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The Strasser Method Trim Reconsidered  
by Henry Heymering, CJF, RMF

Seven years ago, in 2002, I read all 3 books by Dr. Hiltrud Strasser (about 900 pages). I subscribed to and read the movement's newsletter, *The Horses Hoof*. For several months I read the postings on the movement's Internet discussion group [naturalhorsetrim@yahogroups.com](mailto:naturalhorsetrim@yahogroups.com). I corresponded at length with more than a dozen proponents. I read many of the many web pages devoted to Strasser and barefoot. I drove several hours to see the best available examples within 100 miles of my home. I met and discussed at length problems with the Strasser method from an ex-CSHS (Certified Strasser Hoofcare Specialist) who showed me detailed photographs of the front, side, and bottom of each foot on horses she trimmed – before the first trim, after the first trim, and after the second trim. I saw several cadaver hooves trimmed to Strasser specifications. I listened to Dr. Strasser lecture for 2 days and have seen her trim a foot. After this, I wrote *The Strasser Method Trim Considered* – an analysis of her method. This present article is an update of that previous analysis.

Considering Dr. Hiltrud Strasser's specialized barefoot-only hoof care method, what I can tell you with certainty is that (1) the Strasser Method is a franchise; (2) there is no proof regarding her claim that the Strasser trim is better than other trimming methods, in fact Dr. Strasser herself says her trim may cause the death of the horse; and (3) there is no proof of Strasser's claims that horseshoes cause damage.

## **I. The Strasser Method is a Franchise**

A franchise requires strict adherence to their methods, such as "flame broiled" for Burger King®. Strasser requires strict adherence to her method, such as 30 degree hairlines. Chef school or medical school may teach a method, but does not require a particular method.

A franchise will revoke the franchise if you don't follow their method. Strasser will revoke your certificate if you don't follow her method, "Certification as a Hoofcare Specialist may be revoked at any time if the individual deviates in his/her hoof care practices from the principles and methods developed by Dr. Hiltrud Strasser.... " By contrast, Chef school and medical school do not revoke diplomas – they exert no control once you have graduated.

A franchise requires a franchise fee to open a franchise unit. Strasser requires a franchise fee to open a clinic, "Certification as a Hoofcare Specialist does not entitle the individual to open a

Hoof Clinic or other facility for lameness rehabilitation using the Strasser methods unless by special arrangement with Hiltrud Strasser. Franchise fees may apply.”

A franchise is not just a specific method, but a method that requires adherence – control to protect the brand name. The Strasser Method is a franchise. With a franchise you should get the same quality (burger or whatever) from every franchisee. This is its benefit as well as its drawback. You’ll get nothing worse than its standard, but also nothing better. In contrast, pure education is open ended – they teach you how to learn and you keep on learning.

## **II. There is no proof that the Strasser Method is better than a traditional trim**

Some parts of the Strasser Method have been previously tried and rejected:

### Barefoot-only

Barefoot is always an option, but barefoot-only has been difficult for the average owner to put into practice. In the late 1800s there was an anti-horseshoeing movement with books written by Page; Wood; Fisher; and Ludlow. Those authors promoted working horses barefoot instead of in shoes. However, in contrast to Dr. Strasser, they found that in order to make barefoot viable they had to keep the hooves scrupulously dry – not moistened daily as Dr. Strasser contends. Also, in contrast to Dr. Strasser, the earlier anti-horsehoers were not selling a method.

### 45 degree toes

Although this is a figure repeated in many texts between 1754 and 1861, George Fleming, a veterinarian and the foremost authority on hoof care in the 1800s put it this way: “It must be pointed out that giving the angle of 45 degrees.. is a grave error. Looked at in profile, a hoof with this degree... would at once be pronounced a deformity... and if the farrier were to attempt to bring every foot he shod to this standard, he would inflict serious injury, not only to the foot... but also the tendons....” Wild horse studies published by Ovnicsek, Jackson, and Rooney each found the normal range to be roughly 50 to 60 degrees, with 45 degrees being outside the normal range.

### Hoof expansion

This was a hotly debated topic in the 1800s (Dollar’s Handbook of Horse Shoeing, p.116-127). It was debated whether or not the hoof naturally expanded on loading, what form that deformation took and whether or not it should be encouraged. Several researchers found no expansion of healthy hooves. Lungwitz’s experiments published in 1891 became the most persuasive. Although he found more expansion than the other researchers, it was minimal. Even after soaking the hooves overnight, several of his horses showed no measurable expansion at all, and those that did were between 1/50<sup>th</sup> and 1/12<sup>th</sup> of an inch. Dr. Strasser, in contrast, recommends expansion to be clearly visible to the naked eye – outside the range of what has been found to be normal.

### Opening cuts

This operation of weakening the hoof wall on both sides of the frog at the heels was popular in the 1700s but was replaced by less extreme methods in the 1800s.

Some parts of the Strasser Method are new and unique:

1 cm bars

From seeing cadaver hooves trimmed to this level it appears horses trimmed this way could not be sound. It makes the soles paper-thin adjacent to the bars.

30 degree hairline

This is a new idea. I could find no evidence that the hairline has any fixed relation to the functioning of the hoof, nor could I find any evidence that horses should have that particular hairline angle.

Hoof trim as abuse

In 2006 a UK court found Mary Jo Kowalski guilty of causing suffering to a pony by applying the Strasser Method Trim (<http://hoofcare.blogspot.com/2006/08/strasser-trimmer-receives-sentence-in.html>) this is the first and only case I've heard of where a trim has found by a court of law to have caused suffering. However, I have also seen clear evidence from a Strasser trained ex-CHSH that the Strasser Method trim actually caused four horses to founder.

Death from a hoof trim?

Unprecedented, and unique to the Strasser Method trim, Dr. Strasser says in her text that after beginning the Strasser trim: "It is possible that, in some cases, although the hooves are coming along well, the heart is no longer strong enough to support the task of healing. In horses whose hearts have already been damaged due to box stall keeping and high demands while shod (without the hooves to support the circulatory system) heart failure is a possibility within the first 6 to 8 weeks of beginning rehabilitation." Dr. Strasser says that to minimize this risk horses trimmed by her method must not be stalled and must be kept in a natural environment.

### **III. Strasser's claims of severe damage from horseshoes is not only unproven, but slanderous.**

Dr. Strasser makes numerous charges against steel shoes in her books and lectures. Here are the more important points.

Vibration

Dr. Strasser claims that increased vibration from shoes damages horses. She points to a 1984 study by Bein showing that steel shoes changed the frequency of vibration in the foot and multiplied its strength by three. However, no evidence has been presented that this increased vibration does any damage to the horse. In contrast, a 1993 study by Benoit showed only about a 30% increase in shock with a steel shoe compared to barefoot and actually showed a decrease in shock compared to barefoot when a leather pad was used with the steel shoe.

### Anesthesia

Dr. Strasser claims that nailing on a shoe anesthetizes the horse's foot. Clearly this is not the case as horses respond the same to hoof tester pressure with or without shoes.

### Circulation

Dr. Strasser claims that circulation is decreased when shoes are applied. Her book offers as evidence an infrared thermograph of a horse showing absolutely no heat from a leg with a shoe on it while the rest of the horse shows normal body temperature. I have taken similar infrared thermometer readings from shod and barefoot legs in numerous horses and can find no pattern of difference in temperature. Typically shod and barefoot have the same temperature. Sometimes shod legs are warmer than barefoot. Her results are not repeatable.

### Kidney disease

Dr. Strasser claims the [unproven] lack of circulation caused by shoes in turn causes kidney disease, liver disease, and dandruff. While shod horses are common, kidney disease is quite rare. I doubt if enough such diseased horses could even be found for purposes of a study. Dr. Strasser's claim of reduced circulation is unbelievable, and her claim that shoes cause kidney and liver disease is even more unbelievable.

### Contraction

Dr. Strasser claims that iron shoes always cause contracted feet that get worse with each year of shoeing. This is clearly not the case, as I have shod the same horse for as long as 15 years with the same size and shape shoe.

### Conclusion

Seven years after my original article, Dr. Strasser's has only increased her slanderous statements about professionals in the field, but has not improved her Method, despite legal action against the method.