

Shoes that are too long are more likely to be torn off. If the shoe is too short, the back of the shoe will rest on the sole and result in a bruising of the sole known as corns. In making sure that the shoe is the right size, it cannot be overemphasized that the answer is to make the shoe fit the foot, **NOT** to make the foot fit the shoe.

It is important to drive nails into the proper parts of the hoof. Nails driven inside the white line will likely pierce sensitive tissue and result in a crippled pony. This is a very common cause of lameness in shod ponies.

These are some of the more common faults in trimming and shoeing ponies. Take care to avoid these problems, and you will have less trouble with your pony.

More Information

This is the fifth in a series of pamphlets on hoof care for the Newfoundland Pony. Further information can be found in the other pamphlets (Structure of the Hoof; Routine Hoof Care; Hoof Trimming; and Common Causes of Lameness), through the many magazines and books available on horses and ponies, and through your Regional Veterinarian.

Links

Newfoundland Pony Society:

www.newfoundlandpony.com

For more information, please contact the Newfoundland Pony Society, your Regional Veterinarian or the Animal Health Division.

Other information pamphlets are available online from the Department of Natural Resources at:

www.nr.gov.nl.ca/agric/

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Newfoundland
Labrador

Hoof Care for the Newfoundland Pony: Shoeing Your Pony



Introduction

The Newfoundland Pony is well known for its hardiness and flint-hard hooves. While these characteristics are desirable, they do not suggest that its health needs are any less than those of other horses and ponies. It is for this purpose that a series of pamphlets have been written on the proper care of the Newfoundland Pony's hooves. This is the fifth in that series.

Background

Man has put shoes on horses for centuries. Horseshoes have been found in China that were made about one thousand years ago; and a mosaic in Pompeii dating back to 300 B.C. shows a horse which seems to have iron shoes on.

Today people often stick shoes onto horses without understanding why, other than it has always been done. Horseshoes may bring good luck and are fun to throw, but they do have a real purpose as shoes for horses.

Horseshoeing has often rightly been called a necessary evil. Horses would be far better off if they did not need shoes. The weight of shoes slows a horse down and makes the horse tire more easily. Driving nails through the hooves weakens their structure. A horse's foot is designed to expand as it hits the ground, and shoes inhibit this movement.

With all of these problems, why would anyone even want to put shoes on their pony? Wild ponies are never shod and they rarely have problems with their feet. Unfortunately, once the pony is brought in out of the wild, things become more complicated. We ask our animals to work longer and often on hard surfaces. This can result in the hoof wall being worn down faster than it can grow back. Ponies are also often used in situations where more traction than a bare hoof supplies is needed.

A number of conformational and disease problems in ponies' feet can often be helped by corrective shoeing. When a pony's feet are not properly positioned, or if the animal has an improper gait, appropriate shoeing can often bring a leg around into proper position. This type of work should only be attempted by trained farriers, as even slight mistakes will make the problem worse and possibly even ruin the pony. Proper shoeing can also help disease problems. A shoe with a clip on either side of a hoof crack can help stop the crack from spreading up the hoof. Special shoes may be helpful with diseases such as contracted heels, laminitis (founder) or navicular disease. It must be emphasized, again, this type of work can only be done by someone who knows what they are doing, not someone who thinks they know what they are doing.

Shoeing Your Pony

Horseshoeing is a necessary evil, and some thought should be put into what type of shoes to use and why the animal is being shod. The first step in shoeing a pony properly is to find the correct size of shoes for its feet. Never try to change the size of the feet to match the shoes. To properly fit, the shoe should follow the shape of the hoof and extend 1/4 inch past the back of the heel. Along the heel and quarters, the shoe should be about 1/16 inch outside the wall; and at the toe, the shoe should be flush with the hoof. The extra room on the sides is to allow for slight expansion of the hoof as the hoof hits the ground. The back nail in the shoe should not be more than two-thirds of the way back along the foot. If nails are further back than this, they will stop expansion of the heels.

It will not always be possible to get shoes to fit exactly, and some final changes can be done by hammering the shoe. The shoe is then centered on the foot using the frog as a centering line. Now the shoe can be checked to see if it fits exactly and the hoof checked to see that it has been trimmed so that the shoe touches the wall all the way around.

After the shoes have been put onto the feet, the edges of the hoof wall below the clinches can be lightly dressed with a rasp. If you have chosen the proper shoes and shod the pony correctly, no rasping should be needed to fit the shoe to the toe of the hoof. The hooves should not be rasped above the clinches; if the shiny hoof surface is removed, it will allow the hooves to dry out.

Problems Arising from Improper Shoeing

While it is obviously the purpose of trimming and shoeing a pony to help the animal, the results are often far from helpful. People working on ponies' feet who do not understand the basics of foot care or who are careless often cause more harm than good. One of the most common mistakes made in trimming feet is taking too much of the hoof wall off. This makes a pony bear weight on its soles; and, as a result, it becomes crippled. Skill, experience and care are the only ways to prevent this. Remember the differences between the amount of wall to be left for a shod and unshod pony.

Inexperienced workers often take more wall off of one side of the hoof than the other. There is a tendency to remove more wall from the side which is easiest to get at. This results in an unbalanced foot and an awkward pony with gait difficulties.

Cutting the front off of the toe or "dumping" the toe is a serious mistake. If a toe is too long, it should only be shortened from the bottom surface, not the front. When someone says a toe is too long to correct from underneath, the problem is usually that the foot has been neglected and not trimmed enough. When the front of a toe is cut off from above, sensitive tissue may be exposed and the foot shape altered so that it will be almost impossible to fit shoes.

Paring the sole is sometimes done, but only harms the pony. All that should be touched on a pony's sole is the flakey, dead-looking material.

Paring the frog is also a serious mistake. As mentioned earlier, the frog has an important function as a shock absorber in the foot. Cutting at it results in a shriveled form more likely to get thrush (frog infection).

A less common, but still serious error, is cutting the bars. This makes the heel look as if they expand more, or are wider. However, it actually weakens the heels and predisposes them to contraction.

Because it is easier to see how far you should cut the toes than the heels, inexperienced farriers often remove too much from the heels. This causes weak heels and puts increased strain on the tendons and ligaments running down the back of the legs.

As previously mentioned, the outer shiny layer of the hoof should not be removed as it keeps moisture in and keeps the hooves from drying out and becoming brittle.

When shoeing a pony, a common cause of problems is using poorly fitting shoes. Unless the shoes fit the pony properly, it will be almost impossible to attach the shoes to the feet correctly. If the shoes are too wide, they may interfere with other feet.