

Chapter4 - What is Good Horse Shoeing?

What is Good Horse Shoeing?

What's the proper angle for your horse's hooves?

Using the cliché "mother nature knows best" we can easily understand that the angle should follow the natural slope of the pastern. This puts the least amount of strain on the legs and sets the tendons in their most flexible and natural position. We will be referring to the average, normal angle that will be found on a majority of horses, keeping in mind that there are many times when a horse needs to be tweaked in order to perform without hurting himself. Also for efficiency of movement so that your horse will be able to give maximum performance with minimum effort. The shoulder of your horse is a good place to start as to determining the angle of his hooves. The shoulder angle is duplicated at the pastern and his hooves should continue that angle. Now when we add shoes to the equation, we must take into consideration the on going research into balance, support and proper loading of the hooves and boney column. Ducketts Dot is generally accepted as the center of hoof and therefore the placement of shoes should be slightly back of the edge of the hoof. Natural Balance promotes this setting by bringing the shoe back to approximately 3/4" ahead of the true apex of the frog. This can be misunderstood by both farrier and client, and is a study all in itself. I will simply say that if done properly this will help your horse and need not look weird or ugly like some of the "duck" feet I have seen. Proof is in the pudding, so that if your horse looks odd, travels poorly and seems unstable, something is wrong. Personally I try to follow these advancements and my clients are not shocked by what they see, simply because the difference does not appear radically changed and their horses move better then ever.

Many race horses, gaited horses, horses with a forging tendency e.g. Arabians, Standardbreds, or horses with a special conformation, obviously cannot follow this rule. However, a vast majority of saddle horses and others agree that "mother nature does know best" and there is need for us to understand these principles of balance and support. Remember that applying a shoeing package is to be done in an individual manner not, "a one size/setting fits all". An experienced farrier is continually learning and recognizes the individuality of the shoeing process.

The average angles for front feet are 45° -- 50°, most often 48° -- 50°. For the hind feet 50° -- 55° with the angle usually closer to 52° -- 53°. The opposing feet should be the same angles in most cases, but there are times that some horses exceed these parameters because of conformation, injuries or the individuals athletic abilities. Terrain and working conditions can make one try and correct something that is really not about the setting, so be careful not to look in the wrong place for answers.

Written by: John Emsley