How to Select Hoof Boots for Riding

Hoof boots are comparable in many ways to hiking boots for people. Designed to be worn for riding on the flat or on the trail, horse boots fit snugly onto a horse’s unshod hooves to protect them from chipping or injuries such as stone bruises and to provide traction on uneven terrain.

Hoof boots can be worn on both front and hind feet, and are popular with horse owners who keep their horses barefoot. While unshod horses often do well being ridden or turned out on soft terrain, some require the help of hoof boots to stay comfortable and sound on trail or during long rides.

Hoof boots are also handy to have on hand in the event of a lost shoe, and some riders carry one with them while hacking for just that purpose. Hoof boots are also an asset for riding when a horse’s feet are tender while transitioning from wearing shoes to going barefoot.

Styles of Hoof Boots
To help you determine which of the many models of hoof boot is best for your horse and easiest for you to use, consider various features that are intended for the comfort of your horse, ease of tightening, materials, shape and sizing.

Easyboot Glove

Comfort features – If you have a horse with very sensitive skin, the Easyboot Glove has an innovative low profile in which the body of the boot hugs the wall of the hoof, never coming in contact with the horse’s skin or hair. A soft strap and built-in gaiter fits against the horse’s pastern to secure the boot. Other models of boots incorporate soft, rolled material at the top rim for smoothness against the horse. As an example, the Cavallo Simple Boot has a rim made of leather.

Old Mac’s G2

Interior cushioning may be one of your concerns if your horse is ridden on lengthy rides or suffers from certain hoof ailments or soreness. As an example, Old Mac’s G2 Boots incorporate the use of high-density foam to cushion the inside bottom of the boot and to minimize concussion as hooves meet the ground.

Fastening system – To work effectively, all hoof boots must fit your horse very snugly, so any well-fitting hoof boot will be slightly challenging to slide on. Once the boot is in place, however, fastening systems vary. Consider your personal preference on the way a boot closes, especially if you have dexterity or strength issues in your hands. You may find one style easier to work with than others. Most boots have a strap system that holds the boot secure. For example, Cavallo Sport Boots fasten in place with Velcro® brand closures, while the Boa Horse Boots tighten with the turn of a dial on the front of the boot.

Materials – The upper surface of boots can be made of leather or synthetic material. Leather provides a classic look, is durable and smooth, and can be cleaned and conditioned with the appropriate leather cleaners. Synthetic materials such as high denier nylon are also durable as well as being lightweight and easy to hose clean.

Sole – The tough soles of different models of hoof boots have varying thicknesses and depths of tread pattern. If your trails are flat and smooth, you may not need a sole with a deep tread. If you ride for long periods, you may want to choose the lightest weight sole. Also discuss your horse’s breakover point with your farrier. Not all hoof boots provide the same amount of breakover area, and not all horses break over in the center of their hoof. It is possible that one boot may prove more comfortable to your horse’s stride than another, and your farrier may be able to guide you with this aspect of your decision. In rigorous activity may benefit from a no-turn style.
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Tips for Using Hoof Boots

- If you're unsure about the proper fit of a hoof boot or are concerned about the way your horse's foot breaks over when your horse moves, consult with your farrier.
- Horse boots should be used only for riding and should not remain in place on your horse's feet.
- As your horse's hooves grow between trims, be sure to check the way his hoof boots fit. On most horses, properly fitting boots fit well throughout the trim cycle but some hooves grow in such a way that the boots become ill-fitting.
- Hoof boots should not twist or rub the horse. If this occurs, check the fit or consider another type of boot for your horse.

How to Measure for Hoof Boots

To be effective and comfortable for the horse, hoof boots must fit snugly and correctly. Improper fit can result in chafing or rubs, tripping or loss of the boot during a ride.

To determine the size hoof boot your horse needs:

1. Measure each of your horse's feet just after a trim using a metal tape measure with inch increments. A horse's hooves are not always symmetrical in size, especially when comparing front to back.
2. Measure the width across the bottom of the foot at the widest point.
3. Measure the length from the toe to the buttress line of the heel. The buttress line is located at the end of the weight-bearing point of the heel, where the hoof wall ends and starts to curve in.
4. Compare your measurements to the manufacturer's size chart for the brand of hoof boots you would like. (Size charts are accessed from the individual product page for each type of hoof boot at DoverSaddlery.com.) The width and the length should fit within the same boot size, but if different sizes are indicated by the measurements, select the larger size.
5. A hoof boot should feel so snug as to be slightly difficult to put on. The sole of the hoof should fit level in the bottom of the boot.

Note: A selection of hoof boots, such as the Davis PVC Treatment Boot, is available to help you apply medicinal soaks in the event of abscess or injury. Also, boots are available for therapeutic purposes. As an example, the Easyboot Rx has a soft, supportive pad inside that is similar to that used in human orthotics. Under the guidance of a farrier or veterinarian, this boot may be helpful in the instance of chronic lameness, laminitis, founder, navicular and related problems.

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