

Bryony Lovegrove. University of Surrey EVSA winner 2021

I was fortunate enough to be the recipient of the EVSA award for the University of Surrey. I spent a week with Richard Gerken and his apprentice Will where I had a fantastic time and learned a lot. Richard and his family were so welcoming to me, and I saw a variety of cases during my time with him. Will had only started his apprenticeship 3 months ago so was still fairly new to it all, and it was great as we were able to learn the basics together.

Before I started the week I had a basic understanding of the importance of good farriery but now I have a far greater appreciation of the work that farriers do. I hadn't quite understood the amount of things that are considered when putting a set of shoes on, especially when the case is not straightforward. Whilst I had a basic knowledge of hoof anatomy, Richard taught how to look for the small differences in anatomy which can make a big difference. Looking at medio-lateral balance, heel height and HPA are all things which can really affect the horses' way of going, and internal structures within the hoof and lower limb and are very important to think about when putting shoes on but also when evaluating lameness / hoof problems. Going forward I will make sure to take the time to look at the hooves thoroughly, rather than just a cursory look, and I will also make sure to make it a key part of my clinical exam.



*Burning on to assess shoe fit*

Will was in the process of learning how to make shoes, and I did not realise how difficult it was to make the perfect shoe. There is so much to think about when making a shoe for the horse, taking into account any problems the horse may have, their foot conformation and the purpose of the horse. Also the actual act of making a shoe from scratch to fit the horse perfectly never failed to impress me.



*This is the first shoe that Will made - it is safe to say he has improved a lot from then!*

My equine distal limb anatomy has definitely improved during the course of the week. Richard's immense knowledge of distal limb anatomy was evident, as well as his passion for teaching. Both myself and Will were able to learn a lot, especially in the van between clients. One particular highlight was Richard encouraging both Will and myself to draw diagrams of the bones, tendons and ligaments of the distal limb – something which I have never been confident in before but now I am. Whilst I knew what the tendons and ligaments were, Richard demonstrated their origins and insertions on the horse itself and how that affected their function which really helped my understanding of injuries to them will affect the horse.



*Examples of different types of pads*

One topic of conversation was how to approach navicular syndrome. Richard has such a vast knowledge of understanding about it, and I have a far greater understanding of the risk factors and how to approach treatment. Richard showed me shoes with graduated heels which he explained can take the strain off of palmar aspect of the hoof and hopefully relieve some pain / clinical signs.



*An example of shoes with a graduated heel which would be good for a Navicular case*

Unfortunately during the course of my stay there were no remedial farriery cases, but Richard and I spoke at length about how he would approach a variety of cases. Laminitis was one of the main topics of conversation, and Richard explained how he would use imprint shoes to provide frog support to try and relieve the pain caused by pedal bone sinking / rotation. He also spoke about how different vets have different approaches to how they will try and treat laminitis, and how sometimes it can be a compromise with the vet to ensure that everyone is happy, but most importantly that the horse is pain free and is in the best position for recovery.



*Imprint shoes that Richard would use in the acute phase of laminitis*

One key skill that I learned was how to take shoes off. On the first yard we went to Richard demonstrated on the first hoof how to take a shoe off, and then encouraged me to have a go. It definitely took me a few shoes to get the hang of the technique of knocking the clenches up but I feel so much more confident at taking shoes off now. It is such an essential skill for vets to know, and I have gained so much experience this week about how to take shoes off properly and efficiently. I also feel confident using the basic equipment needed for this, as well as using a T-square to assess mediolateral balance.



*T-square to assess mediolateral balance*

There were so many little pieces of valuable information and tips which I learned throughout the week. Colloquial terms was an important one, as in vet school we only learn the scientific terms but many people in the equine world have their own terms. I personally think this is really important as I can see a future client losing confidence in the vet if they do not understand basic equine terms.



*A horse with a more complicated hoof anatomy*

Now that I have a greater understanding of what farriers do, I feel I will be able to build a better relationship with farriers who I work with in future and therefore working together to achieve the best outcome for the horses under our care. I would thoroughly recommend this to anyone who thinks horses will be a part of their future, as it was such a valuable learning experience. I would like to thank Dr Lydia Brown, Richard Gerken and all of the host farriers who give up some of their valuable time to help teach vet students like myself.



*A newly fitted shoe ready to be trimmed up*