So I did a really tidy trim. The roll was smooth and consistent, I made sure the rasp didn't inflict any scars on the walls and I finished each hoof with a smooth polish in line with the hoof grain of the walls. Megan fessed up that she was going to paint Sunny's hooves too. I momentarily choked, bit my tongue but was much relieved when she added that it would all come off after the test. She understands the need for the hoof wall to breathe.

A pattern was emerging here. Megan has immaculate fingernails (I haven't dared to ask about her toes). She wants her horse to have immaculate hooves. But well maintained hooves as well. And on Sunny, these two things are one and the same. The hooves on Sunny are important to Megan and that is a refreshing thing. (Too many horse owners give scant regard to their horse's hooves). Sunny also gets ridden regularly as well. Not just in an arena but along roadsides, in

the bush and around the paddocks. His feet reflect this. They are developing into the sound, tough and problem free hooves that are the aim of the barehoof movement.

What is also great about Megan and her riding friends (including the person who recommended me to Megan) is that they are all embracing of the concept of 'good lookin' hooves. In mild desperation they will call me and say "I've got a such and such ride/event/test on this weekend, can you give my horse's hooves a tidy up please?" This is in stark contrast to horse owners who will have a horse's hooves trimmed when they are so long the horse is lame, they break off great chunks exposing the innards or they are planning to sell the horse. Some even say they cannot afford to pay for regular trimming. They shouldn't own a horse!

To appreciate this cosmetic attractiveness of hooves is an obscure thing. But many look at a great set of natural barehoof hooves and remark, "gee they look great!" I do it all the time. (And pull horrible faces when I see the other, all too often, extreme. The smell often puts you off as well). Someone once said on a website that great natural barehoof hooves look sexy. That may be pushing the English language a little but I think I knew what they meant.

I am unashamedly biased here but I have yet to see a sexy shod hoof. Or a good looking shod hoof. I have seen a good shoeing job or two maybe, but a piece of unforgiving steel nailed onto a living structure is, to me, definitely unsexy. Obscene is probably a more appropriate description. Perhaps it's all in the eye of the beholder.

I can't wait to see what colour Megan's nails are tomorrow when I give Sunny his monthly maintenance trim.

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