

JEFF NEWNHAM FARRIERY SERVICES

Why Shoe Horses ?

As a professional farrier for over 25 years Jeff Newham's experience ranges from Olympic 3 day eventers and international Quarter Horses to large "Working Horses" Riding horses and Children's ponies.

The reasons for conventional shoeing (and I includes glue on shoes in this) is four fold:

- i) To prevent wear
 - ii) To overcome a pathology
 - iii) To increase or reduce traction
 - iv) A misguided belief on the Horse owners' part that all horses and ponies need shoes.
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- i) Feral horses have been tracked at covering over 20 miles a day foraging and browsing. So distance covered is not really the issue. But when horse riders dictate the terrain and the speed and then ask the horse to either carry them or pull them, this is when the foot needs additional protection other than that afforded by the hoof capsule. In fact it was the slowing down of military advances that created the need for a mass soundness and a need for all horses to perform equally. This need then lead to many official guides on the methods of keeping a mass of horses in a ready condition. This then developed into a civilian method to keep working horses sound. Many of the texts used today still have their roots in these fundamentals even though the majority of horse use today is neither military nor working. The largest use of horses today is the sport horse, where each equine athlete can be assessed for its individual needs, but more often than not are all shod in a similar manner.
 - ii) This group has had the largest introduction of new ideas and thinking. It is interesting to note that very few innovations come from the academic world of horse care. The majority of new ideas come from open minded farriers who's observations and anecdotal evidence has lead to huge advances in hoof care.
 - iii) As with all sports, the horse industry is always looking for the "edge" From selective breeding to training methods or in this case what shoes can be used to give the best advantage over its competitors. With racehorses this can be "toe grabs", with polo it is sometimes the profile of the shoe itself, with eventing and show jumping it is usually the choice of "studs". In Quarter Horse Reining the opposite is required and hind shoes are used to reduce traction to allow the horse to "slide"
 - iv) This group is huge! The reason for conventional use of shoes is conventional thinking! When I was an apprentice many horses were ridden great distances on the road and it would be fair comment to say there may have been a legitimate need for shoes then. But even on reflection many horses were shod using the same shoes (refitted/reset). It is rare indeed to find any planning application for stabling without a ménage. And established stables now not have ménages but also all weather gallops. What this transcends to is a change of terrain that most horses perform over. These new surfaces, readily available, in many cases negate the need for additional protection other than that afforded by the hoof itself.

With the growing awareness that it may be unwise to fight several million years of evolution it is now more common for horse owners to look at a more natural way to keep and enjoy their horses. Different training methods allow the horse to be treated as individuals rather than a mass "breaking in" or "remounts" cavalry style. A more natural husbandry in the care of the horse can minimise or reduce "stable vices" A better understanding of nutrition and not only what we feed but also when and how along with better Dental Care and Parasite control. Together with better farriery, this has lead to a 50% increase in the useful length of the horses' life over the period of time I have been a farrier.

I am not qualified to speak on any subject other than farriery and it is to this that I now turn my attention in these final paragraphs.

My observations have lead me to now promote the keeping of horses and ponies wherever and whenever possible without shoes and whenever extra protection is needed the first port of call should be the use of Hoof Boots. These simple to use unobtrusive devices can be used like any other piece of tack. And used when needed.

It is unnecessary to encumber the horse, no matter how well shod, with shoes that have to be worn 24 hours a day when protection is needed for only the duration of the ride. To continually damage the part of the foot we are trying to protect is pointless when there is a viable and simple alternative. The hoof wall provides a continual protection to the sensitive structures within and to damage the continuity of the hoof wall with nails is not what is needed.

If you have not thought about the possibility of keeping your horse or pony barefoot either for some or indeed for all of the time I would recommend you have a long serious chat with the person who is best placed to help and advise... your Farrier!