



Hoof Boot Fitting & Use

AN EXERCISE IN THOUGHTFULNESS, NOT FRUSTRATION!

by Suzanne Warsinsky

A variety of trail-worthy hoof boots, used and new.

Top row: Easyboot Glove, Glove BackCountry, Epic; Bottom row: Easyboot Edge, Cavallo Simple Boot, Renegade Hoof Boot

Hoof boots are a regular tool in the barefooter's tack room, just like a saddle or bridle. As such, some styles or sizes are better suited for the individual horse and rider. This article offers some thoughts on successful hoof boot selection, application and adjustment, with a few tips that will hopefully lead to a successful booting experience.

Choosing a Hoof Boot

When choosing hoof boots for your equine partner, try thinking about them in a similar way to saddle selection. It is all about keeping our equine partners comfortable and healthy as we share the trail – or other activity – together.

For example, the rider chooses her saddle according to discipline, then for comfortable fit for both horse and rider. Without considering both horse and rider, the saddle fit will likely be poor and cause problems to the horse.

The same can be said for hoof boots. Rather than choosing a boot based on looks or what someone else is using, select according to the following criteria:

1: Discipline – Which boots are recommended for your discipline/purpose? There are different styles for different activities, just like English and Western saddles. Check the boot manufacturer's websites to see which boots are rated for your desired purpose.

2: Horse's hooves – Which boots will fit your horse's hooves (shape and size) the closest, and will make him most comfortable? Different boot styles fit differently, just like people's shoes. Boots are best sized and fit right after a proper barefoot trim, with low heels, short toes, little to no flare, and an appropriate mustang roll. Consult the sizing charts provided by the manufacturer. If possible, work with a natural hoof care provider who carries a variety of hoof boots, sort of like going to a shoe store.

3: Rider's capabilities – Which boots can **you** successfully and easily put on and off? For example, some boot closure systems are a challenge for those with arthritic hands.



Photo courtesy Lander Industries, Inc.

A properly trimmed bare hoof fits snugly in this Renegade hoof boot.

Once you have selected boots that meet the above criteria, then it is time to make them work!

Application and Adjustment

Just as the best saddle or bridle will only serve well if properly adjusted, so to does the success of a hoof boot rest in its application and adjustment.

1. Learn how to apply and tighten your specific boot. Ideally, the boot will fit without any modification other than applying it and tightening it correctly. Make sure to read the application guide and/or watch the application video provided by the boot manufacturer. You must learn to properly apply your specific boot. They are not all the same, just as English or Western saddle fit is not all the same.

2. Keep hooves trimmed. Make sure to keep your horse's hooves trimmed properly. Allowing excess growth between trims can cause hoof boots to not fit as well, and no amount of adjustment is going to make a boot fit a hoof that is simply too big.

3. Shimming and Padding. If your trim is good and the boot is the right size but tightening it correctly does not create a good fit, then shims and padding can be used to help, just like with saddle fit.

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Shims: Hooves are 3D entities and boots should fit all around the hoof. Shimming with athletic tape, vet wrap, duct tape, and/or pads can greatly enhance the fit. Athletic tape works particularly well as a perimeter wrap in EasyBoot Gloves. Vet wrap works well in other EasyCare boots and Cavallo boots and, on dry days, in Renegades. Duct tape plays a similar role. (These products can also be used to help protect areas that might otherwise rub, such as heel bulbs and the back of the fetlocks. Sometimes thick athletic socks help with rubbing, too, but in dry weather only.) Renegades can also have custom shims made with Vettec Adhere.



Above: Athletic tape used around the perimeter of the hoof wall to create a closed seal with the Easyboot GlueOn/ Glove. Hooves can change shape during the course of the year, according to season, weather, environment, use. Check fit frequently. You may find previous shimming is unneeded, or that new shimming is needed.



Above: These are some common shims: athletic tape, vet wrap, duct tape. You can use them to help improve an imperfect hoof boot fit.



Don't be afraid to mix and match boots. This horse/rider combo has Renegades in front and Easyboot Epics behind. Choose whatever you can easily put on and off, that suits the job your horse must do, and that fits your horse's feet, front or back.

Pads: Hoof pads can take up a little extra space in the bottom of the boot as well as offer a therapeutic cushion for horses who need it. EasyCare has 3 different densities and 2 thicknesses; Renegades have a pour-in padding that can be ordered from the manufacturer. One client makes hand-felted pads from homegrown sheep's wool that absorbs perspiration, cushions the bottom of the foot, and serves as a bit of arch support with stimulation in the collateral grooves. She is currently experimenting with sheepskin, too. Many caregivers find imaginative and creative padding solutions.



Above: Selection of pads from EasyCare, Inc.



Hand-felted hoof pads and experimenting with sheepskin pads in Renegades. One additional bonus in these woolen pads is that they eliminate the need to use foot fungal powder (Gold Bond) to absorb hoof sweat inside the boot as wool is a natural moisture absorbing material.

Important Tips

Once everything is working well, please keep in mind the following for long-term success:

1: Practice with the boots before you want to take a ride. Make sure you have it all going well. Work out any kinks in advance. I like to do some groundwork with the horse with boots on, in both directions and at three gaits, to get the horse comfortable in the boots, and to see if they shift or loosen, or even fly off in either direction at any gait. If they do, reassess size, application, shimming, and/or pads.

2. Desensitize to avoid trouble. For safety's sake, desensitize your horse to a boot that comes off. Yes, that does happen, even to the best booter out there, without necessarily being an indication of poor fit or failure. Take the time to get

Photo courtesy Liz Stout

Photo courtesy Liz Stout

Photo courtesy Wild n Woolly Farm

Photo courtesy Paulita Neff

your horse comfortable with this to avoid a spook. Rub the boot and gaiter around your horse's fetlock. Hang the boot by just the gaiter around the fetlock, if this is the type of boot you are using. Put your boot on very loosely and allow it to come off as you work your horse on the ground in a safe location, such as on a lunge line or in a round pen.

3: Listen. While riding on the trail, get used to listening to your horse's foot fall. If you hear 1 sound per step, that is good: boot and hoof are working in tandem. If you hear 2 sounds per step, indicating hoof and boot are landing separately, thus not working in tandem, dismount and adjust/ tighten.

4: Lastly, take care of your boots. Clean them after each ride. Boots are pretty hardy, though they do not last forever. They will endure a lot longer, however, with proper care.

Good luck and happy trails in your boots! ♡

For more information:
Common Hoof Boot Websites:
www.cavallo-inc.com
www.easycareinc.com
www.renegadehoofboots.com



About the author:
Suzanne Warsinsky is a natural hoof care provider in West Virginia. She started Appalachian Hoof Care in order to offer

high quality barefoot trimming and booting services in her area. She also leads an equine 4H club through which she enjoys sharing her passion for natural horse care with horse-crazy youth. Suzanne is an Accredited Farrier with the American Association of Professional Farriers and a Volunteer Scholarship Recipient with the Equine Sciences Academy. She is also the Strategic Visioning Facilitator of Natural Horse Magazine.
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