How to Select and Fit Bell Boots

Bell boots, sometimes called overreach boots, cover a horse’s front feet from the pastern over the coronary band and the hoof wall down to the heel.

Bell boots provide protection from interference from the hind feet, which can overreach or clip the front feet during riding or turnout. Overreaching causes injury as the hind feet strike the tender heel bulbs of the front feet, or as the hind feet step on the backs of the front shoes and loosen or pull them off. If your horse tends to lose shoes in turnout, or finishes a ride with dirt marks, scrapes or bruises on his heels or pasterns, he may benefit from wearing bell boots.

Bell boots also provide protection to the coronary band during activities in which a horse may tend to step on its own feet, such as during lungeing or trucking if shipping bandages do not cover the horse’s pasterns or heels. Bell boots should always be placed on a horse when horseshoe studs are in place, and may be necessary for a horse wearing corrective shoeing.

In some instances, bell boots may be helpful when placed on a horse’s hind feet, such as on a horse that tends to lose its hind shoes or that develops clip marks or abrasions above the coronary band on its hind feet. Properly fitted bell boots can temporarily lessen these problems, but a farrier should be consulted for a more permanent resolution.

Bell Boot Styles

Pull-on bell boots are considered by some riders – especially those taking rigorous jump courses – to provide the greatest measure of security against the bell boot coming off during a ride. They also offer the greatest level of protection as the boots have no opening to expose an area of the heel or pastern. Pull-on bell boots can be slightly challenging to put on and take off, so many riders and barn managers favor open bell boots with hook and loop closures for convenience.

Open bell boots are easy to put on and take off because they simply wrap around the hoof and close in place with hook and loop fasteners. Care should be taken to ensure that the ends of the open sides of the boot meet to fully protect the hoof wall, and that the hook and loop fasteners are kept clean and intact so that the boots close securely.

Within these two main styles, you’ll find that the majority of bell boots on the market rotate freely as the horse moves. Most horses do not mind wearing bell boots, and rotation does not pose a problem. However, some sensitive horses, those prone to chafing or those participating in rigorous activity may benefit from a no-turn style.

No-turn technologies include boots such as the Professional’s Choice Ballistic Overreach Boots, in which a molded area on the interior of the boot rests against the back of the pastern just above the bulbs of the heel to prevent the boot from turning. This design places the hook-and-loop closure at the front of the boot to ensure full protection at the back of the boot. A second no-turn design features a pliable pull-on style that conforms to the hoof and heel bulbs for protection, such as can be seen in the Acavallo No-Turn Bell Boots.

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Bell Boot Materials
Understanding how various materials are fashioned into bell boot styles will help you choose the best boot for your horse. Materials are waterproof or water-repellant and offer varying degrees of durability.

**Gum** – Traditional gum rubber bell boots, such as the Easy-Stretch Bell Boots are very lightweight and stretchy, and have a characteristic caramel color. Gum bell boots are generally available in pull-on style, and within that style some have double thickness at the bottom for added strength against tearing. If your horse is extremely hard on bell boots, you may find that heavier rubber bell boots or PVC bell boots last longer.

**Rubber** – Rubber bell boots, such as the Equi-Stretch Ribbed Bell Boots, are slightly heavier than gum boots. Rubber bell boots are available in both open and closed styles, and because rubber can be dyed you’ll find them in many bright and traditional colors. Consider a Fleece-Lined Bell Boot with synthetic fleece lining for a horse with sensitive skin, but be sure to keep the fleece clean and dry for maximum effectiveness.

**PVC (Polyvinyl Chloride)** – Heavy-duty PVC is a tough, synthetic material that is molded into bell boots with double-locking hook and loop closures, as can be seen with the Davis Bell Boots. Like rubber bell boots, PVC boots come in a variety of both conservative and fun colors. PVC may be a good option for your horse if you are looking for economical boots with sturdy sides to deflect hoof strikes.

**Nylon** – Several kinds of no-turn bell boots are made of nylon, an extremely durable and lightweight material. An example of this type of boot is the 3DX No-Turn Bell Boot, which has a very dense center designed to absorb impact and a soft nylon lining for the horse’s comfort.

**Neoprene** – Some boot manufacturers incorporate neoprene, a soft, flexible and resilient material, into their bell boots for comfort against the horse. For example, Woof Kevlar® Overreach Bell Boot pairs a hard outer shell with a soft neoprene lining, and Eskadron offers the Pikosoft Bell Boot with a strong suede-like material on the outside and a neoprene lining.

**Open Cell Foam** – ThinLine Bell Boots feature a strong synthetic outer shell lined with open cell foam, a lightweight and breathable material that disperses shock and heat. As the horse wears these bell boots, its body heat warms the foam and allows it to mold to the horse to help absorb concussion.

**Carbon-fiber** – Horses that are extremely hard on bell boots while engaged in vigorous jumping activity may benefit from bell boots such as the Dalmar Overreach Boot which incorporate a carbon fiber strike pads. Carbon fiber is lightweight but extremely strong to offer a high level of impact protection.

Prevent Chafing:

- Before putting on bell boots, brush away dirt on the hoof walls and pasterns. Grime can chafe and cause sores on the skin.
- Remove bell boots after riding, trucking, lungeing and turnout to allow the skin and hair to air dry.
- Wash away grime from the inside surface and upper rim of the bell boot, and inspect these areas regularly for tears that will cause friction against the horse’s skin.