

A close-up photograph of a horse's head in profile, facing right. The horse is wearing a dark brown leather muzzle with metal hardware. A person's hand is visible near the horse's ear, possibly inserting an earplug. The background is blurred, showing a dirt field and some foliage. The title text is overlaid on the image.

HORSE EARPLUGS 101

MOUNTEDSHOOTINGSUPPLIES.COM

**OK, are you
all ears?!!!**



**A frequent question asked
by prospective Mounted Shooters, is**



“Does my horse need ear plugs?”



ANSWER:

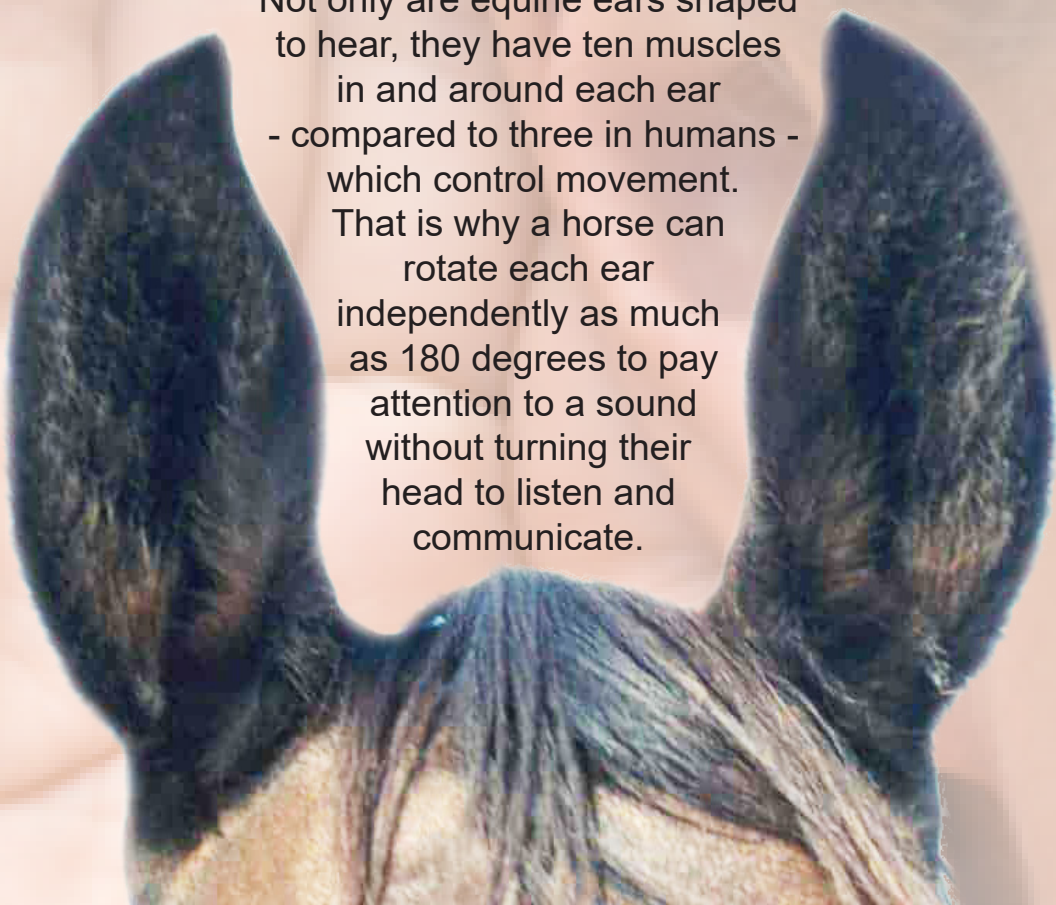
Absolutely

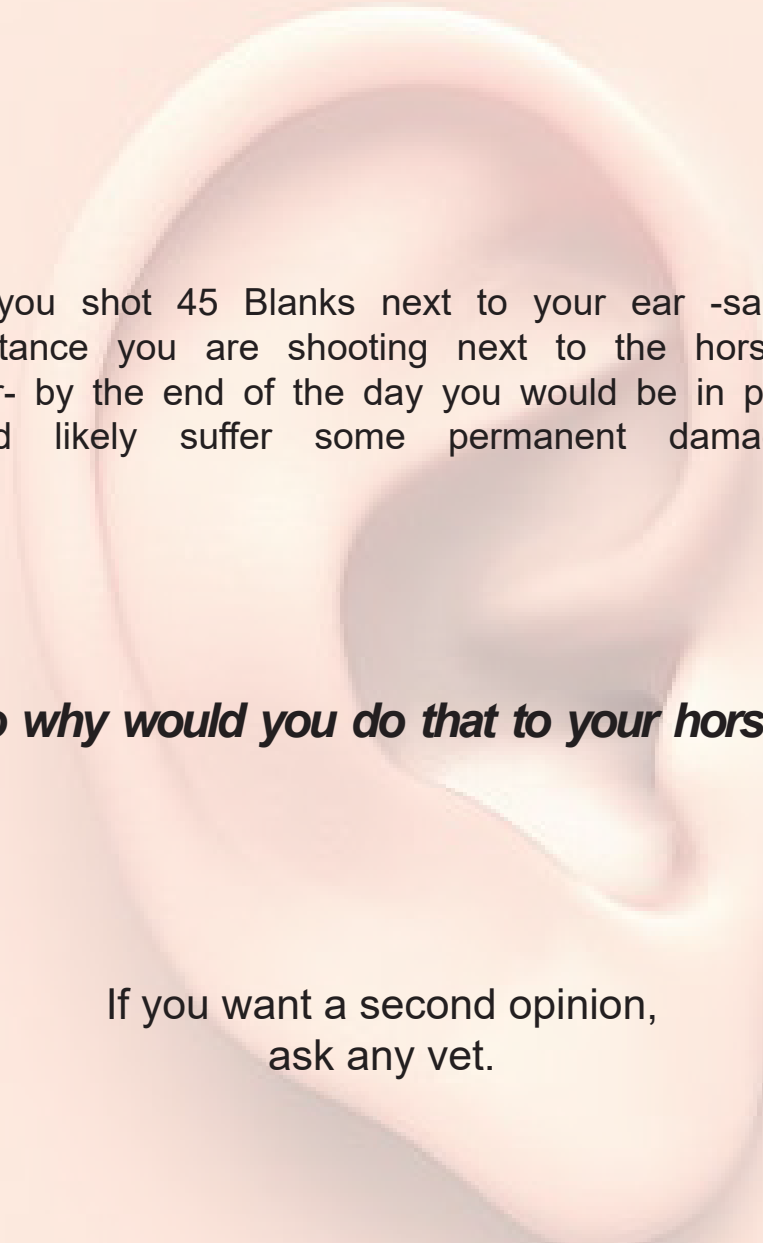
YES!

A horse has better and more sensitive hearing than a human. Horses hear sounds over a wider range of frequencies than we do. Horses can detect sounds as far as 2.5 miles away. The ability to hear higher frequencies means horses can detect the ultrasonic shriek of a bat, which is inaudible to a person's ear. That means they can often be aware of something outside our range of hearing and react to it. Horses do use their exquisite sense of hearing to pick up on changes in their environment. Horse's ears are shaped to locate, funnel, and amplify sounds.

Not only are equine ears shaped to hear, they have ten muscles in and around each ear - compared to three in humans - which control movement.

That is why a horse can rotate each ear independently as much as 180 degrees to pay attention to a sound without turning their head to listen and communicate.





If you shot 45 Blanks next to your ear -same distance you are shooting next to the horses' ear- by the end of the day you would be in pain and likely suffer some permanent damage.

So why would you do that to your horse?

If you want a second opinion,
ask any vet.

The real question is how to train your horse to accept Ear Plugs. Some horses accept ear plugs fairly quickly, while others require a lengthy training process. An early indicator is, if your horse will let you touch his/her ears, especially the insides. If not, desensitization of the ears will be the first phase of the training process. Which will require an extended progressive training approach. Consider the ear plug training as an essential part of the training of the horse for mounted shooting. With proper technique, it all comes together - you and your horse become a **Winning Team!**

EAR PLUGS

There are several types of Ear Plug materials and sizes. In general, the materials are either Foam or Fur, typically sheep skin wool.

FOAM

The foam types may be further grouped into firm or soft. It is more important with the firm foam plugs that you use the correct size.

Using too large a plug can be uncomfortable for the horse and

too-small will allow them to be shaken or fall out too easily. Mounted Shooting

Supplies offers firm foam plugs designed by Cashel

in sizes ranging from small to mule size.

Mounted Shooting Supplies also offers soft foam plugs designed by AJ Horses; these come in one average horse size.



FUR/WOOL plugs usually have more flexibility in shape than foam plugs. Wool tends to interface with the hair in the ear which aids retention. Wool is breathable and therefore more comfortable for the horse. Top of the line wool ear plugs is Mounted Shooting Supplies' **SILENCER Ear Plugs** which feature a soft foam core covered with Merino sheep skin.



Another sound reduction product is the **BONNET** with insulated ear covers. Mounted Shooting Supplies also offers a bonnet with insulated ear covers. The Bonnet features ear covers that are insulated with neoprene or heavy wool felt and it fits under the bridle and can be used alone or in addition to earplugs for extra protection. Most horses that object to earplugs will readily accept a Bonnet. Keep in mind, insulated Bonnets are quite warm and should be removed immediately after competition run.

One important point-

It is best to use ear plugs that have a lanyard connected to both plugs.

The lanyard is usually wrapped a turn around the headstall. This prevents the ear plugs from falling into the dirt should they come out, which in turn will get dirt into the horse's ears. Lanyards also prevents the earplugs from getting lost.



EARPLUG TRAINING FOR THE HORSE

For starters, it really helps to get to a point where the horse will let you rub its ears, especially the insides. You should start to work slowly and offer rewards for progress. For sensitive or resistive horses, your objective on day-one is not to put ear plugs in the horse's ears, but to concentrate on getting the horse to accept handling of his ears. If the horse is ear-shy, avoid handling the ears at all; start by rubbing his neck. Move your hand closer to the ear and then back again, then a little closer to the ear, and back. Gradually keep working toward the ear. It may take several days before you can actually touch the ear. Some progress may seem very slow and it will be an accomplishment when you can just touch the ear tips.

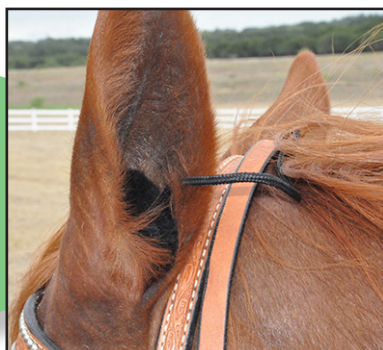
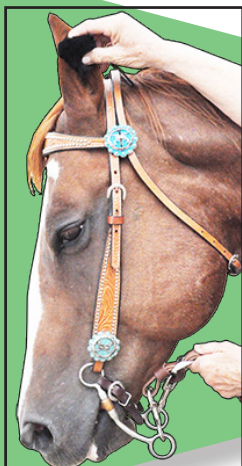


Certainly do not rush or force the process. Often you can make good progress by using a bucket of feed to capture the horse's attention on eating while you are touching the ears and even possibly actually inserting one or both plugs. In due course, you will be able to get the plug into the ear. In most cases, the horse's reaction will be to try to shake the plug out. The wool plugs usually tend to stay-in better. Be sure to connect the earplug's lanyard to the halter or headstall

so it does not fall into the dirt. When attempting to insert the first earplug affix the second earplug to the halter so as not to swing around and bang into the horses' face when he shakes his head.

After you reach a point of the horse accepting touching the insides of the ears, another method, is to use a corral or rounded pen for the earplug insertion training. Halter

the horse with a lead rope and work with the ears -same touch and technique as your initial training. After the horse is calm and accepting, slip one plug into ear. If the horse objects or reacts negatively, immediately start to walk the Horse, giving commands that the horse is familiar with -Walk, Whoa and Backup- to try to get his mind on you rather than the ear plugs. Also treats can help redirect the horse's attention. If the horse continues to be resistive, it just means that the training process will take more time. Do not try to force the horse or show **impatience**.

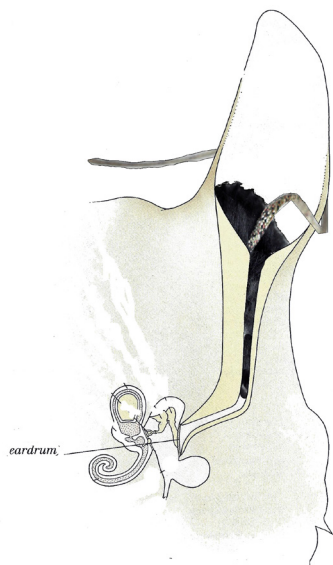


Just be politely firm!
Offer treat for good

progress. After you are successful with the first ear, be prepared to repeat the entire process for the other ear. Just like riding, you have to train both sides of the horse.

Several other considerations-

First you cannot push the ear plug too far into the horse's ear. The ear opening at the top is what you see and tapers into a smaller canal to the actual ear drum. But this is where you certainly don't want to bring dirt in from ear plugs which have been exposed to dirt. Also you should make sure the horse's ear are reasonably clean and there are **no ticks** inside. This can cause the horse





to be more reactive to ear plugs and add discomfort to the horse.



**Horse with
ear plugs &
attached
lanyard**



After you have been in Mounted Shooting for a while, you will occasionally see horses that do not like the sport! Often they are a real handful for the rider to control and will show their displeasure with various antics. Some times disconcerting!

We're not talking about the high-emotion highly competitive horse. You usually can tell the difference between the "Lets go win" horse and those which are really dismayed with the sport. Very often you will observe that the "Not Happy" horses are not wearing earplugs. The discomfort (or **PAIN**) is a bigger factor than most of those riders realize! The same as if someone were forcibly demanding you to run with the 'Blast of gunfire' near your ear repeatedly all day!



Your horse is the other half of your team.
Treat him/her as you would want to be treated and
You will create a Winning Team!

