

The Basics of Hot Shoeing

In some cases it's best to fit a horse with shoes fresh off a forge.

By Laurie Bonner for EQUUS magazine.

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"Hot shoeing," also called "hot setting" or "hot fitting," is a common practice among farriers. After the foot has been trimmed, rasped and is ready for the new shoe, the farrier will heat the shoe in the forge and place it briefly on the foot to sear the path where the shoe will ultimately lie.

The purpose is to create a smooth interface surface between the hoof and the shoe and to seal the cut horn tubules, making them less likely to dry out in a dry climate or take on moisture and soften in a wet environment. "The intense heat also tends to kill any fungi and bacteria that may cause problems in the hoof," says Paul Goodness, who manages a group farriery practice called Forging Ahead in Round Hill, Va. Goodness says he hot shoes nearly every horse in his practice, because the climate in Virginia is so moist.

Hot shoeing also helps stabilize shoes with clips. "This burns the base of the clip into the hoof wall and it's locked into place," says Mitch Taylor of the Kentucky Horseshoeing School. "It takes a little more time to hot shoe a horse but you get a better fitting shoe if you do it correctly."

Care must be taken not to damage the foot. "You want the shoe hot when you're searing it onto the hoof if you want the interface to be perfect," says Tia Nelson, DVM, a veterinarian and farrier in Helena, Mont. "You just barely touch it to the foot and take it off again." Mistakes can produce serious sores and abscesses in the foot.

But hot shoeing is not always necessary. "I don't think you need to hot shoe a horse to do a good job," says Nelson. Hot shoeing may aid a smooth interface, but a good job of trimming ought to have already accomplished this goal. "What you do to the foot before you add the shoe is more important than what you put on the foot," she says. If the foot has been shaped and prepared properly for the shoe, the shoe does not need to be hot, she adds; if a foot is not balanced, hot shoeing won't resolve that.