

These Boots are Made for Riding

By Sharon Biggs
For Veterinary Practice News

The hoof boot has evolved from a simple rubber clamp designed to temporarily support a shoeless hoof to a practical alternative for shoes, a real innovation for riders.

But veterinarians are also finding favor with the products, not only for the health and well-being of their patients, but in financial incentives too, manufacturers say.

Not only have boots replaced the need for gauze padding and duct tape strapping, but many manufacturers are offering programs for veterinarians to earn commission or set up their own retail services.

Hoof boots were first scrutinized for medical use as early as the 1970s. The Easy Boot was designed in 1970 by nuclear physicist Dr. Neel Glass after his horse was diagnosed with navicular disease.

The Marquis Supergrip by Stride Equus was later designed by German veterinary surgeon Helmut Marquis. And studies on blood circulation, hoof loading patterns and laminitis by Robert Bowker, VMD, Ph.D., compelled Cavallo Horse and Rider in Roberts Creek, British Columbia, Canada, to design boots several years ago.

Veterinarian use of hoof boots has been a natural progression, says Chris Adderson of Stride Equ-

us in Vernon, British Columbia, Canada.

"Because boots are so adaptable, they work for both veterinarians and riders. Veterinarians use them in many different ways, for poultices, packs and shock absorption. The material is firm but flexible and gives integrity to the hoof, which is great for chronic thrush, tender feet, flat soles and hoof cracks.

"Gaits improve tremendously with navicular horses because the boots cushion the sole. Many people also use boots instead of nailed shoes to help with broken coffin bones."

"[Boots] are very good for foundered horses because they provide [comfort] for the sole," adds Karen Chaton, from Easy Care in Tucson, Ariz. "They are comfortable and so the horse is more likely to move around, which helps with their therapy."

Horses can also be outfitted with boots after anesthesia; metal shoes can tear up expensive padding in the recovery room and removing them isn't always practical. They give horses more traction to stand as they recover.

Recreation

Boots aren't strictly for medical use. Horse boots are also designed to offer hoof protection until an animal has recovered.

"Exercise is a good therapy to promote healing because the hoof mechanism will work to bring in blood flow and nutrition," says Richard Drewry, US distributor for Swiss Boots. "But during the workout the horse may experience discomfort and that's when boots come in handy."

Although fitting the boot isn't complicated, it does take education.

Many of the manufacturers offer educational videos on their websites and some offer a trial period to test the fit. The boot must fit correctly and the hoof must be cleaned before the boot is applied.



Riding through water in the Marquis Supergrip



Pumping up the Marquis Supergrip

Veterinarians should also educate clients to check the boot every day; take them off and let the feet air for a couple of hours.

Although a properly fitted boot will be debris resistant, water, sand and mud can work into the boot in poor footing.

"With any kind of covering, bacterial build-up can happen," says Carole Herder from Cavallo Horse and Rider.

"If there is a concern we advise our customers to make up a mixture of one part water to one part cider vinegar, put it in a spray bottle and spritz the hoof and inside of the boot. It's an old remedy that

can cut down on bacteria."

On the Market

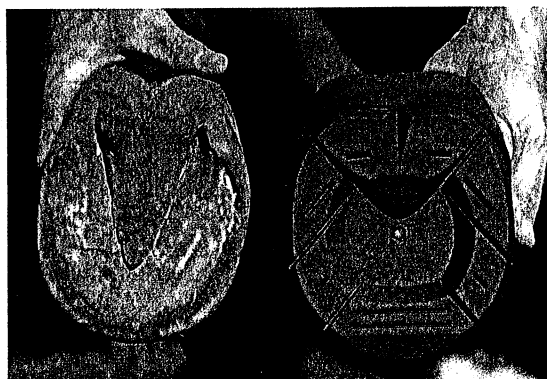
Here are just a few of the horse boot products available:

Marquis Supergrip by Stride Equus: The Marquis Supergrip boot is held onto the hoof by an air chamber that can be adjusted with a hand held pump. Air chambers can be modified to fit the horse's needs; for example, foundered hooves benefit from swiveling the chamber to a higher placement.

The front flap opens up to seat the hoof directly in, then is secured with clamps, similar to a ski boot. Poultices, bandages or the company's neoprene insoles can be inserted. Many veterinarians use dental amalgam inserts with the boot to help arch support, Adderson says.

Veterinarians can either sell the boots directly or earn commission through orders (Stride Equus will drop ship to the client) at www.strideequus.com.

Simple Boot by Cavallo Horse and Rider: The Simple Boot is designed to be applied easily and quickly, which is a plus if a horse is too tender to stand on three legs for long. Similar to a sneaker, the boot opens up in front, a tongue pulls forward, the hoof is slipped in and the product is secured with



The Easyboot Bare is designed to closely resemble a horse's bare hoof.