No Hoof, No Horse

Ted Turner shows how he prevents white line disease in his horses’ feet.

THE OLD SAYING, “AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND of cure,” is particularly true when it comes to horses’ feet. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a performance horse, a halter horse or just a backyard pony, if the hooves aren’t healthy, then the horse can’t function properly.

White line disease is one of the most common hoof diseases and also one of the most preventable. An opportunistic disease, white line is caused by fungi that take advantage of a compromised hoof wall. The infection can then spread around the hoof and up inside the wall to gradually eat away at the hoof.

“The best way to describe white line disease is it is like termites in wood,” said Team Wrangler member Ted Turner. “What happens is you get a separation of the wall of the hoof and it eats away and goes right up the coronet band if you don’t get a hold of it. And when it gets that serious, the only way to get rid of it is to cut away the hoof wall and kill it with iodine or formaldehyde with iodine.”

Ted knows the best defense against white line disease is a good offense. He treats his horses’ hooves daily to prevent any infection from fungi or bacteria.

“It is something you really have to get in front of and stay in front of or it will eat you up down the road,” he said.

Ted’s farrier, Doyle Black, taught him this method for preventing white line disease in hooves.

“Every time we bring the horses in from working, we clean all four of their feet out really well and we coat the bottom of each foot with 7 percent iodine,” Ted said. “The reason we do that is to try to kill any bacteria or fungus that might be in the foot.”

But sometimes, iodine isn’t enough.

“Then you have to be more aggressive and treat the hoof with a mixture of formaldehyde and iodine. It’s something you really have to stay on top of.”

And keep the feet as dry as possible, Ted said.

“Water fuels it more than anything. Wet feet and moisture in the stall will fuel it. When it is wet outside a lot, you also have to be more aggressive in treating and preventing it.”

And occasionally, no matter how well you keep the hooves clean and dry, some horses will still develop white line disease.

“We’ve had horses that just seem like they are more prone to get it than other horses are,” Ted said.

For horse that do develop white line disease, Ted will cut away the infected area and aggressively treat the hoof either by soaking the foot in iodine, formaldehyde or something strong if the veterinarian recommends it.

“You might have to doctor it twice a day,” he said.

But the best way to treat white line disease is to not let it infect a horse’s hooves in the first place.

“Common sense is 75 percent of what we do in the horse business,” Ted said. “Just think how bad you hurt all over when your feet hurt. The horse is no different. You just have to do whatever you can to protect the foot and to keep disease out of the foot.”

HOOF TREATMENT

Here is the method Ted Turner uses daily to prevent white line disease in his horses’ hooves.

When a horse returns from being worked out, all four hooves are thoroughly cleaned.

Each hoof is soaked with 7 percent iodine. The horse is put back in a clean, dry stall.

As much of the dirt and debris is brushed and scraped out of the hoof as is possible.