

# HOOF CARE & SHOERING REGULATIONS

## New surfaces, new rules

Racetracks with synthetic surfaces set house rules on toe grabs

by Joe Nevills

THE installation of synthetic racing surfaces has figuratively and literally changed the landscape of Thoroughbred racing. It also has changed the way horses travel across that landscape.

Officials at racetracks with all-

weather surfaces have begun to set guidelines that restrict or ban toe grabs and other traction devices on the feet of horses racing or training at their facilities.

Keeneland Race Course and Turfway Park made a joint announcement on July 17 that restricts the use of toe grabs and bans caulks, stickers, inserts, blocks, turndowns, trailers, and heel extensions on front and hind shoes from their tracks. Beginning

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### FIRST TO OFFER

Robert Elliston, president of Turfway Park, the first North American facility to install an artificial surface, says the Northern Kentucky track was "contemplating some kind of shoe rule" before a joint announcement with Keeneland revealed both tracks would ban several types of shoes



John Engelhardt photo



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# HOOF CARE & SHOETING

## Rules and regulations

### Shoe policies of North American racetracks with synthetic surfaces:

#### Arlington Park

**Location:** Arlington Heights, Illinois  
**Surface:** Polytrack  
**Year installed:** 2007  
**Rules:** Turn downs, quarter horseshoes, or any shoe with a toe grab of more than one-quarter inch will not be allowed on Polytrack for training or racing.



#### Del Mar

**Location:** Del Mar, California  
**Surface:** Polytrack  
**Year installed:** 2007  
**Rules:** Front shoes—toe grabs with a height greater than four millimeters worn on the front shoes of Thoroughbreds while racing are prohibited. Hind shoes—turn downs or any shoe with a toe grab of more than one-quarter inch will not be allowed on the main track for training or racing.



#### Golden Gate Fields

**Location:** Albany, California  
**Surface:** Tapeta Footings  
**Year installed:** 2007  
**Rules:** No toe grabs allowed (effective September 17).



#### Hollywood Park

**Location:** Inglewood, California  
**Surface:** Cushion Track  
**Year installed:** 2006  
**Rules:** All shoes approved by other racing jurisdictions may be used on the main track, however, turn downs of more than half-inch, front or hind, will not be permitted.



#### Keeneland Race Course

**Location:** Lexington, Kentucky  
**Surface:** Polytrack  
**Year installed:** 2006  
**Rules:** No toe grabs, caulks,



stickers, inserts, blocks, turn downs, trailers, or heel extensions will be allowed on front or hind shoes. Only flat, Queen's Plate, Queen's Plate XT, or equivalent may be used on Polytrack or turf (effective September 1).

#### Presque Isle Downs

**Location:** Erie, Pennsylvania  
**Surface:** Tapeta Footings  
**Year installed:** 2007  
**Rules:** Queen's Plates recommended, not mandatory. Pennsylvania Horse Racing Commission has prohibited the use of turned down or any bent shoes at all Pennsylvania tracks.



#### Santa Anita Park

**Location:** Arcadia, California  
**Surface:** Pro-Ride  
**Year installed:** 2008 (scheduled for completion prior to opening of Oak Tree at Santa Anita meeting on September 24)



**Rules:** To be determined (California Horse Racing Board rules prohibit use of toe grabs).

#### Turfway Park

**Location:** Florence, Kentucky  
**Surface:** Polytrack  
**Year installed:** 2005  
**Rules:** No toe grabs, caulks, stickers, inserts, blocks, turn downs, trailers, or heel extensions will be allowed on front or hind shoes. Only flat, Queen's Plate, Queen's Plate XT, or equivalent may be used on Polytrack (effective September 1).



#### Woodbine

**Location:** Rexdale, Ontario, Canada  
**Surface:** Polytrack  
**Year installed:** 2006  
**Rules:** No toe grabs, caulks, stickers, inserts, blocks, turn downs, trailers, or heel extensions will be allowed on front or hind shoes. Only flat, Queen's Plate, Queen's Plate XT, or equivalent may be used on Polytrack or turf (effective September 3).



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September 1, the only shoes allowed on the two tracks will be Queen's Plate, Queen's Plate XT, or equivalent shoes.

Commonly used in turf races, Queen's Plates are flat, aluminum racing plates with no extensions in the toes or elsewhere for additional traction. The Queen's Plate XT includes a small, two-millimeter rim at the front of the shoe for a slight increase in grip.

"We had been contemplating some kind of shoe rule for some period of time because we observed that the [Polytrack] surface was very safe and it provided plenty of grip for the horses," Turfway President Robert Elliston said.

The Keeneland and Turfway announcement came in the wake of recommendations by the Jockey Club Thoroughbred Safety Committee that suggest a two-millimeter limit for toe grabs and the abolishment of other traction devices on front shoes. The policy was approved by the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission on July 14 and adopted on July 15 by Penn National Gaming Inc., owner of Thoroughbred tracks Penn National Race Course in Pennsylvania, Charles Town Races in West Virginia, and Zia Park in New Mexico.

However, Keeneland and Turfway—which is half-owned by the Keeneland Association—went beyond the suggested guidelines, and applied the rule to hind shoes as well.

"With the synthetic surfaces, we believe the footing is so good that you can extend the same justification for fronts to backs as well and not sacrifice any gripping or performance for the horse," Elliston said. "We believed it was prudent to do that on all four feet rather than just the fronts."

#### Prior movement

While the announcement by the Kentucky racetracks has garnered the most attention, the movement toward Queen's Plates on artificial surfaces began several years earlier at Woodbine. The Toronto race-track implemented the Queen's Plate guidelines when it opened its Polytrack surface for training in August 2006.

"They [Keeneland and Turfway] adopted our rules, actually," said

Michael Burns photo



Steve Lym, Woodbine's director of racing and racing secretary. "We originally didn't have any toe grabs, just the Queen's Plates; no turndowns, no trailers. Then we allowed quarter-inch toe grabs for a while and now we're back to flat shoes again."

Woodbine eased its restrictions on toe grabs in November 2006 after cold temperatures and a large amount of horse traffic caused the ingredients in the racing surface to separate, making it difficult for some horses to achieve traction. The track will resume its flat-plate policy on September 3.

"What influenced the change originally was that the track just wasn't right," Lym said. "It was a bit loose, and some of the horsemen thought they might need traction. But that's been corrected, and the track's pretty good right now."

"I actually thought there would be more to follow quicker," said



Garry Jones photo

**EVEN GROUND**

Sovereign Award-winning trainer Mark Casse says he favors prohibiting toe grabs and that elimination of the shoes gets everyone on a "level playing field," which is "better for the horse. And what's better for the horse is better for all of us"

Woodbine-based and Sovereign Award-winning trainer Mark Casse. "Woodbine and the Ontario Racing Commission are usually the first to act on a lot of different issues, and I applaud it."

Though Casse said he has used toe grabs at Woodbine, he did not think the change would drastically affect his training style.

"I've always thought that we're better off without the toe grabs," Casse said. "We've used a low toe because maybe it does help a little bit in getting a little better traction, but if everybody's on a level playing field and

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nobody's using it, I think all around, it's better for the horse. And what's better for the horse is better for all of us."

"When I talk to horsemen, there aren't many that use big grabs any-

way," Elliston said. "So the two-millimeter, the XT's, the low-toe kind of shoe, I think is pretty much the order of the day for most trainers on synthetics. I don't view this to be intrusive to the trainers at Turfway at all."

**Adjustment period**

While trainers may be largely unaffected by the switch to flat racing plates, Victory Racing Plate Co. President David Erb worried the change may create some issues among the farriers at the affected racetracks.

"The biggest change, I think, is in

**SLIGHT VARIATION**

Woodbine eases its regulations in 2006 due to cold weather effects on Polytrack but will resume flat-plate policy on September 3

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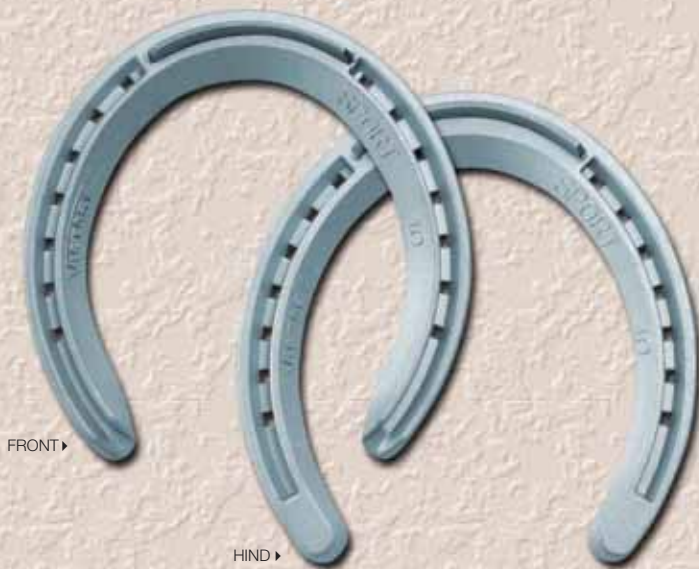
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# HOOF CARE & SHOERING



**NO TRAINING OR RACING**  
Keeneland Race Course, which conducts meetings in April and October annually, does not allow any toe grabs, caulks, stickers, inserts, blocks, turn downs, trailers, or heel extensions on front or hind shoes, and will only allow Queen's Plate, Queen's Plate XT, or equivalent on Polytrack or turf effective September 1

Photo by Z

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their inventory," Erb said. "Farriers carry what their trainers asked them to carry in the past, and therefore, they have an inventory of shoes with higher toe grabs. If the rules are changed abruptly, then the farrier has this inventory that they're stuck with."

Erb also noted the new policies might lead some crafty minds to look for ways around the restrictions.

"Plato said, 'Necessity is the mother of invention,'" Erb said. "Trainers may pressure farriers to come up with some creative solutions that would enhance traction. For exam-

ple, maybe using nails with larger heads, since there's no ruling on the nails to be used on the shoes, or placing nails in non-traditional locations on the shoe that could potentially act as higher grabs without being grabs because they're nails."

On the other end of the spectrum, some trainers at tracks with synthetic surfaces have forsaken racing plates altogether, often training their horses barefoot. The effectiveness of such a training method drew mixed reactions.

"I've heard that anecdotally, but I have not asked specifically to somebody if they'll tell me when they've done that," Beasley said. "I don't think it would make any difference."

Elliston was open to the possibility of barefoot training at Turfway.

"If the surface is kind enough to the foot to permit them to do that and it benefits the horse and the horsemen, then I'm all for it," Elliston said.

Erb did not support the practice, though he admitted he is in the business of manufacturing and selling racing plates.



Michael Burns photo

## WOODBINE TRAINING

Horses at Woodbine, such as Woodbine Oaks winner and Queen's Plate Stakes runner-up Ginger Brew, race under similar rules in place at Keeneland and Turfway that do not allow toe grabs, caulks, stickers, inserts, blocks, turn downs, trailers, or heel extensions on front or hind shoes

"Our view is that for the support and protection of the hoof, it's beneficial for horses to wear some kind of footwear," Erb said. "If you take a human being out and allow them to walk in their normal daily routine barefoot, they're going to come up with injuries. I would then logically extend that into Thoroughbred racing without plates because there's an added factor here, and that is horses don't naturally run with people on their backs, so the added weight, I would think, would be detrimental to the hoof."

At Woodbine, Casse had heard of trainers who have conditioned their horses without shoes, but none have left his stable without the proper footwear.

"I don't, and I haven't, and I doubt that I will," Casse said. "But never say never." ♣

Joe Nevills is an editorial intern of THOROUGHBRED TIMES.

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