

“I don’t know how many horses I’ve shod through the years!”

Leo Snowden



There are many different kinds of shoes.

By Ron Snowden
Russ Snowden

This story is about my dad, Leo Snowden, and how he learned to shoe horses. He was born in Weldona, Colorado, and moved to the Yampa Valley area as a youngster. Most of his life he has ranched and worked with animals as well as shod horses for years. Presently he works for the U.S. Forest Service and still shoes horses. Through the years he has helped many people learn the horse shoeing business.

“I guess the first horse I shod was when I was about 12 or 13 years old. It was an old kid’s horse we had. Dad was moving cattle and he said I couldn’t go because the horse wasn’t shod, so I tacked on my first set of shoes. They weren’t very fancy, but they stayed on so I could help move cattle. From then on my Dad helped me shoe a few of the gentle horses till I kinda knew what I was doing.

“Dad shod in a blacksmith shop when they used draft horses to build roads and in the fields. It was all hot shoeing back then. I never did do much in the way of hot shoeing. The first few years I mainly just did our own and a few for the neighbors when they needed one shod. I first started at nothing till I got good enough. Then I put a lot of shoes on for \$5.00 a head and furnished the shoes. Today I charge \$20.00 and don’t

than rocky or hard ground. Some horse's hooves get awful dry and they need to have a hoof treatment put on them. There are lots of them on the market today. The hoof treatment keeps the hoof from getting dry and cracking.

"Trimming the horse's hoof is one of the main things. You need to get the hoof level like the horse naturally walks so that when he puts his hoof down the weight is over the whole hoof, not just one or two places. This way the leg cannot twist or cock to one side. This is the way I shoe all the older horses so they travel the way the horse naturally walks.

"Corrective shoeing doesn't work very much on older horses. You can weigh the hoof so that when the horse strides, it doesn't interfere.

"It's just part of breakin' the horse."

Corrective shoeing needs to be done when the horse is young. Most of the corrective shoeing is done to make the horse stand straight. By the time the horse is three the bones are pretty much set so the horse needs to be shod the way it walks.

"Most of the horses that are bad to shoe are that way because when the horse was broken they never curried down its legs or worked with its feet. I feel that part of breaking a horse is being able to handle its feet. Around here, any horse being used much will need shoes. When

"I've shod horses all over western Colorado."

you saddle up a colt you should pick up its feet for just a second and check them, then you will always have a good horse to shoe. Then he'll be used to someone messing with his feet. It is just not worth the chance of getting hurt to take one of these horses that are hard and mean and need to be shod.

"For quite a few years around Steamboat there weren't very many people shoeing horses. There's quite a few around now. Junior Bedell

and I shod a large percent of the horses around here until Gary Kihlstrom came in and shod horses full time for several years. I have shod horses all over Routt County and a few in Jackson, Grand and Moffat counties. I shod some up on the Snake River. I didn't do a whole lot of shoeing up there. I went down around Maybell and did a few one year.

"In the spring of the year is when I shoe the most horses. For about the last five years I have shod the dude horses out at Bear Pole and a few for Perry-Mansfield and the Whiteman school also. One spring I went down around State Bridge and shod for a dude outfit. A lot of ranchers and 4-H kids need their horses shod about this time too. I trim and shoe a few horses off and on through the summer if the horse is going to be shown or used in some event. In the winter months I don't do too much shoeing, just a few of the chariot horses now and then, maybe eight or ten each winter.

"Ninety percent of the horses aren't that bad to shoe if you handle them right. That is the biggest part of shoeing a horse. The first time or



No two feet are the same.

two you shoe them you don't spook them in some way to make them hard to shoe. Now and then you get a bad one that you have to throw or scotch to shoe. (To scotch a horse, a rope loop is placed around the horse's neck with the opposite end below the horse's ankle which is then lifted, tied off and attached to the neck rope.)

make much more now than back when I only charged \$5.00. For the last 15 or 20 years I've shod steady after work and on the weekends during the summer. I don't know how many horses I've shod through the years. For several years I would shoe somewhere between 200 and 265 head a summer.

"When I trained race horses I learned a lot about shoeing. The people who owned and shod them were good shoers and showed me a few things that helped out. The shoes I use are premade or a cold shoe. Now and then I will make a corrective shoe with the help of a welder.

The race horseshoes are a little different than the shoes used on a cow horse. There are several types of shoes. The cow horse shoes are steel. The race horse shoes are lighter and usually made out of aluminum. I used one type of shoe that was plastic but they never panned out. The nails are smaller for race plated than cowhorse shoes. With your race horse you reset the shoes oftener than your regular saddle horseshoes. Also you try to leave the walls of the hoof a little longer so that you have more of a cup. This does two things. It helps keep the soles of the horse's hoof off the ground and also gives a little more traction when running. Your race horseshoes are a lot more expensive, and they're a little harder to put on than the saddle horseshoes.

"Every hoof is a little different in some way, so you need to see how the horse stands before you start. With your trail horses and cow horses, the main thing is to get the hoof level before nailing the shoe on.

"The tools have changed some but not much. They came out with clinchers to turn the nails over with rather than a piece of iron or the side of your rasp to clinch the nails. The clinchers are a little faster and you don't have to hammer on the horse's hoof so long, which on a colt makes a difference.

"If you take care of a horse's hooves like you should, the shoes will stay on. A lot of people don't take care of their horse's hooves and expect the horseshoer to nail a shoe on a hoof that is all broken out till there is nothing left to nail to. It is hard to get a horse shod so the shoes will stay on. How long a set of shoes will last depends on where the horse is ridden. Most horses need to be reset or shod every four to six weeks, depending on how fast the horse's feet grow. A horse doesn't need to be shod to keep its feet from breaking out. All that needs done is to trim the horse down in the fall and one or two times during the winter. If you keep the horse out of the wet ground it helps because after the feet get soft and the horse steps on something hard, it breaks a piece out of the hoof. Wet ground is harder on a horse's feet



The tools haven't changed much.

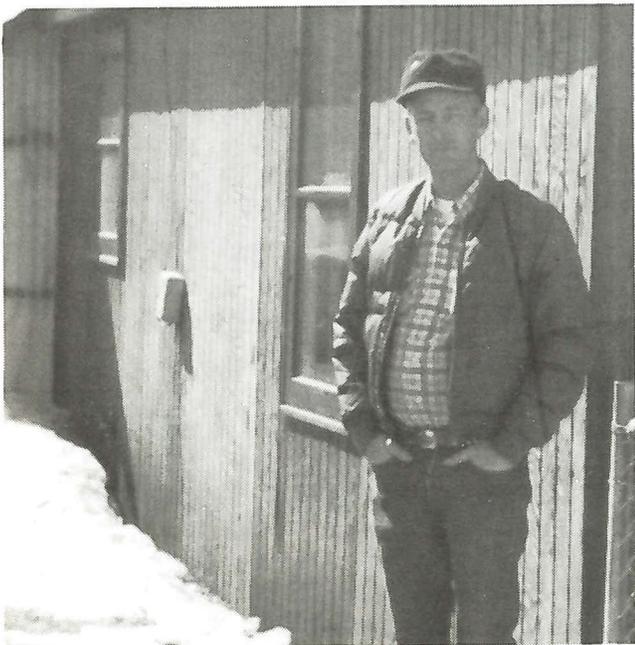
"It can vary quite a lot to how long it takes to shoe a horse. If the horse stands good and his feet aren't all broken up, it takes me about 30 to 35 minutes. I have spent as long as four or five hours to shoe some horses that are bad. One thing that helps when shoeing a horse, is to have someone holding the horse that will keep its attention and not let it eat. This will cut the time down a lot and make it a lot easier. If you can get a horse to relax and not work against you, then the shoer can relax.

"I have helped several people around here get started, some of them are just shoeing their own horses now and are not doing it as a sideline. The kids are all kinda started on it. Rod is the oldest one, and he shod some, and then there's Ron and Russ, they have shod mainly their own or helped me out when I get more than I can handle and some gentle horses to learn on. Tate Tellier is one person I got started mainly as a sideline.

"He worked with me one year and then went ahead and worked with someone else for a while. The first shoes Wes Cook ever put on, I kinda helped get lined out and going. Billy Green, Jim Wadsworth and the Wilhelm boys shod with me some, and the Booco kids in Hayden I kinda helped. They now do their own horses and a few for the neighbors too.



The first thing I do when I start to shoe a horse is clean the hoof out with a hoof knife and cut away some of the frog (V shape in the center of the hoof) if needed.

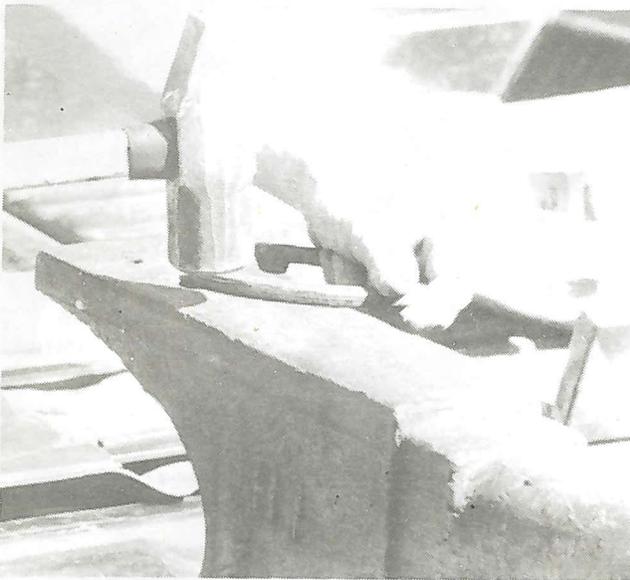


If the hoof is extra long, I will then use the nippers to trim the hoof down some.

There are many different kinds of shoes.



After I trim the hoof, I use a rasp to level and smooth the bottom of the hoof.

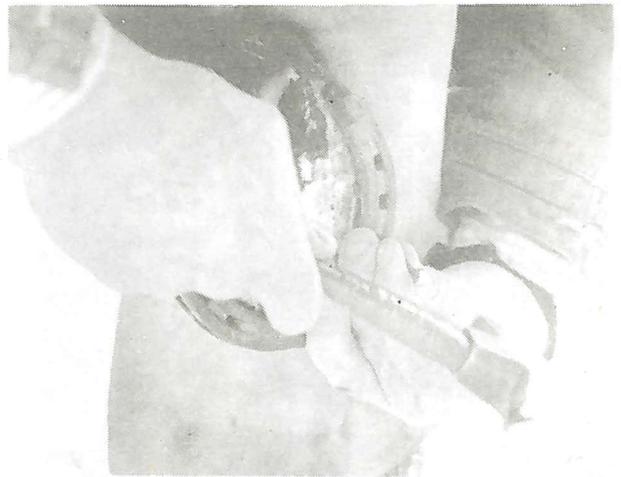


When the hoof is level then I shape a shoe to fit the hoof. The shoe is shaped on an anvil.

After the shoe has been shaped, I set the shoe and make sure it's set level with the hoof. The shoe should be set so that the whole shoe hits the ground at the same time.



Now I am ready to nail the shoe on. The nails are driven through the hoof from the bottom side.



When a nail is driven through the hoof, it is twisted off with the claws of the hammer. Some horseshoers will bend the nails over and cut off the extra later.

**“If you take care of their feet like you should,
the shoes will stay on.”**



A groove is rasped under the nails after they are twisted off. Then the end of the nails are clinched over into the groove.



The nails are then clinched or bent down to keep them from working back out.



I enjoy talking about horseshoeing with my dad, but I realized years ago that he intended for me and my brothers to learn and take over his horseshoeing business.

“Around here any horse being used much will need shoes.”