

## Winter Horse Shoeing

Are horseshoes necessary in the winter? What if you ride only once in a while? Do shoes matter in the winter for the horse himself? Shouldn't the hooves get a rest from shoeing?

Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! However, there are variables to all these questions. Shoes are not necessary in the winter, but they sure can help in slippery conditions which can crop up unexpectedly. It boils down to "Better safe than sorry".

If you ride only once in a while then you have to weigh whether or not the cost of shoeing is justified for your safety. Years ago there was a rider and his trusty mare ambling down the main street of a small town, when suddenly they found themselves sliding down an embankment into the middle of the main street. Fortunately the traffic was able to stop in time. The look of embarrassment of the rider and the bewilderment of the motorists left an indelible impression on all those witnessing this spectacle.

Naturally, winter shoes will help a horse for his own stability, but this is not practical for all situations. There have been a relatively small number of horses that have spread eagled on icy surfaces and been permanently injured. While that is a very small number of the thousands of horses in the country, the risk is still there and the owner should be aware of it.

The hooves WILL benefit from a small rest from nailing and winter is usually the most convenient time to give your horse this rest.

As for winter shoeing, there really is only a couple of ways to properly shoe your horse for it. The most common method is four shoes with caulks at the heels for riding horses and additional caulks for driving horses. There should be snow pads on the front feet to prevent "balling up". These pads should be packed with a black hoof packing that prevents manure from getting under the pads and rotting the frogs. The hind hooves have a twisting action which dislodges the snow balls and therefore pads aren't really necessary for them. Some farriers use silicone under the pads which makes one wonder if they haven't heard of the effects of silicone on humans? There hasn't been a comprehensive study done on the effects on horses, so why use it?

Instead of a complete pad there is a rim pad with a tubular section that prevents "balling" and allows the hoof to breath. This would be better to use for those that have a silicone-use addiction.

For those that have heard that painting vaseline or grease on the soles of the hooves before going for a ride is good advice - this lasts for about twenty strides, which is a pretty short ride!

Written By: John Emsley