

## **EVSA 2019: Isabelle Talbot Price- University of Bristol**

Up until now I have always regarded farriery as a profession that requires skill, dexterity and manual labour however following on from my week with master farrier Jason Somerville BSc (Hons) AWCF, I will now look upon farriery in an entirely different light. I have discovered that farriery not only requires manual skill but additionally mental expertise within the equine sector; a great deal of knowledge, aptitude and ability is required to shoe a horse, keep the horse sound and therefore fit for its intended purpose.

During my week with Jason I was in absolute awe of the level's farriers can go to ensure horses can continue work and perform to their absolute optimum. I witnessed first-hand the difficulties encountered by farriers and the brick walls they can come up against when fulfilling clients or even veterinarians wishes. Jason taught me the importance of the client-farrier bond and I noticed how clients open-up to farriers in a different manner when compared with vets. Clients seem to perceive farriers as a tool of wisdom and assurance, during my week I noticed that clients are more comfortable to disclose information to their farrier that they would otherwise not disclose to their vet. This confidence that clients seem to have in their farriers (that is seemingly lacking from the vet-client bond) may plainly be down to the fact that the same farrier will visit every 4-6 weeks with a steadfast approach to shoe the horse to the best of his/her ability in order to keep the horse in work (generally with a good chat along the way). Thus, the farrier is a constant in the life of horse owners whereas the vet is generally interchangeable.

Jason taught me an incredible amount throughout my time with him, from hoof balance and levelling to making a shoe and counteracting poor conformation. I was first shown the steps of rasping, shortening the toe and levelling the sole to create a balanced hoof. Next Jason demonstrated hoof mapping to me, hoof mapping is an approach which I was unfamiliar with before my farriery week. Hoof mapping allows the farrier to determine the location of the pedal bone within the hoof and therefore its relationship to the point of breakover. This information is useful when creating a shoe to fit the individual horse's hoof as the measurements can be mapped to create a close-fitting individualised shoe.

As of Monday morning, when I entered the farriery life for a week, I started to witness and appreciate the intricacies involved in farriery, from levelling hooves to adjusting balance and fitting a shoe to the individual horse. From day one I began to realise that each movement with the rasp, each cut made with a hoof knife and each tap (or 'donk' as Jason called it) to the shoe, to adjust its shape, was a well thought out process which consistently had of a long list of justifications behind it. These justifications behind why a horse was shod in a certain way were always present when I asked and evidently come naturally to a farrier with years of shoeing experience. I don't think many people realise that a farrier is an expert in his field, a farrier looks at horse's hooves day in day out and can therefore appreciate subtle changes in gait and assess conformation in the blink of an eye which is a skill many people can only dream of having.

From Wednesday onwards I began to get more involved, I started by taking off the front shoes of a well behaved pony, this proved to me how physical the job is and I was out of breath just from having to hold the horses leg up for so long. Removing the shoes also proved to me how much you have to assess the horse before you start, in terms of temperament and pre-existing disease, for example you don't want to be flexing a horses limb too much if it has osteoarthritis as you will cause discomfort whilst shoeing and therefore form negative associations in the horses mind. Additionally, you don't want to be making a horse with thin, sensitive soles stand 'bare' foot for overtly long on hard ground because you will end up making the horse sore and therefore lame. After accomplishing

front shoe removal, I was able to tackle hind shoes which I knew would be far more challenging. I eventually managed to grasp how to hold the leg and hoof stationary whilst knocking up the clenches, but it was hard work and I didn't envy the farriers job at this point.

Throughout the week a common theme of shoeing horses with 'flat feet' arose. Jason tackled this in a variety of ways depending on the severity of the conformation default. In one specific case the horse presented with a long toe, low heels and a slightly rotated pedal bone, Jason explained that we wanted to raise the heels and correct the angle of the pedal bone, but in raising the heels with a straight bar shoe we would put excess pressure on the heels and 'crush' them. He explained that it would make more sense to use a tapered pad under the shoe that was slightly raised at the heel but tapered at the toe. This would balance out the pressure evenly across the whole foot, therefore raising the heels and thus altering the angle of the pedal bone without compressing the heels. I realised at this point that such slight and seemingly insignificant alterations to the way a horse is shod can have a major impact on the comfort and soundness of a horse.

On my final afternoon with Jason I was very lucky to experience the 'full circle' of farriery when I was able to have a go at making my own horse shoe. I was presented with a straight bar of steel; Jason's apprentice Jack demonstrated each step of heating the bar at intervals in the furnace and knocking the bar into a shape that would fit a horse's hoof. The process was lengthy and the skill level far beyond my expertise, however with some help and laughter along the way I managed to form a roughly horse shoe shaped object that I was quite proud of, a little memento to remind me of my farriery week.



Being a final year veterinary student who wishes to specialise in the equine field I consider that knowledge surrounding the horse's hoof with specific emphasis on maintaining soundness is one of, if not the most important areas to understand and be aware of. I personally feel that farriers are the population of individuals with the most experience, familiarity and expertise with regards to the horse's hoof and therefore I consider my week with Jason to be invaluable.



I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jason Somerville and his apprentice Jack for opening my eyes to the farriery world and allowing me to spend a week with them in aid of this award. I would also like to thank Lydia Brown for arranging the week and of course, The Worshipful Company of Farriers for providing me with the opportunity to complete this placement. In my opinion, spending a week with a farrier has been an unequivocally valuable experience, in fact one of the most eye-opening and beneficial weeks of Extra Mural Studies I have undertaken so far.