

# Contracted Heels

by Bill Gray

***"Contracted heels is a shift of the hoof wall resulting in the narrowing of the foot"*** as defined by Anvil Magazine.

For years, I have widened and spread the shoe to be full and hanging out on the sides of the hoof to leave room for expansion if the heels were contracted. This concept is the traditional way most horseshoers, including myself, have been programmed to shoe for years and years. I would see little, if any, change from one shoeing to the next using the theory of keeping the shoe full throughout the heels. I don't want this process to be confused with how to shoe a horse with under-slung heels; the "traditional" way will be most helpful with that situation. The last decade has changed my way of thinking on shoeing a horse with contracted heels. I continued to notice a lot of racehorses rarely have an issue in this area. I'm aware that conformation, genetics, and their habitat (like soil texture, climate, or moisture) may play a role in how a horse's hoof can and will grow. However, this is a continuing issue that does arise frequently and almost every horse owner will run into this annoying problem sooner or later! It is my job to keep the hoof as healthy and sound as possible and do preventive maintenance for any soreness issues that may arise in the future.

In my years of shoeing horses that perform in multiple disciplines, I have had to bring the shoe in tight in order to keep them from disrupting or jerking the shoe off. In this day and time with the athletes these animals have been bred to be and the moves that they are capable of making, they are not exempt from overreaching and can pull a shoe off or wrench one. I would never want to risk the safety of any of my clients or these equine athletes that owners, trainers, and jockeys spend endless hours and/or money on. Due to safety precautions and bringing the shoe in tight, I noticed the heel continued to spread out over the shoe as the foot grew after the horse is shod.

I want to see and produce easy movement in all four feet. The first thing I do is to trim the hoof to an angle by considering factors such as pastern and shoulder angles. Then, I take my rasp and open up the heel to approximately a 45 degree angle. You want this to look as natural as possible considering each foot.



We are now going to focus on the first nail hole closest to the heel, on each side, to the back of the shoe. The shoe should be slipped or beveled to the outside. The purpose of this is for the hoof to start to grow to the outside of the shoe and train the soft tissue of the hoof to spread. We all have experienced the hoof growing out over the shoe at the toe. Basically, we are trying to get the same results by spreading the heels. Another part when shaping the shoe is

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to fit the shoe tight at the heel. "Tight" means that you don't have any of the hoof extending beyond the shoe from the first nail hole back. By doing this we are hoping in the next five to six weeks that the hoof spreads over the shoe and expands the heels. In using this method, I have seen the hoof obtain a normal looking heel over a period of time. Keep in mind that some horses' hooves grow faster than others. Our hopes are to eventually reduce the severeness of contracted heel/heels and relieve the constriction of the deep flexor over the navicular bone in most cases. There are occasions where you will only see that one side is more contracted than the other. In that case, just do the same process on the side that is contracted.

*Bill*