

Lost Shoes

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Q. I have two questions though similar they are separate. I am a fairly new horse owner (9 months) and at a large boarding facility. My farrier came recommended by the previous owner and I moved the horse to this facility. So I am the only person here that uses this farrier.

My horse loses his shoes (what seems) much more often than the other horses at my barn. My horse occasionally stomps his feet. How do I know if this is the reason for the shoes coming off (as my farrier says,) or is my farrier not putting the nails in well? Or if his hoof is just softer than most horses?

Also, how do I tell overall if my farrier is doing a good job?

Anna

A. There can be a multitude of reasons why horses lose shoes. Everything from the environment the horse lives, the rider's experience, the discipline the horse is ridden in, shoes for therapeutic shoeing, to problems with the mechanical aspects of shoeing on the foot.

Since you are in a large boarding facility I am assuming that there is nothing in your horse's environment that can cause lost shoes, such as field fencing, large areas of mud, a pond in the pasture, etc. These types of "obstacles" can be a nightmare for both horse owner and farrier.

Next questions would be about your horse's conformation. Does your horse have long sloping pasterns with underrun heels? Has a veterinarian or farrier recommended egg bar shoes or shoes that extend beyond the buttress of the foot? If so, you as the horse owner, have an obligation to see that the horse is exercised in hand. Too often horse owners will turn a horse, that has been stalled for several days, into the arena and chase him to make him run. The horse will drop his head, placing the center of gravity forward, which will delay the breakover of the front feet, giving the back feet an opportunity to pull the front shoes off or loosen the clinches so the shoe will fall off later. Turning a horse loose in an arena after two or three days of being idle in a small stall and forcing them to run fast and stop quickly is a sure way to create lower leg lameness and lost shoes.

Too many times a horse owner will evaluate the expertise of a farrier by how long the shoes stay on. Most farriers can shoe a horse so it never loses a shoe. This however, is rarely in the best interest of the horse and his soundness. Because of normal foot dynamics shoes should be fit a little full in the heel area. Horses with conformation defects (even minor ones) may need shoes fit full to the inside or outside or heel area. When a good farrier shoes a horse to prevent lameness or address a lameness/injury issue, support or pain relief is more important than the length of time the shoe stays on. With specialized shoeing comes the owner's responsibility to ride, exercise, house and trailer the horse to help prevent shoe loss. The use of bell boots, shipping boots, collection in riding and exercise in hand help a lot.

Sometimes inexperienced riders will allow the horse to lay on the bit or allow the horse to drop his head to grab a bite of grass while they are riding. This will also cause the weight of the horse to move forward, delaying the breakover on those front feet and give the back feet an opportunity to strike and pull the front shoes. Horses with mild conformations that lend themselves to overreaching or forging will become chronic shoe pullers if they are not collected when ridden. Lost shoes may be just a matter of the rider being able to collect the horse.

Horses ridden in speed events will also have a tendency to pull shoes more frequently. These horses need to be shod short and tight. Clips forged into the shoe may help. Horses with weak, thin hooves may lose more shoes than horses with strong thick hoof walls. If your horse has thin, shelly walls then your farrier may want to use thinner nails and/or a lighter shoe and clips as well.

As far as your horse habitually stomping his feet, I don't see how that can lead to chronic shoe loss unless the horse spends most of his day stomping on asphalt or cement. "Soft" feet are not really a consideration unless your horse is standing in water all day.

I would ask your farrier to put side clips on the front feet and quarter clips on the hind feet. These clips must be burned on and not hammered in. Properly fit clips will help secure the shoe onto the feet, taking pressure off the nails and may be the only thing needed to keep shoes on your horse.

You asked, "How do I tell overall if my farrier is doing a good job?" The simple answer is that you can't. Without professional training as a farrier a horse owner is incapable of evaluating the mechanical aspects of a shoeing. Regardless of what your barn buddies may tell you only another

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professional farrier can accurately evaluate a shoeing. You can, however, tell if you are satisfied with a farrier. Since your farrier is providing a service it is incumbent upon him/her to make sure that you, the paying customer, is happy. It is imperative that you have confidence in your farrier. If you don't then it is in everyone's best interest that you change farriers.

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