

Worshipful Company of Farriers Equine Veterinary Studies Award 2023

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I was thrilled to be nominated to spend a week shadowing an Associate of the Worshipful Company of Farriers (AWCF) to gain a greater understanding of their trade and appreciate the importance of a good working relationship between farriers and veterinarians. I was very fortunate to be placed with Steve Hewitt and his very welcoming family, including two bonus furry travel companions, in the beautiful North Yorkshire countryside.



Growing up around racing and being interested in pursuing a career in the racing industry, I was delighted when I heard that the majority of Steve's work involved racehorses. My week started with a trip up to Middleham to routinely shoe a number of horses and plate the horses that were entered to run that week. During the car journeys to the yards I really appreciated the conversations with Steve where we discussed the benefits of Aluminium racing plates and how fresh plates before a race can improve traction and breakover. We also discussed the routine 4-week shoeing cycle in racehorses and the importance of giving horses a 6-week break from shoeing during the year to allow the foot to regain its natural strength and recover from the toll that repetitive shoeing has on the hoof wall.

The assessment of foot balance was something I had hoped to improve on during the week. On each of the racehorses, Steve explained how to assess medio-lateral imbalance by correctly holding the horse's leg in a neutral raised position with a hand just above the fetlock joint. This was an incredibly important tip as Steve showed me how easy it was to create a false sense of medio-lateral imbalance by holding the leg incorrectly at the pastern! I also gained a greater understanding of the hoof-pastern axis. Towards the end of the week I was better at identifying the horses with a long toe and a broken back hoof axis, therefore needing more off at the toe during trimming.

We also discussed the measurements that Steve aims for when trimming a foot for shoeing, dividing the foot into thirds. $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ of the shoe length should be from the dorsal hoof wall to the tip of the frog and $2/3^{\text{rd}}$ of the shoe should cover from the tip of the frog caudally. Steve explained the importance of fitting the shoe to the white line instead of the hoof wall. The nails should always be nailed on at the white line to prevent being too close to the outer hoof wall which can cause cracks or too close to the sensitive laminae which can cause a nail bind.

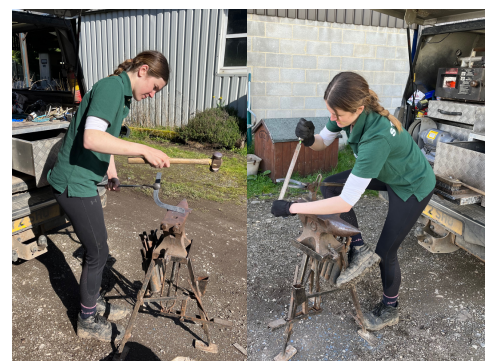
I also had the opportunity to remove lots of front and hind shoes on some lovely and patient racehorses! Being able to remove shoes efficiently is very important in practice as the horse's that need this performed by vets will most often be foot sore and therefore less tolerant of a poor technique. Steve was a brilliant teacher and the more I removed, the more I gained in confidence. I learnt the importance of posture in improving horse comfort and I improved my technique of raising the clenches with the mallet and buffer which definitely made me more efficient by day 5!



Each day when returning from Middleham, Steve took the time to explain different concepts of remedial farriery and the function of a variety of shoes he had made for competitions. Heart bars, straight bars and egg bars are all variations of shoes with increased heel support with straight bars being the most suitable shoe for a racehorse in training. In racing, the need for frog support has largely been replaced by the use of 3D pads and Steve showed me the horses he had introduced the 3D pads to, many of whom are now winning races. The most interesting shoe to look at was the fishtail which is used to provide temporary relief for horses with SDFT and DDFT injuries to prevent hyperextension strain on the flexor tendons. Steve also showed me shoes with lateral extensions which increases the support under the lateral structures of the lower leg to relieve strain on collateral injuries.

I also learnt about the tools needed as a farrier. Steve recommended having a buffer, mallet and hoof pincers in an ambulatory vet's car in order to effectively remove shoes. We also discussed the names and function of the hammers used routinely. A nailing on hammer is used to fit the shoes and a shoe turning hammer is used to shape the shoes to correctly fit the horse's feet. I also realised that sharp rasps and a good apron are a farrier's best friend. I was amazed to hear that Steve goes through a rasp a week!

On the final day, I had the exciting opportunity to make my first ever horse shoe from a straight piece of metal at Steve's forge. It was definitely a challenge technically and physically and, although flawed, I am very proud of my first attempt at a front shoe. Learning from a Master Farrier with a wealth of competition experience worldwide definitely helped!



Photographed is the shoe I made – it makes a real change from the lightweight aluminium racing plates!



The week was an amazing experience and one I am very grateful for. I have a massive admiration for this trade and a much greater appreciation of the technical skill and knowledge farriers possess, alongside the physicality of the job. Having completed the placement, I feel in a better place to communicate with farriers using the correct terminology and have greatly improved my hoof anatomy and understanding of remedial farriery. I will always be advising my equine clients to work closely with their farrier, alongside myself, when it comes to dealing with foot conditions.

I just want to say a big thank you again to Steve and Jill for a fantastic week's experience, made very enjoyable by their hospitality. Thanks to Dr Lydia Brown on behalf of The Worshipful Company of Farriers for organising this placement. I am also very grateful to have been awarded this opportunity by John Keen at The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies. I would encourage any prospective equine vet to spend some time with a farrier to gain an appreciation of their profession and an awareness that it is always best to share knowledge and expertise in order to reach the best clinical outcome for our equine patients.

Anna Hogarth

Final Year Veterinary Student

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