

“If we consider the various breeds, individual foot conformation, structures of the foot, phalangeal alignment, etc., it would appear highly unreasonable to trim all horses in the same manner. All horses are not created equal—and neither are their feet. Shoes have been known to cause lameness and change the hoof capsule; shoes have also been documented to treat lameness and improve the structures of the hoof. So when we decide whether a horse can be kept barefoot, (and many can't), considering the variables involved, the answer may be 'it depends.' ”

Stephen O'Grady, Farrier and Equine Veterinarian
Quoted from the American Farriers Journal

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Karen Chaton, the company's director of marketing, notes that this year the warehouse is full and retailers are happy. Research and development continues to produce more user-friendly models such as the Boa, a high-tech boot designed for traction. Low-tech products include the original Old Mac that uses easy-on, easy-off Velcro closures.

Another manufacturer at the forefront of the movement, Cavallo Horse and Rider, claims that 31 percent of today's horse owners are unable to use metal shoes, and 27 percent of those owners support natural barefoot horses. The lightweight and durable Simple Boot is designed to absorb shock and increase circulation essential to the healthy hoof. It is specifically fitted and shaped for the natural hoof and is easy to use.

A specific benefit to the Simple Boot is the raised inner bar that alleviates pressure off the frog, sole and bars. Cavallo also says that sales have skyrocketed and over the next five years, will increase exponentially.

Obviously, other companies with more products are out there. As the trend toward natural hoof care grows, so will the array of horse boots and hoof supplements. Your customers will let you know what they want to buy and ask you if they're not sure.

Hindsight

Whether traditional, New Equus, or somewhere in between, your customers are getting educated. They are listening to veterinarians, trainers, farriers and clinicians. They are hearing “shoes are good” and “shoes are bad.” But there is common ground, and the horse is entitled to the most comfortable and beneficial care possible.

By positioning your store as a resource center, you can provide valuable information and resource materials to your customers. An educated horse owner is a responsible horse owner.

Essential research is yet ongoing and the more studies on hoof health, the more questions there will be. The only given is that barefoot horses will continue to appear in the show ring, on the dusty trail and at the horse park. And their advocates will be your customers.



Iron Clad

Natural hoof care proponents argue that nailing iron shoes to a horse's hooves inhibits movement and causes circulation problems, nerve problems and other damage to living tissues. Veterinarians aren't always convinced. Most point out that the portion of a healthy hoof wall that flexes is at the rear of the foot. Horseshoes are clipped to the front of the hoof, leaving the rear flexible part free to do its job.