



~Tails & Trails~

JANUARY 2010

HAPPY NEW YEAR



From the President's Saddlebag

Howdy,

The party for Christmas was a great success. It was good to see everyone.

There are several new faces on the board for 2010 with some good ideas for rides, places to go, work parties and such. Please come to the January meeting so we can get off on a running start. I will be talking about hypothermia and doing a demo on clothes that either help or help to kill.

It has been cold but open weather, so dress warm and saddle up.

Boots and saddles!!!! it's a stampede. ~ Bob



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As is
Dee
Sverdsten

10 Tips For Winter Hoof Care

Does the sound of sleigh bells set your nerves on edge, anticipating a wreck on the icy patch down the road? Do you dream of the day next spring when you will be able to see your horse below his knees? Do you lie awake at night designing heating wires that can be implanted in horseshoe pads to melt the ice balls? Have you dreamed of sandpaper inserts for custom hoof pads? If so, you are not alone. Winter sends snowbound horse owners into a tizzy. There is too much to think about: tangled blankets, frozen water tanks, and snow depths that allow horses to walk over fences. Then we have to worry about horses slipping on ice or balling up in snow, or we just generally feel insecure about whether or not we should pull our horse's shoes.

With the help of an opinionated group of farriers from around the world (including a few from Scandinavia, who thought that having to ask about winter shoeing was absurd), *The Horse* presents 10 suggestions that might help you survive a winter without ulcers. Try to master all 10 tips; then pray fervently for a mild winter anyway!

TIP #1

Get out the calendar. Look at past years' calendars, and try to remember the dates of First Frosts, First Snows, and First Real Snow. "Real Snow" is the stuff that hits the ground and stays for more than a few days, if you live far enough north to have that type of snow.

With calendar in hand, discuss with your farrier when to initiate any changes in shoeing for winter. Find out if the farrier is planning to be away during the winter (many farriers migrate with show clients to southern states) and what sort of schedule your horse should be on. Get the name of a backup farrier in case your regular farrier feels the need to hightail it to Maui for a month.

Explain that you want any winter shoeing to be completed before your anticipated "First Snow" date.

Discuss winter shoeing ideas with your farrier well in advance. Many farriers carry only certain types of snow pads, while others are either vehemently "pro" or "con" on the subject of hard-facing shoes. If your horse has abnormally large or small feet or is shod in a special way, normal products might not be available to fit your horse.

Make sure that your farrier knows how your horse will be used in the winter. If you will be schooling indoors, particularly over fences, be sure your farrier knows. If you are planning to ship the horse to another part of the country to be bred or trained, you should warn the farrier that the snow sets might need to be pulled before the horse leaves, or even perhaps an extra set made up to go with the horse.

TIP #2

Think about winter in the summer, not in the winter. If you wait to order snow pads in January, the suppliers could be sold out. More importantly, if you need to correct a problem in your paddock or barn entry that affects the safety of your horses, January is not the best time to be working outdoors.

One of the biggest mistakes people make is forgetting about winter once it's gone. When you are repairing or replacing fencing in the spring, think about how that fence will hold up under a snowdrift, and if the materials are strong enough for winter use.

Do yourself a favor this winter and keep a camera handy. Take pictures around your barn and pasture when the snowfall is deepest and when the thaw is on. Put these photos into a book that you look at in the summer, when you are doing maintenance work. You quickly will remember the places where the big ice patch formed, or where the drifts were.

You'll also remember that it gets dark very early in the winter, and you might want to add extra lighting along a path to the barn. Burying electrical wiring is easier in the summer than in the winter. If you can see your horse, and the ice beneath you, as you lead him in each evening, you might avoid injury and mishap.

TIP #3

Remove obstacles and hazards from your pasture, driveway, and any walkway where horses are led.

Regular readers of this column know the dangers of having any stock wire in their fences, but the dangers of wire fencing are multiplied in winter. Any wire fence that can be buried in the snow can catch a shoe, or worse, an entire foot. A horse stuck in the snow with one foot outside the bottom wire is a danger to himself and anyone who comes near him.

Stepping on instead of over the cavaletti buried under the snow is forgivable for the horse, but not for you. Bring all jumps, barrels, poles, mounting blocks, lunge lines, and whips inside as soon as your "S" day hits, whether it has snowed by then or not.

Do not leave flower pots and window boxes for plants in paddocks where horses will be turned out in snowy winters. Remember that when water sits in them, and freezes, it expands, often breaking the pots. Clay or plastic shards can cut horses and get caught under bell boots, or rip blankets and skin.

Rake or harrow all your pastures where horses will be turned out after the first frost. On a dry day when the muddy sections are somewhat solid to walk on, stride the length and breadth of the pasture. Look for nails, boards, and any sharp object that can hurt a horse. Several excellent bar magnets on long handles are made for this purpose; who knows, you might find some of the shoes your horse lost last spring! One sweeper magnet even comes with wheels on either side.

Check your fences, and don't forget your gates! Gates can be very dangerous if the horses gather there and the ground is wet. When it turns icy, horses easily can slip a leg under a gate or through a gate (particularly a pipe gate) and hurt themselves.

Check the ground clearance on gates before it snows. Imagine ice and snow on the ground as you open and close the gate a few times. Now imagine it is icy under your feet, you are opening the gate, and your horse is prancing at the end of the lead line. A gate that swings easily is safer than one you have to lift, or one that is frozen into the ground. Check latches and chains, too, to make sure you will be able to open and close the gate quickly.

Gutters, or the lack of them, often are troublesome on barns. In areas with heavy snow, flashing is used on the barn roof to make the snow slide off. This is a great feature, but it creates a big pile of snow a few feet out from the wall of the barn. When the snow dam lets go, there is a sliding sound, then a big "thump!" as the snow hits. This sound has been known to send horses into orbit. Then, when the snow melts, it creates a veritable moat around the barn. And, as we Yankees know, whatever melts must soon re-freeze, so dangerous ice slicks surround the outbuildings. As Murphy's law would have it, the puddle/ice slick will always be most dangerous where your horse needs to walk.

Clean the gutters, if your barn has them, in the fall, and check all downspouts so that melting snow can be routed safely away. If your barn does not have gutters, surround the building with a path of crushed stone where icicles will drip and snow dams will fall. Pay special attention to barn entrances and exits, even the ones you do not ordinarily use. Remember that an emergency could force you to

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use that exit and you need to be able to move a horse out that doorway safely.

In November, stock up on sand, salt, shavings--whatever you like to use for traction. Some people think that commercial salt mixes are harmful to horses' and dogs' feet; they will ruin your shoes, that's for sure. Make a habit of checking the pathways your horse needs to walk, and sprinkle the way with something that will offer some traction.

TIP #4

Roll out the carpet. Or at least an old rug. Keep your eyes open on trash day and you will find your town's streets lined with old carpets that are being thrown out. Stash them in the back of your truck and drive quickly to your barn. You might store them in a horse trailer not used often, or in a shed, since they might be flea-filled or smell bad. Then, if a bad ice storm hits suddenly and you need to get a horse across a frozen parking lot, those old rugs can be put to good use. They need to be used safely (check the backing; position them so that they won't slip; use common sense) but they can be a lifesaver--sometimes literally! If you never use them to lay down a walkway for your horse, you might find yourself cutting them into strips when a car gets stuck in the mud or ice!

Of course, trailer or stall mats are the ideal man-made bridge over ice, but you can make do with your own improvisations. If you live in an industrial area, find out if old conveyor belts and other types of industrial belting are available from companies. Cut and laid flat, belting looks for all the world like a continuous stall mat. Another source is restaurants, which use chef's mats in the kitchen to cushion workers' feet.

Don't leave mats out all winter--be they carpet, trailer, aisle, or stall mats. Once they are frozen into the ground, they will be worthless for providing safe footing for your horse. Worse yet, they are impossible to move and might not be useable when spring comes.

TIP #5

Check your blankets. One size does not fit all in the blanket world. If your blanket is too big for your horse, it can be an invitation to danger. This is especially true of foals and yearlings who are rambunctious and very lithe. To blanket or not to blanket is your decision, as is to hood or not to hood. Remember that foals love to scratch their ears with a hind hoof and that their tiny hoof can get caught inside a blanket hood or poke through the eye hole and be caught. These things really happen. Just ask your veterinarian.

The most common injury in blanketed horses is found on a horse turned out wearing studs, an extension shoe, or a bar shoe. The horse catches the stud or the corner of a bar shoe on a hanging strap or surcingle, and the foot is easily wrenched. Worse yet, the blanket can be pulled and twisted by the tangled shoe, making it impossible for the horse to walk, even after it frees its foot. In some cases, a horse can panic and bolt or rear, causing further injury. (And you thought those blankets turned upside down by themselves!)

Blankets are expensive, so they should be worth keeping in good shape. Send your blankets out for repair when there are rips, broken buckles, or torn linings. Doing this in the spring will allow you to clean them and put them away once the repairs are done; then they will be ready for the following winter. Consider selling or trading in blankets when you change horses if you have any doubts about the blanket not fitting safely. Be especially careful about putting more than one blanket on a horse. A nice compromise on blanketed horses is to remove the hind shoes. The shoes can still be caught in the fabric of the blanket, but removing the danger of the shoe and studs lessens the chance of serious injury.

There are many styles of blankets; the designs with contoured hip

skirts (Baker's makes one) might have some safety advantages for horses which are shod in the hind feet all winter.

TIP #6

To shoe or not to shoe, that's another winter question. Most farriers and veterinarians agree that a few months off from wearing shoes will probably help a horse more than hurt it. However, some horses, particularly with conformational medial-lateral imbalance, might need the support and structure that shoes provide.

Discuss your plans with your farrier. Some farriers work less in the winter and pulling shoes might delight them. Make sure that you agree on an interval for trimming throughout the winter, keeping in mind that hoof growth will slow slightly. Some farriers fear for the horse's safety on ice with shoes.

Other farriers are looking for work in the winter in northern climes, since many of their clients might have shipped south, or all the barefoot horses leave them with time on their hands. These farriers could be delighted to experiment with studs and pads and hard-surfacing for your horse. Make sure that a farrier has experience in this type of shoeing before you outfit your horse for the Equine Iditarod. Also, find out in advance what the cost of winter shoeing will be, before you find yourself with a case of Shoeing Bill Shock.

If your horse's feet are worked up for snow sports, make sure that your farrier intends to return at a reasonable interval, usually five or six weeks, even in winter. Snow pads wear down when the horse is ridden on pavement, and shoe wear that is uneven under dots of hard-surfacing can spell ligament trouble in short order.

Some farriers stock and recommend a certain type of winter shoeing product--a pad that works for them, a type of hard-headed nail, or whatever--for all their clients. This makes it easier for them to control errors and keep items in stock when resets or repairs are needed. Your farrier should be honest about whether or not his product will fit your horse.

If your farrier recommends borium or hard-surfacing, realize that this will add considerably to the cost of shoeing. Borium costs more than \$25 per pound, and it requires skill to put it on correctly. Some farriers "puddle," while others "point." Just make sure it stays on! Remember that borium products actually are harder than the shoes themselves. This means if your horse is standing in a trailer or is worked on hard ground, the borium might create pressure points on foot structures. Farriers usually will not put borium on the toes of hind shoes, even though a great deal of wear takes place there.

Screw-in studs work in some cases for temporary traction, but they can injure a horse. Large and heavy horses, such as draft breeds, often are mistakenly fitted with large studs that can break off under the horse's weight. Borium is a better choice for those horses.

You'll notice if your horse is shod with borium that the shoeing appointment might be longer. The farrier will let the borium air-cool to ambient temperature before nailing it on. This gives you time to chat about how to keep the ice balls out.

TIP #7

To pad or not to pad--another tough question. There are many considerations to debate, and a good selection of products to make your decision easier--or harder! Snowball pads come in two styles--full popper and tube rim--and you will want to discuss your choice with your farrier.

First of all, think about your daily care of the horse. Do you routinely clean the feet, or is that your least favorite job? Do you get disgusted when you clean that wonderful wintry mix of manure, dirt, and snow out of your horse's feet? Are your horse's soles and frogs healthy and thrush-free? Does your horse wear pads anyway? You

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might be an ideal candidate for popper snowball pads.

Poppers fully cover the bottom of the foot and have a plastic "bubble" that is believed to be full of air. Snow pushes against the bubble and the bubble pushes back, making snow "pop" out of the center of the shoe. No dangerous snowballs should build up with these pads on.

Poppers come in the old-fashioned "fabric-backed" or "Fruin" style, which are much like inner tubes, and the more modern "low profile" plastic types made by companies like Castle. The Fruin pads might no longer be available, although many farriers hoarded them and still will have them available for clients.

Massachusetts farrier John Blombach warns that farriers sometimes make the mistake of packing oakum under snowball pads. Oakum is an absorbent material that acts like a sponge under the pad, drinking up water the first few days it is under there. When the horse is turned out or ridden in freezing temperatures, the water in the oakum will cause it to stiffen or even freeze solid, creating a rock-hard pressure against the sole of the foot and the frog.

In general, Blombach warns, no packing should go under a snowball pad, since its bubble needs to be pushed and popped back. With the exception of the oakum disaster, a snowball pad can be helpful for horses which tend to bruise easily or have sensitive soles. Remember that in winter even a little divot in the ground is as hard as a rock, so horses which are "ouchy" have a particularly tough time without protection.

From the rider's point of view, the bubbles pop rhythmically with the horse's strides as you ride, so you can quickly tell if the horse is off. The pop-pop-pop at the canter is reassuring and becomes a sound you will forever associate with winter riding.

However, on the down side, popper pads literally can pop. They are designed for use in the snow, not just in cold weather. If you ride on the road a lot, or on a hard arena, the bubble can pop or be worn down on the ground side so that when it does snow, you'll have very little bubble to pop. Farriers call this a "blowout."

As with any special hoof equipment, check the pads daily and call your farrier if the bubble is worn down or popped, even if your horse is not due to be shod. Popper pads now are available in draft horse sizes.

Tube rim pads--available from Mustad, Summit Tech, Castle, Horseshoes Unlimited, and probably others--are fashionable equipment on sport horses. The nice thing is that they work! These little rim pads have a continuous bead of rubber that follows the inside web of the shoe; the pads are riveted onto the shoe before it is nailed on. Many riders like these pads, they say, because they can still see the bottom of the foot and clean the frog. These pads seem to enhance the stride of some horses and give them a little "bounce," or so the riders say.

The snow rim pads have an advantage over the popper pads in that they can be used with a heart bar shoe; a popper pad would interfere with the heart bar. In fact, some therapeutic shoers use the snow rim pads on a year-round basis with bar shoes. Blombach also finds them useful on hind feet with a bar wedge, or front feet that require full wedges.

When it comes to price, the rim pads can be more expensive than the poppers; both are possible to use for two or more shoeings, depending on how hard the horse is worked and over what surfaces. Sizes can be difficult in the rim pads, particularly for small or large feet. Remember to check the pads often, as some types can rip and loosen around the rivets when they become worn.

TIP #8

Avoid ice balls. Two images of winter in New England come to mind: one is a horse stuck in the middle of a field, elevated several

inches by wads of ice wedged inside his shoes. The other image is bringing a horse into the barn to a nice clean stall and coming back with feed a half hour later only to find the fresh shavings clumped and wet, since the four feet of the horse had been full of ice that quickly melted in the warm barn. I've often marveled at the four circles of wetness on the barn floor between cross-ties where a horse had been standing.

Winter is full of hazards, and ice balls are the worst. If left in the foot, ice balls actually can press against the sole enough to cause bruising. The popper and snow rim pads are the best protection against snow balls, short of pulling the shoes entirely. But barefoot horses still can slip.

If you are hit by a surprise storm and your horse doesn't have pads or traction devices on, you can try all the old wives' tales. My favorite is spraying "Pam" cooking oil on the feet. I've also heard of using bear grease, Vaseline, pine tar, bacon fat, Crisco, and old motor oil (yuck!). Smear any or all of those things on your horses' feet and go to work; possibly something will work for you.

When in doubt, leave the horse in a stall for the day, or make arrangements to turn it out in an indoor arena. It's safer to leave the horse in than risk injury and fright. Horses don't seem to understand slipping and sliding. I've never seen even a reining horse which liked to walk on snowballs.

TIP #9

Ride smart in cold weather! The opening scenes of the movie "Horse Whisperer" seemed very familiar to riders in the North. You don't know what's under the snow, or under the ice, or under those loose leaves. If it is safer to ride on the road than on trails, plan your rides accordingly. But if you think you will be riding on the road a lot, consider pads, even flat plastic pads, that will protect your horse from at least a little bit of concussion. Don't overdo it, particularly if your horse is shod with borium, since it will increase the jarring effect of a hoof landing on pavement.

Check your horse's feet often when you ride in the snow; if you lose a shoe, it can be a long and dangerous ride home.

If your horse is shod with borium or other hard-surfacing on his shoes, consider getting good-quality bell-boots or over-reach boots to protect the coronets and heel bulbs from injury. They might not be practical for winter turnout, but could be perfect for winter riding protection.

If you are trailering your horse to an arena to ride, consider extra padding in your trailer to save your good trailer mats. Hard-surfacing can rip up a mat, particularly on a ramp, in a few trips.

TIP #10

And if none of these work...You might live in an area that receives little or no snow, and unexpectedly be buried in a snowdrift. If your horse lives outdoors, perhaps with a run-in shed, you have some alternatives. Some farriers will go to customers and replace nails. They pull heel nails and replace them with "Duratrac" Mustad nails, which have hard-surfacing material (similar to borium) built into their heads. You might notice the imprint of these nails in your barn floor for a few years, though!

Our friends at Les Care, makers of Easy Boots, have created what might be the best solution of all: a studded Easy Boot. The boot is drilled for studs, and can be used for any purpose. If a sudden ice storm hits, just screw the studs in and head out to the pasture. Knock the snowballs out and slide the studded Easy Boot on. You then can slowly, but safely, walk your horse to the barn.

Winter can be beaten if you think creatively and prepare for it ahead of time. After all, there are no flies!



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P.O. Box 1903 • Hayden, ID 83835

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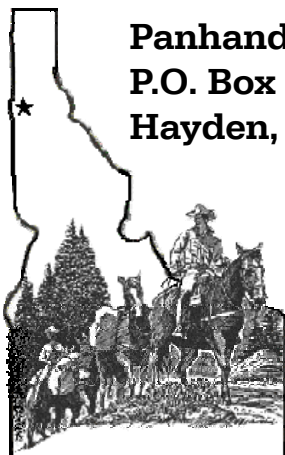
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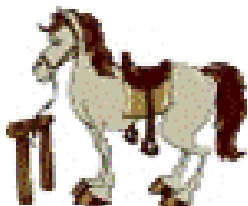
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PRESENTATION:
Hypothermia and
Clothes that either
help or help to kill

Trailer Sticker discussions to begin.

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