

CARRIAGE HORSE SHOEING



I have always had a fondness for carriage horses. Their motion is, in my mind, more natural than that of horses under saddle. A horse in harness really only has to work half as hard as he would under saddle. Both types have weight to move forward, but the harnessed horse doesn't have to support the weight of a rider. With the exception of starting a heavy load or negotiating hilly roads, the harnessed horse can move more to his own liking.

When I speak of carriage horses I am referring to the horse whose main gait is the trot. The heavies—the Clydesdale, Belgian, Percheron, Shire and Suffolk—are primarily walking horses. Their slower action keeps them from having many of the problems suffered by their flashier and lighter counterparts. The carriage horses I'm referring to can be

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divided into two groups. There are the ponies (Shetland, Welsh, Dartmoor, Exmoor, and Welsh Cob) and the horses (Hackney, Morgan—probably the most popular—Cleveland Bay, Saddlebred, Standardbred, German Holsteiner, Geldlander, and Lipizaner) There is also the crossbred, which may be Clyde/Hackney or a Thoroughbred cross.

Don't confuse these horses with the fine harness horses of the show ring. The carriage horse I'm talking about is a "using" road horse. An example of what I mean occurred this past week. Two of my clients hauled their horses and vehicles 150 miles one way to drive around a private estate. One coach weighs 4000 lbs. and is pulled by a four-in-hand hitch of Hanoverians. The other, much lighter carriage seats two passengers and a footman and is pulled by a team of Hackneys. These horses covered 18 miles in one day, so they are not babied cream-puffs.

These horses are shod to minimize exaggerated, frivolous action and maximize support, traction, and a natural way of going. Even when carriage horses are in a coaching show, they perform as part of their classes an event known as a marathon. This marathon usually averages seven or eight miles. In order for a single horse, team, or four-in-hand to be in proper physical condition for these endurance events, it is necessary for them to train regularly and here is where carriage horse horse-shoeing is different from saddle horse horse-shoeing. An average shoe without some type of hard surfacing will hold up for only two or three weeks and will wear smooth. This means a lot of cast shoes, bad-footed horses, and poor traction.

Making the shoes extremely thick with high calks isn't the solution. Heavy shoes seem to be a problem in this way. Horses will tire quickly with unnecessary weight and start dragging the toes right off their shoes. They will also "play the castanets" or forge and start brushing their ankles. As for high calks, not only will they dump the horse on his toes and cause excessive wear, but they will also keep the frog too high off the ground. Sidebone and ringbone are real everyday problems for horses driven on macadam roadways. Good healthy frog function is the cheapest, most practical defense against these problems.

RUBBER SHOES AND PADS

There was an era when rubber shoes were popular, but now they are rarely used in my area. Besides their prohibitively high price, they are difficult to shape to a foot properly. That requires a lot of compromise with the hoof wall when fitting odd-shaped feet. Also, they are very thick and prevent the frog from ever touching the ground. They do, however, give the sole a lot of cover and prevent stone bruises. Their weight is another drawback. On a street horse—one that only walked, such as a vendor's horse—they were just fine. Slipping was not a problem and, if it was, rubber drive calks could be driven into the shoe as a preventative.

One rubber product that is useful for today's carriage horse horse-shoeing is heel bar pads. These pads are used with a three-quarter steel shoe and offer good traction and frog pressure. They must be watched carefully, though. The hoof surface has a canvas mesh imbedded in the rubber. This canvas tends to let the heels of the hoof cut a channel in the pad. When this breakdown of the pad occurs, the hoof is trapped in this channel and the condition could lead to contracted heels and, in turn, sidebones. These pads, often referred to as "roadster" or "road" pads, are currently available.

MAKING SHOES

I don't know of any farrier who exclusively shoes carriage horses unless it would be in an Amish community. I feel most farriers mix carriage horses in with other types of horses in their business. This is the situation I am in and I can only tell you what I do.

I shoe approximately 18 carriage horses and 3 ponies. The largest of the group are Hanoverians and Lipizaners. Their feet measure from 5½" to 6½" wide. Each of these horses will travel at least 20 miles a week, mostly on macadam roads. I can get six weeks on these horses if I use ⅝" x 1" in front with a nice stout toe clip and ⅜" borium. The borium is on each heel and across the toe. I have found on the heel that if I don't keep it right on the end of the shoe, the shoe will wear round where there was no protection. I build this up around ⅜" high and ½" round. Drive calks could be used here also. Most people put two buttons on the toe; however, we have a lot of sand in this area and the shoes will hold up better if I run borium all the way across the toe. If you keep it back from the toe and in the middle of the web, it will let the horse break over a little easier, helping to prevent forging. On the larger shoes I put one additional button of borium between the second and



Figure 1. If coach horses are going to work well together and maintain top form, it is necessary to exercise them regularly.

awfully hard on their fine legs. Number six or even four number 4½ regular head nails are adequate if the shoes are clipped and fit properly.

I don't see how anyone can keep shoes on carriage and coach horses without clipping them. A nice strong clip seated firmly in the wall can take a lot of shock off the nails. They will keep shoes from screwing off a foot on base-narrow horses. When shoes have a lot of traction and the load is heavy, nails just can't do it all.

In order to prevent sole bruises, pads may be necessary in areas of the country where horses must be driven over rocky ground. It is not often that they are needed behind, and in many cases they can be avoided in front if the sole is not pared thin and the shoe is made of wide stock. A little trick in areas where the pads fill up with sand in a week or so: Cut the pad into a super-wide rim pad at the toe—that is, cut it out ½" wider than the shoe on the inside. The sole still gets lots of protection, and dirt won't pack it up. I use leather pads on the large horses—not because I want to, but because the plastic pads are not quite thick enough and, in some cases, not wide enough either.

When a horse loses a shoe on the trail, it's no big deal for the rider to get off and walk the horse home. But when one horse of a \$10,000 team pulling a \$5,000 carriage loses a shoe, it can result in big problems. I don't think the average driver should be asked to nail a shoe back on. Most people just poke the foot full of nail holes trying to put a shoe back on anyway. I think a farrier would be wise to advise any clients who have expensive carriage horses to carry a selection of easy boots as spare tires. They won't lose time with a sore-footed horse and a farrier will have a good foot to work with later.

Occasionally, interference on carriage horses is an in-and-out situation. Before you blame yourself and think the horse is not balanced properly, think about this: These horses do hard work and, in some cases, plenty of it. This can result in sore muscles and will cause a very awkward way of going. Interference is usually the result. Besides hiding the shoe under the foot and finishing it smoothly, there is not much you can do for fatigue interference except advise the driver to put protective boots on the horse.




Figure 4. By rolling the toes up, you can prevent some toe dragging.

One interference that you can do something about is when the toe of the hind foot interferes with the ground. This may be the result of a hock or ankle problem or just plain fatigue. It makes no difference. Get the foot short and the heel a little higher than usual. Make up a shoe wide in the toe (not thick) and rock it up the toe, kind of like a low, wide clip. If the front of the shoe is not sticking out, it can't drag on the ground.

I can't say that there are any big secrets to shoeing carriage horses other than to keep in mind the fact that the horses must move naturally or they won't move far. Balance the foot to help the horse move smoothly and keep the shoes as light as you can get away with and still afford good cover and strength. Try to keep the frog as close to the ground as possible.

I have only mentioned shoes for these horses made from barstock. It is certainly not that they cannot be well-shod with a factory shoe. I like to have a lot of "cover" on these feet to prevent sole bruises, but avoid having a lot of weight on the foot. If I were to use a factory shoe on these horses I would probably go for a Nordic flat in front and a heeled Bronco (Diamond) behind. I think I can keep the weight down better, though, with my hand-mades. Besides, I can use the size nail I want, where I want it.

A lot of nice people have been introduced to coaching since World War II and we farriers can help them better enjoy their horses if we take the time to give them the professional service they deserve and for which they are paying. 

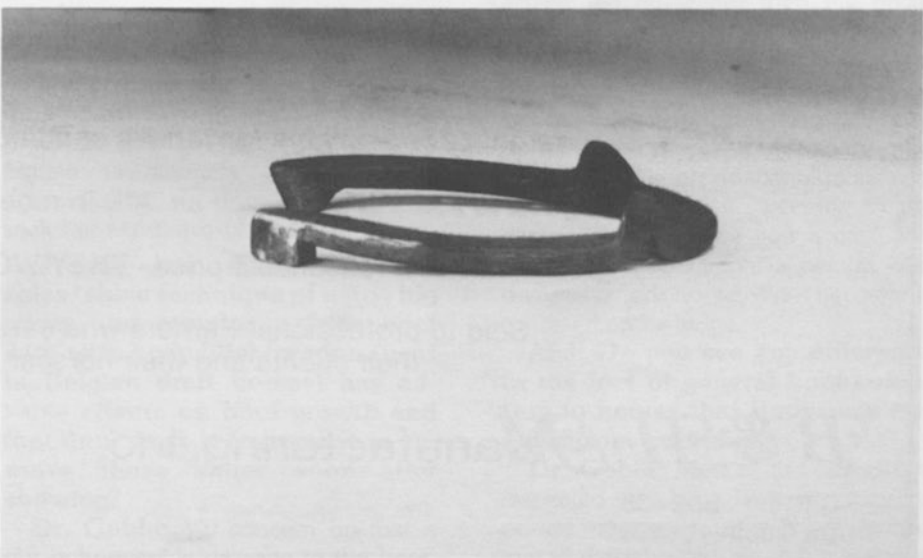


Figure 5. When making calks for coach horses, keep them low or they will cause excessive toe wear.