

On one trip when professional farrier Jim Crawford shod horses down at the barn, the thought occurred that he might know why my left hind leg quivered and shook. Way, way back, a slight tremble began from leaning so far over a table at Doc Sorrel's pool hall with the right leg in the air poked back and all the weight on the left leg to take a shot way down and across table.

No one comes as close in contact to hind legs the way Jim sees them. Those joint-aligning, rubbing doctors over in Angelo only examine legs stuck in the air, hanging over the edge, or flat on a table. The change from a rubber to steel headed hammer would throw them off track worse than the night Engine 909 derailed from Memphis, much less the challenge to fit a piece of iron on Ol' Dauber's foot, odd-shaped as a gelatin imprint.

The winter a couple of hombres stayed over at the hotel across the street from Doc's pool hall to buy his clothing inventory, they taught the town boys how to play Nine Ball on all ends of a table. In the three-week course, the education cost one month's income from my shine stand at the barbershop. After those lessons, other places hurt too bad to notice leg pains.

But back to Jim's skills. He can tell by the way an old pony's leg feels whether he's going gimp or stiff from old age. He senses the front leg quivering while lifting the foot off the ground. If the diagnosis didn't embarrass him to say so, Jim would be qualified to advise a school board when the coaches or even the teachers became too slow to stay out of the way on the courts and school grounds.

He also has a different outlook on life, bent over under a horse with his mouth full of nails. Way back when keeping our horses shod, we marveled (and marvel still), at Jim's cheery attitude. His massive strength may be the main answer. Should one of those sapsuckers try to jerk a hind-leg loose, Jim walks him on his other three legs until he (the horse) shows respect.

At the old ranch, the Big Boss wanted his Thoroughbred thin-hoofed polo ponies shod by one cowboy at the line camp, or by the old groom from San Antonio. Other bunglers, such as myself, who avoided installation wrecks by tying a hind foot off the ground (the horse's, not ours) ranked non-gratis in polo circles.

Our worst cases ended on a concrete shearing slab too slick for good footing for the shod or the shoer. "Old Caesar" and "Old Streak," to name a couple, found less objection to new shoes after "spread eagling" on wet

concrete and leaving hair and blood samples in the cement floor.

One thin-hoofed disgrace to all four-footed beasts named "Iguana" refused to be shod. He planned on killing Jose or me, one. His fragile hooves required leather lining underneath the shoes to be ridden in the rocks. The guinea hens and peafowls rated higher IQ's than his by 100 points.

Someone should quash such a tale in the flush, but I am compelled to confess that we dug from under a set of harness one of the most severe of all horse-reasoning tools - a "twitch" we kept hidden under the harness in the saddle shed to shoe or doctor such fools.

A twitch, in case you have never seen one, fits a looped trap chain run through a hole hung on a sawed-off shovel handle. When the chain is looped over the upper lip of an outlawed horse and twisted hard enough by a strong hombre, the outlaw will no longer kick or paw the man shoeing him. With a twitch on his snout, King Tut, the circus mastodon, would have responded to a mere tug by Tiny Tim, the famed midget.

Iguana stood. The damned fool never jerked or dropped a foot. His top lip poked way, way out, human sweat poured, peacocks strutted by, guineas chirped in the woodpile...And you may have guessed, the Big Boss walked up where he faced

Jose under the back foot and I held the twitch, looking toward the rear straight at him.

Jose lacked clinching the final nails. I'm not sure, but I think Iguana and I lost our breaths at the same time. I wasn't about to let go, nor was Jose. The profanity the Boss attached to wonder, disbelief, disgust and disappointment can't be re-crafted.

We never had to shoe Iguana a second time. He left in a week on a truck to go to a polo camp. Few horses today probably need to be shod on leather-lined pads to ride 225 miles on rubber-lined trailer floors. But I'll bet if they meet up with Jim Crawford, he can put 'em on leather and iron without a secret weapon in his kit.