

Protect Those Knees

Try flip-flop shoes on a trotter to lessen hyperextension

Farrier Steve Stanley of Versailles, Ky., has shod some of racing's top trotters and pacers. Here he discusses using flip-flop shoes to help prevent knee soreness.

In the fall of 2007 Frank Antonacci Jr. brought a nice 2-year-old trotter in the shop from his Lindy Stable. This colt had trained well in the winter earlier that year wearing flip-flop shoes (also called flappers), but Antonacci had tried him in PG shoes in an effort to protect his feet from the hard tracks he faced over the summer.

A PG shoe is a two-piece package that has an aluminum plate nailed to the hoof and a rubber outer layer screwed onto the top of the base plate. PG shoes are very protective, but can be cumbersome to race in for some horses. Antonacci felt

that this colt was at his best in flip-flops during winter training, and he uses them extensively on young trotters.

Flip-flops, which came out of Denmark in the 1970s, are essentially a pad that uses only the front half of



UNFLAPPABLE: Flip-flop shoes (left) helped trainer Frank Antonacci Jr. and the author make Crazy into a millionaire.

a shoe (any type of shoe). The shoe is fitted to the pad and then nailed to the hoof. They are great for a horse with sore knees.

The rear half of a flip-flop is a large, continuous ground surface area in back of the hoof that prevents the heels from sinking into the track, sparing the knee from hyper-extending. It's a small difference, but when the knee is fully extended and the hoof impacts the track, even millimeters count. The second advantage is that it employs the use of the frog and can aid in cushioning the

Watch for Sore Feet

Some people think flip-flops are good for sore-footed horses. I strongly disagree.

Flip-flops do not support the back (caudal) part of the horse's hoof as well as a normal shoeing appliance. Hooves with quarter crack issues or low under-run heels do poorly in flip-flops.

I have found it sometimes necessary to leave flip-flops off a horse for one shoeing interval after the horse has had them on for 2 to 4 shoeings. This gives the frog and heels of the hoof a chance to recover. A flip-flop may help a horse with contracted heels, but I feel like there are other ways to address that issue.

One gait type that might not benefit from a flip-flop is that of the short, choppy-gaited horse, because more weight in the heel exaggerates vertical motion in a horse's gait. However, the same knee issues normally do not apply to horses gaited like this anyway, since they do not have a long-reaching front end.

impact.

The racehorse is a truly remarkable animal. The structures of hoof and lower limb do an incredible job of dissipating the energy of impact with the racetrack, starting at the hoof, then lessening as it travels higher up the leg.

While the knee takes less shock than the lower joints, some horses' knees tend to have more trouble than others, from a basis of conformation. Horses that are back on the knees can have problems, because they are more susceptible to hyperextension.

Horses that are over in the knees have the same type of soreness issues, but for a different reason. These horses are simply less tolerant to any kind of hyperextension, not because they are predisposed to it.

Other horses, like Antonacci's colt, don't have conformation issues, but are simply more comfortable in flip-flops.

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We put the flip-flops back on the colt. He responded well and finished his freshman year strongly. He even started in the Breeders Crown.

Staying in flip-flops for the rest of his career, Crazy 3,1:52.2 (\$1,063,059) had a very good 3-year-old campaign, winning the Colonial and Matron, and handing Trotter of the Year Deweycheatumnhowe his first loss in the Canadian Trotting Classic elimination.

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