

To Shoe or Not to Shoe

Definition of shoeing or not shoeing

Not shoeing – is that barefoot? The semantics aren't as important as having a functional foot that will carry a horse comfortably through whatever work is asked of it. Chris is going to speak on

Let's call it Hoof Protection

The basic alternatives of hoof protection are boots or shoes, or NOTHING which involves months and years of conditioning and toughening up the hoof to "cope" with carrying a rider comfortably over varied terrain, and that will initially involve applying hoof protection.

-Horse can go all day on whatever it lives on be that grass, or sand or rocks, but change the substrate and the hoof capsule can't cope.

Boots are an option to protect hooves just as shoes are.

Factors affecting the decision – of shoeing or not shoeing

Time, Money, Dexterity, Knowledge, Patience, Flexibility

Not Shoeing

Time

- Whether you pay a professional or you're an owner/trimmer, it is important to keep a good, balanced trimmed foot. Whether the horse is in work or not: whether it's retired or a broodmare. If it's not moving 40kms per day over hard stony terrain, it will be growing horn (hoof) and will need trimming.

-Putting boots on and removing and cleaning them adds to time allocated to training. Allow fifteen minutes extra, and if you're attending an event, allow extra time

- Keeping boots fitting well means a rasp may need to be used to trim the foot prior to application.

- If you are an owner/trimmer there's no need to make appointments with farriers/trimmer, just rasp and clean up the foot as necessary

- Whether an owner/trimmer or

Money

- Paying someone to trim your horse/ horses is certainly cheaper than paying a farrier to apply shoes
- Learning to trim your own horses negates the farrier cost completely, but it can be hard on your back and your hands
- Allow \$170-ish per boot and always have spares, esp at rides, spares are like a spare tyre – they don't have to be perfect
- Life span of boots is variable
 - Type of terrain
 - Weight of horse and rider

- Care – keeping them clean and well maintained pays off big time
- Quality of manufacture
- Fit – if they don't fit well, they'll wear much faster

Dexterity

- Application of boots requires some dexterity, bending lifting, holding up the hoof and attaching the boot. Sometimes, especially when starting out, this can be on an impatient, jumpy equine of several hundred kilos. Practice and patience pays off.
- Boots may need repairs on the run or in the shed at home, fiddly, gritty little parts that sometimes need specialist tools – the benefit is that boots can be used for hundred of kilometres and many months or sometimes even years
- Over time horses come to appreciate the boot application and owners become fit and able to complete the process

Knowledge

- Steep learning curve: changing from shoes and taking over the management of your horse's feet is no small or easy task. Getting to know and read your horse's feet and learning how they affect and are affected by what is happening in the body and environmentally as well as psychologically will undoubtedly change the way you manage your horse.
- such an extensive range of boots available, it can be daunting and confusing at first. Much research can be needed to select a suitable boot
- Speaking to other boot users is a great way to gain insight and can be done on track, around the campfire. I have not yet met a boot user who is unwilling to share information and insight.
- Improve your knowledge by doing a course, and learn from your trimmer especially if they have done an advanced course.
- Even yesterday I learnt more from the very experienced Ian Curtis on the difference in tread thickness and thus longevity of renegade glue ons.

Patience

- Steep learning curve. Again. Be patient with yourself and with others who may not want you to be trying new things and failing. We learn from failure
- Be patient with your horse when putting boots on and taking them off. Anxiety feeds through to our horses.
- After a few months you'll surely begin to see the benefits of taking an active part in your hoofcare and hoofwear.
- Ask your farrier to be patient – there may be times that you need a farrier. We are not at war here. Don't be afraid it on and then go back to shoeing before you have another go at booting.

Flexibility -

- Booting gives you the flexibility to ride whenever you want. No waiting for the farrier to turn up and put shoes on or replace a lost or sprung shoe
- You won't always need to put boots on – sometimes it's better to go without boots. I don't use boots in the snow or in very muddy or slippery conditions such as wet slippery grass.
- You'll need to learn which conditions require what application – boots, no boots, good tread, no requirement for much tread, glue-ons, strap ons, nail ons.

Which boot is the right boot? – Boot meaning strap on, glue on, nail on – really any hoof protection including shoes.

It's the boot that fits.

It's the boot that impedes the normal functional action of the body the least.

- as biomechanically neutral as possible
- as light as possible
- as comfortable as possible

Once the hoof is trimmed and balanced, the boot serves to provide comfort for the horse whilst in work.

The benefit is that when boots aren't on, they're not wearing, the hoof is!

Shod or unshod – Factors to consider

Diet, Pathologies, Balanced trim, conformation or body issues

Diet

- plays an enormous role in hoof health and horn quality

Pathologies

- Simple pathologies can include thrush, seedy toe, greasy heel, quarter cracks, sand cracks
- More than anecdotally, mineral deficiencies play a big part in many hoof pathologies. I expect Carol Layton will expand on this.
- Pathologies that aren't treated ARE going to gradually affect your horse

- Pass around the hoof capsule and pedal bone

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Anecdotally – from what I have witnessed, horses suffering thrush or poor horn quality have benefited enormously from mineral supplements. Horn improved to the point I have trouble cutting and rasping, insidious thrush disappeared even in wet weather, “event lines” (EXPLAIN) become less pronounced Mineral Supplement that I recommend is ESP Balanced Equine. – economical, developed from pasture testing and, as I understand it, is specific to our area of SE Australia. It has proven helpful in horn improvement of nearly all the horses I know who use it.

So – you’ve decided to give it a go...
Which boot is the right boot for you?

Basically a “performance boot” does not extend beyond the coronet, apart from the straps that attach it.

Show the range on display.

Boots that are suitable for shorter rides can extend beyond the coronet and include styles and brands such as Easycare Trails and Backcountry, Cavallos, Equine Fusion Joggers and the Old Macs range. 20k ok any more and the horse would have to have been proven in them before attempting say, a 40km ride.

Boots that have consistently proven to be suitable for regular 80km rides are Easycare Gloves and to a lesser extent Easycare Epics. Renegade Viper and Renegade Classics are also high quality performance boots. These are the Holden and Ford of boots. Newer performance boots on the market are Scoot Boots: easy to apply, stay on quite well, need Endurance gaiters for longer riders, may wear out a little faster.

New boots available are: Easycare Fury and Fury Heart and now the Evo.