



By Holly Clanahan

Horseshoes don't just fall off; there's always a reason.

YOUR HORSE COMES AMBLING IN TOWARD THE pasture gate, and something's just not quite right. Then it hits you: His right front shoe is AWOL, probably hiding in a clump of tall grass on the far side of the property.

So Shoeless Joe Jackson comes in the barn for a nice dinner, while you troll the pasture hunting the shoe and dialing your farrier.

Horses throw shoes for a variety of reasons – some of them preventable, but most of them not. It's just one of those dubious joys of horse ownership.

"There are the craziest reasons why horses pull shoes," says Keith Green, an American Farriers Association certified journeyman farrier from Wakeman, Ohio. He has seen horses who do a lot of hard stops "actually slide the hind shoes back and torque the nails." Another horse he knows likes to back snugly up to his stall door, and he sometimes catches a hind shoe under the door.

More commonly, though, horses step on the heels of their front shoes, ripping them off. Other horses can step on the shoes, too, or they can catch them on foreign objects like a fence.

But here's something that doesn't happen: Shoes don't get sucked off by deep mud.

"Mud sucking shoes off is an old wives tale," Keith says. "Mud doesn't typically suck shoes off. It slows the front feet down enough that it allows the horse to step on the shoe with a back foot."

Ironically, the best-fit shoes are the ones that come off occasionally.

A horse would be less likely to step on his shoes if they were fit too tightly under the hoof, with nothing extending past the hoof wall – but a shoe like that wouldn't be best for the horse. Imagine a too-tight shoe on your own foot; it hurts and doesn't allow you to move correctly.

A properly fit horseshoe has about a dime's width of steel extending out from the widest part of the hoof back to the heel, allowing for expansion of the hoof. And the back of the shoe should extend from 1/16 to 3/16 of an

Shoeless in Seattle

inch past the heels, which provides important support for the back of the foot, Keith says. A horse with shoes that do not cover the heels is considered "short shod" and is at risk for corns and other problems, he says.

So while he sometimes fits shoes tighter around the sides, Keith says that when you weigh the pros and cons of shortening the heels of a shoe, it's always better to give the horse some support.

"I would rather shoe the horse correctly and have the shoe come off occasionally than 'short shoe' the horse and risk the other problems," Keith says.

So what can you do to keep shoes from coming off?

"Bell boots help on the front feet," Keith says. "They are a huge help in keeping shoes on in turnout and while riding."

And for the farrier's part, sometimes clips can help secure the shoes.

"I quarter clip a lot of hind feet with hammer-drawn clips, which fit better than pre-manufactured clips," Keith says. And he prefers toe clips instead of side clips on horses' front shoes. "Clips can help immensely with keeping shoes on."

It's best if the clips are hot-fit and set into the hoof wall, and a hot-fit shoe will also make for a better fit, because the shoe and the ground surface of the hoof are exactly matched. (Look for a story on hot shoeing vs. cold shoeing in an upcoming issue of *America's Horse*.)

A correctly nailed-on shoe is also less likely to come off. Look for clinches that are square, about a third of the way up the hoof and folded neatly into the hoof wall.

If the clinches are too low or not secure in the hoof wall, they're likely to get pushed out as the hoof naturally expands and contracts with moisture. Then you've got a shoe that may be loosening.

If a shoe is coming off, Keith says horse owners should go ahead and pull the shoe if they have the tools and the know-how.



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That'll prevent the horse from ripping the shoe off and tearing hoof wall away or possibly stepping on exposed nails.

Once your horse is shoeless, he may chip up that bare foot, giving the farrier much less to nail to.

Keith says hoof boots are a good option for preventing that, as is keeping the horse in a stall or on limited turnout. You can also bandage the hoof with an elastic bandage and duct tape, although that won't last too long because the horse will wear through the bottom of it at the toe.

Perhaps the most important thing horse owners can do is keep their horse on track with regular farrier work every six to eight weeks, Keith says.

Overgrown hooves will shuck shoes more easily, and the overall health of the hooves will be compromised.

"It's not making the farrier's job any easier," Keith says. "A

farrier is limited to the quality of job he can do by the quality of the horse's hoof." 🐾

Visit www.americanfarriers.org to find an AFA farrier near you. The American Farriers Association is an alliance partner with AQHA.

America's Horse Poll

When my horse throws a shoe, my farrier:

- Resets it for free; the service is guaranteed – 51 %
 - Charges a fee to cover fuel, time and materials – 25 %
 - Doesn't charge me anything, but I pay a tip anyway – 23 %
- From www.aqha.com/magazines/americashorse/index.html.
This poll had 512 responses.