

# Ear Protection

## Every Horse is Worth It

By AJ Horses



All mounted shooters should have horse earplugs and train their animals to accept them.

The sense of hearing is important for all mammals. It is essential for survival. Yet it's one of the things that people often take for granted. As humans we have resources that can aid in the prevention and treatment of hearing loss. What we fail to acknowledge is the importance of hearing to the survival of a horse.

Horses are like humans in the fact that their hearing is binaural, which means they hear sounds in both ears concurrently, but because the external part of the horse's ear is cup shaped and so much larger than ours,

very little sound gets by them. Horses are able to capture noises that we can't, including a much wider range of high frequency tones. This enables them to protect themselves from predators. So it's essential for a horse to have its hearing. The equine's survival tools make its reactions to sound an important factor in its mental state and safety.

A horse reacts to its senses instinctively. The horse is an emotional animal; hence it has emotional reactions to its senses. It reacts in fear, not in fight; it would rather

run from the unknown then to confront it. We can help to reduce those reactions by gaining its trust and through training.

If your horse has experienced hearing loss it may be more easily spooked—even with simple things like you approaching it. If the horse doesn't hear you coming it will react without thinking, potentially putting you or itself in danger. The animal is over-compensating for its loss of hearing.

But we can do something to prevent or limit hearing loss in horses.

This is where earplugs for horses are an

essential piece of equipment. All owners should have horse earplugs and train their animals to accept them.

Ear protection is especially important in mounted shooting. Horses that participate in the sport are exposed to the loudness of repeated gunfire in very close proximity to their ears. Common sense tells you that through time this exposure will cause them to experience loss of hearing—just as you would in similar circumstances. Naturally, good horsemanship tries to prevent this by training the horse to accept earplugs and absolutely using them every time you shoot off its back.

Anyone who tells you that a horse doesn't need its hearing and doesn't mind the shooting, or hates the earplugs and always shakes them out, isn't thinking about the horse's well being. That statement is equal to a parent saying his or her child doesn't need a safety belt; they sit fine in a car, or that seat belts are uncomfortable for them. As adults we can make the decisions for ourselves, but for our children as well as our horses, we are responsible for their safety. We need to teach them to accept the things that are in their best interest. As

professional horse trainers we see the benefits that ear protection provides for a horse and its state of mind. That's why we at AJ Horses researched, designed and developed earplugs for horses.

A lot of the troubles people experience when they start shooting off their horses—skittishness, fear, etc.—can be eliminated if they first train the animals to accept earplugs, and then make sure they are wearing them whenever they shoot off of their backs. A horse that might never get used to gunfire can actually succeed in the sport, with the help of earplugs.

For the most part it has been our experience that horses with larger ears tend to be more sensitive to noises. The larger the ear cup the larger the space is to capture the sounds, so they tend to be more sensitive. Another important consideration is that horses, like us, tend to lose their ability to detect sound as they age. We start to lose our hearing around the age of twenty, but for a horse it's more around the age of 5. As professional horse trainers our experience has proven that it is very important that your horse can hear you. So take the time to protect their hearing. Not only will this

help to prevent emotional reactions, but it helps them to gain trust in you and it helps them to perform better as athletes.

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