

Worshipful Company of Farriers Equine Veterinary Studies Award 2021

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I would like to express my gratitude towards the Worshipful Company of Farriers, which provided such a fascinating opportunity for us to gain invaluable experience with farriers, and towards Dr. Lydia Brown, who supported me before, during and after the placement. My week with farriers Alan Bould, Josh Cooksley, Adam Cooper and Mark Neal in The Defence Animal Training Regiment was beyond amazing. It was a great learning opportunity. It equipped me with the most basic farriery knowledge and hands-on skills. It was also an eye-opening experience. I got to meet various levels of farriers, from apprentices to masters. Watching them seizing every minute to refine their skill and work together to improve equine welfare makes me understand what real craftsmanship is.



Figure 1 from Curtis (2006).
Photo of a T square

During the first 2 days, I have been bombarded by a concept called foot balance. Shadowing farriers during yard check really helped me understand how to assess the balance. Shape, distortion, over-growth, rings and lesions were systemically assessed from different views. T Square (Figure 1) had become my favourite tool, since it facilitates an objective assessment of the relationship between the hoof and the leg. Moreover, Shoes' type, size and wear pattern should all be considered. As a beginner, I tended to reach directly to the hoof. Horses' history and conformation will have a significant impact on the foot balance as well and should not be omitted. Observing horses in action and capturing things like abnormal breakover or gait such as paddling will also help us analyse the foot balance.



Figure 2 from Curtis (2006).
Illustration of the "Toe back and heel back" principle.
The left side of hoof was trimmed.

After having a picture of the foot balance in mind and taking shoes off with shaky hands and legs, we started next stage--- shoeing for balance. Preparation is important. Reading through different guidelines and talking with different farriers really help me understand this controversial area. The 3 most basic principles I still remember by heart are "Toe back, heel back (Figure 2)", "Releasing sole pressure" and "a natural extension of the limb". You may already start thinking that sole callus should touch the ground if the horse goes barefoot. Please get into contact if you would like to educate me more about this area.

Vet students are always excited about which type of shoes to choose. I did have a great fun identifying every single type of shoes in the forge and asking endless questions about them. Maybe it is because we like to find similarity between shoes and medicines. It is like if you have a horse with laminitis, it is good to try heart bar. You have a hind limb bone spavin, maybe worth trying elevating the heel. However, we must keep in mind that shoeing is just an extra way of improving foot balance after proper preparation. An egg bar will not work well if the heel is not properly trimmed.

Back to the forge, we started crafting shoes from iron bars. It might look simple at the first glance. However, after hammering my iron blocks into unbalanced and pathetic shape a few times, I realised this requires years of practice and endless refinement of skills. A picture of the shoe should be in my head before anything starts. Measurement before cutting already could decide whether the shoe is usable or not. Bending, forging and welding requires precision and firm grip with great control. It is

hard to remedy most of the mistakes, especially when it comes to making sophisticated shapes of shoes and using material like aluminium.

With a warm shoe in hand, we went down to fit it on a real horse. Making adjustment was our next challenge. A natural extension of the hoof is what we would like to achieve in most of the circumstances. It never ceases to surprise me when farriers adjust the shape by their visual memory. Attention to details is always important, especially during nailing, clutching and rasping, since you do not want hot nail or damaged coronary band. Final polishing should not be taken light of. A shiny gun-power black hoof wall visualises the attention to details and great professionalism.

I had privilege to work with final year farrier apprentices throughout the week. Questions they asked, great work they did and mistakes they made always taught me lessons. Seeing the specimens they made improved my understanding of what features a good shoe. I really appreciate their support and help.

Friday was a big day. A master farrier champion everyone knows came to deliver a tutorial to farriers preparing for AWCF exam. I really like his way of teaching. My knowledge about making a straight bar did improved a lot. His way of dealing with exam and thinking in advance inspired me. He also gave me suggestions about my career choices, which I found very useful.



*Figure 3 from Hinchcliff et al. (2014)
The foot was shod with an egg bar shoe. A quarter clip was placed immediately dorsal to the hoof crack and the heel has been trimmed short to prevent contact with the shoe.*

I am a big fan of flat racing. It is sad to know that TB racehorses, especially retired ones, are prone to foot problems. They are prone to have sloping HPA, probably due to cartilage underdevelopment, predisposing them to soft tissue damage and navicular syndrome. Their walls and soles are thinner, which hindered the nail placement. Their hoof is prone to bruising or penetration, due to the less concave sole. Cracks (Figure 3) are common, due to side to side or front to back imbalance. I felt so lucky that there were experienced farriers answering my endless questions about racehorses. Why their shoeing cycle is shorter than other breeds. Why do people use aluminium instead of steel? How to shoe a hind hoof of a dangerous over-energized racehorse? Would it be more sensible to leave them barefoot, since their thin wall and poor growth are hard to manage?

It was a fruitful week in Melton Mowbray. I had become more comfortable assessing foot balance, taking shoes off, cleaning and trimming for clinical exam. Most importantly, I have been trained to think like a farrier and communicate efficiently with them, since they are the strongest allies of veterinary professionals when it comes to safeguarding equine welfare.

Citation

Curtis, Simon. *Corrective Farriery : a Textbook of Remedial Horseshoeing* / Edited by Simon Curtis. Volume 2. Newmarket: Newmarket Farrier Consultancy, 2006.

Hinchcliff, Kenneth W., Andris J. Kaneps, and Raymond J. Geor. *Equine Sports Medicine and Surgery : Basic and Clinical Sciences of the Equine Athlete* / Edited by Kenneth W. Hinchcliff, Andris J. Kaneps, Raymond J. Geor. Second edition. Edinburgh: Saunders/Elsevier, 2014.