

Hoof Care Corner

Welcome back to the Hoof Care Corner, a series of short articles written to educate horse enthusiasts about a variety of hoof care topics, ranging in scope from “the benefits of barefoot” to “when wedge pads matter”. Our topic today is lost shoes.

Mystery of the Lost Shoe January, 2017

You’ve been there, tacking up on a gorgeous day only to pick up the feet and whoops- no riding for you... your mare threw a shoe. Instead you get to spend the best riding day of the year traipsing across the pasture searching for the shoe, so it doesn’t puncture a hoof later or bind up the field mower. Here we discuss many common reasons horses lose shoes, and some tips for helping your farrier keep those shoes where they do the most good- on the foot!

Hoof health is the reason we shoe in the first place, and unsurprisingly, horses with “bad feet” are often also “chronic shoe pullers”, making for an unhappy chicken-and-egg scenario.

Properly shod, horses with long toes and under-run heels are often “fit full”, meaning the shoe will protrude in the heel region beyond the hoof wall perimeter, to provide support for the caudal foot. This fit may be critical to correcting the long toe- low heel pathology, particularly if the horse is wedged at all. This full fit, however, makes the horse more prone to “step the shoe off”. If your horse is shod this way, consider changes to his turnout situation, limiting him to dry, even footing and restricting galloping and cavorting with pasture mates. Bell-boots, fit large so that they drape the ground in back, are often helpful to protect shoes during turnout. “Short shoeing” means to shoe the back of the foot flush with the perimeter, and should only be considered after all other measures have failed to keep the shoes intact; this fit is rarely to the benefit of your horse’s long-term hoof health.



Heels wedged and fit full to support under-run heels. This shoe should be protected with bell boots.

Thin, brittle hoof wall and weak or damaged lamina are two anatomical challenges for farriers when nailing on shoes. Nailing into damaged white line on the foot is like a carpenter screwing drywall to rotted studs. When the drywall comes crashing down a week later, its going to do some damage. Same for the foot- if the shoe comes off mid-stride, it’s taking some of that hoof wall with it, which makes resetting the shoe much more difficult.

How do we break out of this damaging cycle? Every situation is unique, but your farrier may suggest shortening the shoeing cycle to 4-6 weeks, to minimize the risk of lost shoes during the last week prior to reset, when the shoe is most likely to fail. She may also drive nails higher, seeking healthier wall higher in the foot. Or she may recommend glue-on shoes to avoid nailing altogether, or some combination of nailing and gluing.

If these measures fail, it may be time to barefoot your horse for several months, until the compromised wall grows out. Therapeutic and/or riding boots can provide comfort for your horse while she is barefoot, and you may need to adjust her turnout and riding schedule to optimize her recovery, just like you would do with any other injury your horse sustains.

Antimicrobial treatments such as CleanTrax or White Lightning soaks may be indicated to combat white line compromised by fungi or bacteria. Finally, the far-sighted owner might consider a feed-through hoof supplement to nourish incoming hoof wall.

You may be thinking “*my horse has great feet, and she still tosses horseshoes like it’s a game*”. Why? Well, a multitude of other factors are at work around the barn.



Glue-on shoes provide support without damaging nail holes

Wet-dry conditions may be a culprit. Morning dew, seasonal rain, pasture ponds and daily bathing are all sources of daily water exposure for the hoof. Coupled with clean dry shavings in his stall at night, your horse experiences wet-dry conditions every day. Like wood, horse hooves swell when they get wet, and contract as they dry. Horseshoe nails don’t. Over time, hoof capsule movement disturbs the nails, enlarging the nail hole in the foot and loosening the clinches. Minimizing moisture changes in your horse’s daily routine may help keep shoes on.

Biting flies and black flies are another plague to New England farriers. Some time when your horse is turned out this summer, spend an hour counting the number of times he lifts his foot and stomps it down into the ground. Multiply this by the number of hours he’s turned out and you may discover that your horse spends most of his summer pile driving his horseshoes into the ground. The resulting concussion shears nails and loosens shoes. Topical insect repellent applied daily to the legs and belly as well as good horse farm husbandry including manure removal and drainage of standing water may significantly reduce this hazard to your shoeing program.

Ill-timed traction can loosen shoes. Winter shoes include ice studs, which afford great traction on slippery surfaces. Timing winter shoes is an art; apply too early and the traction studs stick in the mud and rip shoes loose, apply too late and horses suffer snow-balls and slip in their summer shoes. Limiting turn-out during the “winter thaws” could help preserve the life of those precious winter shoes.

Poor quality farriery is certainly one cause of lost shoes, but it is far from the most common culprit. Troubleshooting lost shoes should never begin with blame on either side. Rather, farrier and client should discuss possible contributing factors and develop a plan together to address each systematically. Lost shoes are as much a hassle for the farrier as for the horse and client, so finding resolution is in everyone’s best interest. Be patient, respect one another, and work together for the health of the horse.

Contributer bio

Liselle Batt is a full-time farrier in western Maine. She is accredited through the American Association of Professional Farriers and the current secretary for the Maine Farriers Association. Liselle advocates an educated, common-sense approach to hoof care and to that end offers barefoot trimming, booting fitting, conventional shoeing and glue-ons to clients. Additional information about Western Maine Farrier Service is available on her website.