

## **EVSA Report 2019 - Alice Wright**

I was so delighted and privileged to spend a week with Steve, not only due to being a veterinary student with an equine interest but I have owned horses my entire childhood and always found farriery fascinating. However, in my veterinary training we do not get enough teaching on the importance of good farriery, throughout this week I wanted to improve my basic practical skills and learn more about an industry I hope to have a close working relationship with in the future. I spent the week working with Steve Hewitt, Apprentice of the Worshipful Company of Farriers, and experienced farrier! On many of my veterinary placements I've listened to the vets advising owners and farriers alike how they would like the horse to be shod. This week was my opportunity to watch and discuss farriery from the other side of the table and understand how farriers have to work with the want of the owner and the need of the horse, to get the best compromise.



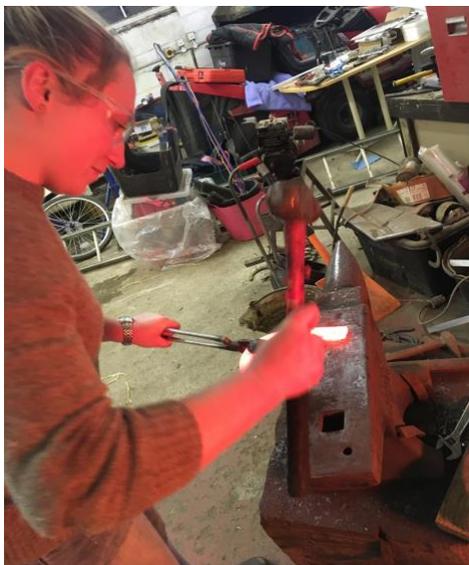
In the past I have only observed hot shoeing of horses however the majority of Steve's work is for racing yards, where the horses are cold shod, which poses different challenges to hot shoeing. On the first yard we discussed how to assess foot balance of the hoof and to consider the whole mechanics of the leg when choosing the appropriate trimming and shoeing for each individual horse. Steve also taught me how to properly hold the leg to prevent inadequate positioning of the leg so I could establish the true foot balance. Although a basic skill, this has made a big difference to how I was assessing the foot and I could understand the problems Steve was highlighting. We also discussed the normal conformation of a thoroughbred foot and how ideally the foot would be shod; stereotypically thoroughbreds have small flat feet with very little heel which ideally would be further supported by a shoe with extra heel support. However, this does not always suit the practicality of shoeing for racing. Most of the time, the racing trainers want the weight of the shoe to be incredibly light, adding as little as possible to the weight of the foot. Therefore, any extra additions to the shoe, such as a bar shoe or even just extending the shoe behind the heel, can be a disadvantage for the best racing performance. It can also increase the occurrence of pulled shoes by the horses overreaching and catching the back of the shoe, causing trauma to the hoof wall. Steve is constantly compromising the best shoeing for the horse's conformation with the practical needs of shoeing a horse for the race track.

Cold shoeing was also a new experience for me. The foot has to be prepared with a perfectly level foot so that the shoe will sit flat and flush, especially as the shoe isn't being 'burnt on' as it is in hot shoeing. If there are any gaps between the shoe and the foot, they are not being

highlighted by the burning on process, so the fit is completely reliant on Steve's assessment. In addition, the initial fit of the shoe has to be more specific to the horse's hoof as the cold metal is less malleable than when it is heated by the forge. The advantages of cold shoeing is that the shoes can be fitted in the stables as the forge is not needed making the fitting much quicker and aluminium racing plates cannot be heated in the forge as the metal is too brittle.

One of our main topics of conversation that we kept coming back to was that Steve is also a student of the RVC as he is currently doing the Masters with Renata Weller. As part of their course they have to perform a study in an area of choice and we discussed at length some of his different ideas. One area that Steve found very thought provoking was the communication between farrier and vet and how it can fail, which it often does at the expense of the owner and horse! I agreed with Steve as I have also seen a breakdown in communication in this area, as I mentioned previously. I think that there is definitely a need for research into farriery as there are many theories on current techniques within farriery but very limited research supporting these techniques. I think it is really exciting that more research is being conducted into farriery, and that farriers and vets are working together to advance our current practices.

An unexpected bonus from the week was the opportunity to make my own shoe in Steve's forge. Even though was very closely supervised and sometimes given a very welcome helping hand by Steve, I managed to complete the whole process from heating the steel to punching in the nail holes. I now have an even greater respect to the craftsmanship of farriery and a farrier's forearm strength! Each farrier's apprenticeship involves examinations on forging and being able to produce perfect shoe for different scenarios. There is a very large range of different shoes that farriers are taught about, that isn't covered in my veterinary studies and I didn't appreciate until, Steve showed me shoes that he has made whilst teaching his own apprentices and in forging competitions.



This week was very informative for me and really helped develop my basic practical skills, such as removing a shoe properly. It also gave me an insight to the daily working routine of a farrier and also into the racing industry, which I previously had very little knowledge about. My enthusiasm for farriery has only been encouraged by this week's experience and I have complete certainty that the importance of farriery and veterinary working together to provide better care and welfare for horses, and provide a better service to horse owners, is undeniable.

I would like to thank Steve Hewitt and his family for the time and knowledge that they gave me and for being so welcoming for the week. I would also like to thank Dr Lydia Brown, The Worshipful Company of Farriers and RVC for coordinating and providing the placement and giving this invaluable experience.

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