

Paul Buer – Variations on Shoeing

They say that ‘necessity is the mother of invention’. For Paul Buer – a native of Norway - economic considerations necessitated that he learn how to shoe trotters. Buer shared some of his history in this regard – and a few lessons learned along the way.

“In Norway, the purses run from about \$3,000 on the bottom to only about \$5-6,000 at the upper end at most racetracks,” Buer reflects. “If you add shoeing to the regular cost of training a horse, it doesn’t leave much profit margin for the owner with a horse in training. As a result, most of the trainers and assistant trainers in Norway know how to shoe horses.

“When I finished my time in the military (at 21 years of age), I started to work as a groom. I also started to learn how to shoe horses. It evolved to the point that I was shoeing for amateur trotting trainers, as well as pleasure horses. Two of us traveled together, and though I made my share of mistakes along the way, eventually I learned the proper way to shoe horses.

“Along the way I learned the anatomy of the foot, came to understand the different types of hoof walls, and learned what things you can get away with on one horses, but not on another – all of which is very helpful to me now.”

Buer also developed a preference for a particular type of shoe.

“I like the flip-flop shoe for a variety of reasons and uses. I like to use flip-flops on yearlings that come from the sale. I find that many yearlings have had their shoes on for a while, and have been shod very narrow. The flip-flop shoe tends to stay on their feet better, and it spreads their heels out because of the frog pressure and increase in blood flow it creates.

“The flip-flop is a great shoe to train a young horse with, because it protects them from the concussion of training. I also find it helps them develop the nice, round gait that you want, without using weight.”

Buer says there are some caveats to the use of the flip-flop shoe.

“Sometimes (if you turn one out a lot) their feet can get a bit soft. You want their feet to be harder, so you might do a shoeing of regular steel shoes. I do recommend using a swedge in the toe of the flip-flop on a horse with sore front ankles. If their ankles are sore, you want them to slide less. On the other hand, if their knees are sore you want them to slide more (so flip-flops would be good). Flip-flops can help some horses with sore heels – but it all depends on the horse.

“If a horse has weak stifles, I prefer that they have a lot of grab in the back. So, if he has a swedge shoe I make sure the shoe is fresh and grabbing the track. This is probably the only time I would use aluminum shoes behind as well. But this is for older horses.

“With the two-year-olds, I’ll use a flat shoe on the back end until they’ve been in 2:20. Then I will put on a full swedge steel shoe, but pound down the swedges. That way, their introduction to grab and extra traction is a gradual one.

“I try not to get too exotic. I see a number of people using aluminum all the way around on their trotters. I don’t like that – I don’t like what it does to their gait. Probably ninety percent of the top trotting trainers have aluminum up front and steel swedge behind.

“Yesterday, I raced a horse at Freehold that I had been racing in flip-flops. I heard that it was going to rain, and I knew he wouldn’t get a cheque in the pouring rain. Flip-flops are no good in the mud.

So, I put aluminum swedge shoes up front, which gave him more grab. He finished second and almost won the race.

Buer's Tale of the Backward Shoe

"In 2003 I had a Wesgate Crown mare named Excusez Moi. I had raced her at the Meadowlands a couple times with half-round aluminum in front, and she raced fine. But when she went up to Canada, she started making breaks.

"We changed her to an open-toe steel shoe with two borium dots in the toe. Basically, it was a nine-sixteenth inch steel shoe – turned around. She won her elimination for the Canadian Breeders Championship and finished third in the final, and later beat For The Luva Moni in a Gold elimination with those shoes. For Excusez Moi, that change worked for her in Canada. When she came back to the Meadowlands, she went back to the half-round aluminum.

"The issue is that every horse is different in terms of what kind of shoeing they need and what they can handle. And track conditions vary too. In our trailer, we always have a shoeing box with us, so we can make changes if the need arises." Buer chuckles as he finishes up. "I think it's important to be able to do that – especially if you're a 'flip-flopper'."