

Worshipful Company of Farriers Equine Veterinary Studies Award 2024

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I was thrilled to be given the opportunity to shadow Stephen Hewitt, an Associate of the Worshipful Company of Farriers, to gain a better understanding of the farrier trade and appreciation of the veterinarian-farrier working relationship. I was very grateful to be welcomed by Steve, Jill and their lovely dogs for the placement in North Yorkshire.

I had previously spent a week shadowing my own horse's farrier where I saw a range of horses be shod. I was excited to hear that most of Steve's work would involve shoeing racehorses, as I had not seen this area of farriery before. The week started with a routine shoeing in Middleham to plate horses with lightweight aluminium shoes before racing. Steve explained the shorter shoeing routine of a racehorse, which differs to the 6-8 week cycle in leisure horses. Steve also explained the important management of the hoof wall given the repetitive toll that regular shoeing can have, for example racehorses may be given a break during the year to regain hoof wall strength. We also discussed the benefits of using hoof casts in these cases, which provide a synthetic hoof wall for nailing on to allow the horse to continue in training. It was also interesting to compare a racing plate to a hunter style shoe, which had a lot more width, length and weight than a plate.



Throughout the placement, Steve took the time to explain the various shoe types, which provide a window of opportunity for vets and farriers to work together to manage horses with injuries or for general support and soundness. For example, lateral extensions on a shoe increase support for the distal limb, while glue on shoes may be beneficial in laminitis cases. Other examples included a variety of bar shoes to increase heel support, however these are often avoided in racing due to the increased risk of losing shoes. Using 3D pads and dental impression material, which provide support to the frog region, helped to mitigate this risk. The use of modern materials in farriery was fascinating. Previously, there was less scope for their use in racing due to their weight and cost, however their use is increasing and seems a positive step forward in increasing comfort and performance.



I was keen to improve my technique when taking shoes off, an important day one skill required by an equine vet. Steve was patient and took the time to explain the different tools required. A buffer, mallet and hoof pincers are essential items in an ambulatory vet's car, and I also learnt that a farrier's apron will be needed to avoid bruised thighs! Steve explained the importance of straightening the nails using the buffer and then pulling the shoe off from the heel using a 'quick and downward' action to improve efficiency. I felt much happier with this skill by the end of the placement, however I definitely need to work on my speed.

I have gained a greater appreciation for the knowledge and skills that farriers possess and understand more about the different qualifications farriers may hold. The placement demonstrated the exceptional opportunity that equine vets have to work with farriers. It was clear that although vets have the diagnostic tools to identify issues, a farrier holds the practical skills to support the horse. Ultimately a good working relationship improves the horse's health and welfare, an outcome strived for by vets, farriers and owners. I look forward to working with farriers closely in my future career and developing these communication skills.

Thank you to The Worshipful Company of Farriers for organising this placement and award. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to dive deeper into the work of a farrier. Thank you to Jill and Steve for a great week and generous hospitality. I look forward to hopefully shadowing Steve again in the future, and I am sure I will be ringing him for advice on difficult cases when I qualify!