

The Fun is Rapidly Fading

7:15 am, on a Monday Morning in Turin, GA

I have my coal forge going with a pair of 3/8 x 7/8 x 15 stock for egg bars that are beginning to glow. I have a 9:00 am appointment to shoe a 3-Day Eventer and my mind is working overtime. I am reflecting back to the past weekend I spent at a recognized event. I was asked to be a member of the farrier team for this event and gladly accepted the challenge.

I have been involved with 3-Day Events for 8 years. In these 8 years, I have witnessed the necessity to have qualified and capable farriers on hand to help these horses handle the rigors of the competition.

My first involvement as a farrier at a 3-Day Event was in 1992. My first conclusion during this event was that most of the people competing lacked the services of a farrier that could keep a shoe, as well as a hoof on their horses. The condition of the hooves and the quality of the shoeing jobs were much weaker than I could have ever imagined.

Four years later, I was on the farrier team for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. I was certain that in four years the hooves on the horses and the capabilities of the farriers would have been greatly improved. To my amazement, the expected improvement was a deteriorating condition for both the hoof and the shoeing jobs present at the Olympics. These were supposed to be some of the world's best horses and there was a struggle just to keep shoes on these horses!

My first inclination is to lay the blame at the doorstep of the "four point trim". I believe the four point trims contributes to the problem, but it is not entirely to blame. There are certainly other factors involved.

During the latest 3-Day Event, I questioned some of the other farriers. I asked them to explain their theories of the front feet being shod with shortened, backed up shoes and the rear feet being severely blocked off with square toes and backed up shoes. My concern was due to the lack of hoof length and obvious poor hoof wall condition. The answers I received were the standard answers that have been expounded of late. Their claim is that this is the best way for these large horses to move over the ground. If the horse had any toes to operate with, it would cause leg fatigue and shoe loss.

I had to replace a shoe on a horse on Saturday afternoon. The owner handed me a "spare" front shoe. The spare was a #1 Eventer with a pad installed. (The horse really needed a 3/8 x 7/8 x 14" shoe to sufficiently cover the foot.) When I put the shoe on the hoof, there was a minimum of 3/4" toe over the front of the shoe and 1/4" of heel exposed in the back of the shoe. Once again, I questioned this procedure and asked specifically about weight displacement, support, and traction.

The answer: more shoe on this horse would only lead to more shoe loss. Since I was replacing one of these short shoes, it appeared rather evident that this package was not working as hyped. This same horse had severely squared off toes on the rear. Again, why? The spot answer was to facilitate easy break over. The “off the record” answer given later in the evening was an admission that this helps keep the front shoes on. Again, why did I have to replace a short shod front shoe earlier today?

During all of these question and answer sessions, there was never a mention of the rear toes having any part of weight bearing or involvement in the propulsion of the horse. The only indications I received, once again, were that rear toes were only in the way and unnecessary, hence the toes were dealt with accordingly. Yet another contradiction came up when I asked about a rear square toed shoe that had screw in studs in each heel. The standard answer was to give the horse traction and help grip the ground.



Figure 1. Which horse is resting and which horse is trying to balance itself?

If you have ever inspected the ground in front of and after the jumps on any jump course, you will see hoof marks that involve the front half of the foot, or in many of these cases, what's left of the front half when the toe is removed! When a horse loads his legs to push off the ground to take a jump, it is the toe that is in the ground and not the heels. When the toes are removed, there is no natural lever action in the foot of the horse, consequently making this task harder on the animal than necessary. With the toe removed when the hoof needs to be loaded and unloaded to clear the jump, then loaded to prevent gravity from winning, and be able to spring forward to clear the next obstacle, the leg has had to work 4 times harder than necessary. Obviously, the toe is very important in these phases. However, when the toe is removed, the horse is robbed of these natural levers and has to endure his hard work made even harder by man.



Figure 2. 3-Day horse that was “demoted” to an occasional fox hunter, now training to resume 3-Day eventing.

The horses at these events have my admiration. To compete roads and track and then cross country with the presence of heart and vigor, even though handicapped because of man’s interference, means they have to be the toughest horses of all.

If I compare these horses to the ones that have a toe length resembling pastern length (equal lever actions), I have observed the longer footed horse is more sound. I have found that the horses with sound feet have fewer problems elsewhere. These horses do not exhibit sore hocks, inflamed stifles, or tender backs. These horses stand easy for grooming and especially shoeing. They make my job so much easier by not having to fight with the horses. The customer is pleased because their horses are so well behaved, not to mention fewer vet visits and fewer lost shoes. I have customers who have gone to 3-Day Events on shoes that have been on for 6 and eight weeks and never lost a shoe! Lucky?? Maybe, but 4 years in a row??

The natural lever functions of the leg and hoof work best for me when I regard the front legs are responsible for lift (90%) and the rear is responsible for propulsion. In doing so, I cover the front foot with enough support to create a surface area that accommodates the horses weight. The shoe should not dominate the foot, nor should the foot dominate the shoe. By leaving the rear toes in tact, I’ve found it’s easier to give the rear limbs direction. Rather than climbing all over the fronts, they land to the lateral quadrant. This is accomplished by medial/lateral equality of the foot by paying attention to the hock alignment with the gluteus mass. Anterior length is not excessively long, but closely matches the pastern length. The shoe is shaped to the full foot with a length from the toe to the buttress of the heel.

In other words, the hind shoe should be longer than it is wide. I avoid squared off, blunted, and reversed shoes. I do this because all of these devices only shorten the

support of the horse. Neither the horse nor man can change the fact that the center of mass of any horse is **ALWAYS** in front of the hind feet. Stop and think what it would be like if you were asked to climb a flight of stairs or run a race but you were not allowed to use your toes. If this sounds funny, try it!!



Figure 3. Typical length and support for rear foot of any horse.

I prefer to use the SX-8, SSP, or Werkman style of shoes unless the horse needs even more specialized mechanics. The web of the toe is creased to give more of a “golf” shoe effect rather than a “bowling” shoe result. By doing this, I have not only satisfied the need for the foot to slightly slide to a stop as well as bear weight, then push off again. The crease gives a percentage of ground resistance. I feel that most rim shoes do not have enough ground surface for the foot to ease into the ground. The rims tend to stop the foot very suddenly, therefore jarring the joints and compacting muscle response.

At least 90% of the horses I viewed at the last 3-Day Event had remodeled feet, both front and rear. Short hooves, blocked toes, short toes, and inadequate expansions. The “authority figures” from vets, farriers, and nationally recognized trainers seem to accept these conditions as normal, even necessary.

My heart aches for these animals that have no say in how they are shod. The mistakes made, common sense ignored, and the ego enhancing “power positions” have made this experience one that is **NOT FUN ANYMORE!**