

*The* **Horse's**<sup>™</sup>  
**Hoof**



## **“Tall, Dark, And Handsome”**

**Barefoot A-circuit Junior Hunter**

**Joe Camp: Hooves in Tennessee**

**Barefoot Police Horses in Canada**

**Does Your Horse Need Therapeutic Body Work?**

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# The Horse's Hoof™

## Barefoot Hoofcare Magazine

Fall 2011-Issue 44

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*The Horse's Hoof* is a generic barefoot resource that supports all hoof care which creates healthy hooves. We believe technology can be useful, and we believe in compromise. We advocate more natural living conditions for all horses. We encourage all styles, methods, and techniques of hoof care that promote healthier hooves. We advocate unity and cooperation within the barefoot movement.

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## Join the Team!

Show your support for the team spirit of barefooters everywhere! Have you posted a Go Team Barefoot logo on your website or blog? Please do! Go Team Barefoot is a place for us to join in unity inside the barefoot movement. Download your Go Team Barefoot logos here: <http://thehorseshoof.com/teambarefoot.html>



## On Our Cover:

Our cover horse **Zephyr** (show name Tall, Dark, And Handsome) is a 17 hand Belgian Warmblood gelding who is making quite the splash as an A-circuit Junior Hunter champion. Best of all, he's barefoot! Owned by Georgette Topakas and ridden by her daughter Laurel Hicks (seen here), this champion barefoot horse enjoys a healthy, natural lifestyle. It's hard to believe that only a few years ago, he suffered serious white line disease, and vets said he would never jump again if they pulled his shoes! Read his entire story on page 6 of this issue! Photo by Flying Horse Photography.

To submit your barefoot cover horse, email: [editor@TheHorsesHoof.com](mailto:editor@TheHorsesHoof.com)



# Barefoot Is A Way Of Life For Tall, Dark, And Handsome

by Erin Gilmore

No shoes required for this successful junior hunter.

At this year's West Coast Junior Hunter Finals in San Juan Capistrano, Calif., a group of farriers gathered at the in-gate as riders were called back for the under saddle phase. Catering to an old tradition, they quickly pulled front shoes left and right before the horses returned to the ring for the final flat test.

But Tall, Dark, and Handsome stood alone as the sound of hammers rang in the air. The large junior hunter was the only horse that didn't need his feet attended. Since overcoming a nasty case of white line disease six years ago, "Zephyr" has become a rarity on the "A-circuit" for what's not on his hooves.

The 14-year-old Belgian Warmblood jumps completely barefoot and has for the past six years.

## Standing Out From The Ground Up

With that distinction, 15-year-old Laurel Hicks and Zephyr jumped well in both rounds and were competitive in the under saddle phase. They placed seventh overall in the large junior, 15 and under, division in their first year at the West Coast Finals.

"We're already looking forward to going back next year," said Hicks. "There were a lot of chal-

lenging jumps on the course and a long bending line that rode in 10 strides. Keeping the pace was the hardest part, but riding Zephyr without shoes feels the same as riding a horse with shoes. He was great."

It's been a long road for Zephyr and his owners, who were told by vets and farriers that he would never jump again in 2004.

As a 7- and 8-year-old, Zephyr carried Georgette Topakas, Montecito, Calif., around the adult amateur and modified divisions, but she had originally imported him as a move-up horse for her daughter Laurel.

However, during the middle of the show season in 2004, the 17-hand gelding (Saygon—Noblesse Hof Ter Heide) began constantly throwing his front shoes. Topakas wondered why as the bills for re-shoeing piled up.

"I took Zephyr to a new farrier, who did a pincer test on the base of each hoof," Topakas said. "When he did that, I saw gray goo come out of the laminae. It was like nothing I had ever seen before. He did that test on all his feet with the same result."

## Out-Of-Control Fungus In All Four Feet

White line disease occurs when bacteria enter the laminae between the hoof wall and the coffin bone. Healthy laminae holds the hoof wall

All photos courtesy Georgette Topakas



Georgette Topakas imported the Belgian Warmblood gelding Zephyr (show name "Tall, Dark, and Handsome") for her daughter Laurel Hicks, but his hooves fell apart even before Laurel was ready to ride him.

together from the coronary band all the way down to the ground, but when bacteria comes into contact with the laminae, a fungus eats away at it, creating a hollow space and weakening the hooves. The "gray goo" that Topakas saw during the hoof test was out-of-control fungus, a serious symptom of white line disease. Zephyr's case was so severe that his laminae space was hollow in all four feet.

Farriers typically treat white line disease by resectioning the hoof. They carve out a large chunk of the outer hoof wall to allow for greater airflow to the affected area and use bar shoes to support the hoof while the laminae heals.

## Topakas Takes Control

After Zephyr was diagnosed with white line disease, Topakas felt betrayed. She'd been following the shoeing advice of horse professionals for several years, but Zephyr's hooves were a mess. Topakas decided to take matters into her own hands.

Her background in pharmaceuticals and botanical knowledge lent itself well to Zephyr's condition. Topakas holds a degree in landscape architecture from the University of Arizona but attests to a lifelong passion for plants and their uses. A second career in pharmaceuticals, in which she partnered with her father to build up and later sell the pharma marketing company

< Tall, Dark, and Handsome showed barefoot all season in the large junior, 15 and under, division with Laurel Hicks.



Photo credit: Flying Horse Photography



## She'd been following the shoeing advice of horse professionals for several years, but Zephyr's hooves were a mess. Topakas decided to take matters into her own hands.

PromoTECH, gave her extensive knowledge to proceed.

With a hunger to truly understand Zephyr's health and how she could improve it, Topakas spent the better part of two years reading every book she could find on herbs for horses.

"I like to do lots of research before I go into something," said Topakas. "I've always understood plants' uses and how they interact with each other. With Zephyr's condition, I wanted to understand what we needed to accomplish before we got into it."

Topakas also began to read about barefoot trimming. She spoke to people that had gone barefoot and learned what worked best for them. She consulted with Oklahoma-based barefoot trimmer Mike LaGrone, who agreed to see Zephyr on one of his trips west.

### Addressing The Whole Picture

"Zephyr's feet were just about falling off before I met him," said LaGrone. "It was ugly. I looked at him and told Georgette that the best thing for that horse was to change his whole life. He needed to get out of a stall, have his shoes taken off and his diet changed, everything."

"Hoof problems are a symptom of environment," added LaGrone. "And there's no way to cure a problem by addressing a symptom. You've got to address the whole picture."

Once Zephyr's shoes were removed, circulation and blood flow to the hooves increased, and he needed constant movement to stay comfortable. Topakas realized that diet and environment were having a critical effect on Zephyr's health, and she began to approach horse care from a new angle.

"I wanted not only to fix the white line, but also to prevent it from ever happening again," said Topakas. "Curing the white line was only part of the equation. The other primary factors were diet and environment."

Topakas faced a barrage of criticism from her veterinarian and long-term farrier when she had Zephyr's shoes pulled and turned him out to pasture for a year. Eschewing corrective shoeing for her expensive hunter was a rare move, but Topakas believed that re-sectioning would only be a quick fix.

"It's important to note that Zephyr was never lame from the white line disease," said Topakas.

It is common practice for farriers to pull the > shoes on hunters right before their flat class. Zephyr, already barefoot, is ready to go!

"My trainer at the time kept saying, 'If he's not broken, how can you turn a show horse out for a year?' But he was broken. And I kept thinking, how could I not?"

During his year of layup, Topakas visited Zephyr almost every day to treat his feet. LaGrone recommended she scrub the hooves with solution that would kill the fungus and promote healing.

### Barefoot Breeds A Business

Topakas wasn't happy with the chemical-based topical treatments available, so she starting mixing up her own solutions.

Using her plant and pharmaceutical knowledge, Topakas made her own anti-microbial hoof scrub from oregano oil, calendula, tea tree oil, eucalyptus, white willow, Oregon grape and goldenseal. The effective scrub was wildly popular with her horse friends, and she soon followed it up with a healing salve, then a fly spray. A year later Zephyr's Garden, LLC was born. The product line is now carried in tack stores across the country and by State Line Tack, Horse.com and the company's own website: [www.ZephyrsGarden.com](http://www.ZephyrsGarden.com).

"I learned to look at the whole picture instead of one thing," said Topakas. "I have a core group of 20 herbs that I really like. When I designed my antifungal spray, everyone was so surprised that it also reduces itchiness and makes hair grow

All photos courtesy Georgette Topakas



Photos of Zephyr's beautiful bare hooves in August, 2011. These were taken at a show, so they are a little squared off at the toe from working on sand.

back quicker. But I know that fungus causes itchy skin, so I added an herb to soothe that. I know that you really need to re-grow hair once you beat the fungus, so there's a herb in there known to jumpstart hair growth."

After his year of layup, Zephyr went back to work without fanfare. The white line disease was gone, and although his hooves will always need close attention, he was healthy.

All photos courtesy Georgette Topakas





Because Zephyr has increased blood flow to his hooves, he knows exactly where his feet are. He has a natural grip, and there's no shoe there to slip.

### Adhering To A Maintenance Program

For Topakas, the challenges of going barefoot weren't challenges at all; they were simply a matter of thorough horse care. If she kept Zephyr on the correct diet, it was reflected in the general health of his hooves.

"If he had shoes on it wouldn't matter much what his diet was, because the shoes would hold the feet together," Topakas added. "When Zephyr is lacking something, it shows up in his feet immediately. I watch how much sugar he gets and don't over-treat him. His treats consist of dandelion leaves, Swiss Chard and watermelon rinds, which luckily he likes!"

Topakas feeds Zephyr a blend of natural herbs for hoof strength and general health; his daily supplements include powdered rosehips, fish oil capsules, vitamin C wafers, chia seed, lecithin, dried dandelion leaves and dried kelp. She adds the herbs to a small amount of Triple Crown Lite and mixes with water and apple cider vinegar.

Topakas also credited the detailed program of trainer Alanna Snowden's Gracelynd Hill near Santa Barbara with carefully maintaining Zephyr's hooves. They must be kept dry and are cleaned several times per day with a wire brush instead of a pick.

### The Unusual Hunter

Zephyr's riding program doesn't include any special practices to protect his barefoot hooves. He goes out on trails, on asphalt and in the arena without issue. The effort to protect his hooves begins and ends in the barn.

"The hardest thing I faced was going against the norm," remembered Topakas. "I was a new horse owner; Zephyr was my first horse, and I'd only been riding for about four years. By going barefoot, I was going against the opinions of every pro I knew. I'm definitely not a zealot for barefoot trimming, and I don't think that barefoot is right for every single horse. But when I looked at my horse and really understood the whole horse, it just made sense.

According to plan, Hicks began riding him three years ago after graduating from her pony. With guidance from Snowden, she has progressed from the children's hunters to the large juniors.

Hicks faced the typical challenges of switching from a pony to learning to ride a large, long-necked warmblood. Snowden drilled the pair with dressage lessons, practice sessions and no stirrups work, teaching Hicks to stay with Zephyr's suspension and keep him straight. But Snowden attests that Zephyr's balance isn't affected by a lack of shoes. In fact, going barefoot is never a concern during training.

"When Georgette and Laurel moved to me, I was skeptical about keeping Zephyr barefoot," admitted Snowden. "It is absolutely unheard of in the hunters. But Georgette believed in it, and she had been working hard on his health. I stand by the fact that, for this particular horse, going barefoot works great. He moves well and takes good care of himself and is surefooted in any condition. Our special measures don't go further than being religious with his feed program and trim schedule, and making sure his stall is always extremely dry and clean."

Photo credits: Kimerlee Curyl Photography



Diet, environment and lots of exercise are critical to the health of Zephyr's hooves.

Prior to the West Coast Junior Hunter Finals, Hicks and Zephyr showed just six times and were champion in the large juniors four times out. They used jumper classes—tight turns and all—as warm-up classes. From her place on the sidelines, Topakas has grown accustomed to the questions about his feet: Is he surefooted without shoes? How does he handle jumping on grass?

"Barefoot hooves have amazing traction," said Topakas. "Because Zephyr has increased blood flow to his hooves, he knows exactly where his feet are. He has a natural grip, and there's no shoe there to slip."

So while farriers busily worked at the back gate of the Junior Hunter Finals, Snowden and Hicks chuckled to themselves. Tall, Dark, and Handsome may be a novelty in the show ring, but that afternoon the barefoot hunter was a step ahead of the game. 🐾

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Georgette Topakas with Zephyr, who helped to launch her business!

Photo credit: Kimerlee Curyl Photography



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