

My Week With Paul Horner

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Hello! My name is Jess, a final year veterinary student from the University of Bristol. I have owned horses and have seen many shoeing's in my time, but the real art and skill of farriery was only exposed to me during my time at university. I had a lot more to learn about the farriery world!

My motivation to undertake this experience came from a combined veterinary perspective, and a particular interest in limb anatomy, functionality, and biomechanics (stemming from my previous degree in Sports Science). I wanted to see how the treatment of equine lameness and general lower limb comfort was achieved through remedial farriery. Paul explained to me how this truly becomes a fully multi-disciplinary approach with regards to balancing the feet correctly at the "bottom end", to correctly training and adapting musculature at the "top end" through physiotherapy.

The week consisted of travelling around the beautiful Somerset countryside with Paul and his team day to day visiting his client's yards. The hours generally began with an early morning, and sometimes finished later into the evening. However, this time flew by - there was so much to see and talk about. Driving between yards we discussed all aspects of remedial farriery – I quizzed Paul about how one became a master farrier (invitation only!), the different training aspects of farriery (4-year apprenticeship to qualify, extra exams to do remedial work). The

horses that we saw varied greatly, from Police horses, top eventing prospects, dressage specialists, to happy hacker cobs. This really demonstrated Paul's teachings that shoeing mainly differs depending on the horse's work load, both in terms of the shoe shape, but also in the shoe materials – eventers need more grip and so requires a furrowed shoe, whereas dressage horses and those only working

on school surfaces can have lighter, smoother shoes that don't require as much grip. Happy hackers need more durable, steel shoes, whereas racing horses require much lighter aluminium style shoes. This was an eye opener for me –never truly appreciated the detailed choice of which shoe, what it is made from, and how to mould it correctly to the feet depending on the conditions seen. Some examples of cases that we saw over the week are included in this report as separate case studies.

Paul taught me all about the structure of the hoof. He used a great analogy which I will always remember – the hoof wall is like straws. When in a straight line and growing as they should, they are incredibly strong. If the angle is slightly off, the

Case 1

Background – Shetland pony with history of laminitic episodes

Remedial farriery performed –

- Pedal bone rotation causes pinching of the sole. This not only is painful, but also creates a thinner, more sensitive sole by disrupting solar growth. Due to this pony's solar sensitivity, shoeing was not possible. Therefore, this pony has glue-on shoes. To place this, the foot is trimmed normally, and then warmed to remove any damp from the foot (this would prevent the glue from sticking). The hard resin glue is then applied using a glue gun – the black glue is rock hard, and the lighter glue covering the sole is slightly softer to provide more comfort.



Case 2

Background - Suspensory ligament damage

Remedial farriery performed –

- “Salad bowl shoes” (pictured below!) were placed. These weird and wonderful inventions have a wide base on the hoof surface, and then narrow significantly towards the ground to a much smaller ground contact area. This massively reduces the lever angle of the foot, making it much easier for the foot to be moved off the floor during locomotion, reducing the tension on the ligaments.



<https://www.americanfarriers.com/articles/13417-benefits-of-the-omni-directional-horseshoe?v=preview>



different force direction causes the straws the bend out of shape, and potentially move away from each other. This could be due to overgrowth (hoof splaying causing cracks) or from differing weight distribution from an injury. I found this analogy really useful in visualising how the hoof grows, and to understand the physiological reasoning as to why a hoof may be growing in the direction that it is.

One area that my university has focussed on going into clinical years is communication skills. Paul demonstrated just how effective good communication skills can be, both when discussing with clients what is happening and how he was going to fix it, but also with vets on ongoing cases that they had together. This really demonstrated how important a good relationship between vet, farrier and client is to achieve the best outcome for the horse. I look forward to working closely with clients and farriers in my own career, and progressing this skill.

The week ended on a high being taught how to make a steel horseshoe from scratch. I have new respect yet again for farriers, its hard work! An awesome experience learning how to measure up a straight piece of steel with middle and nail hole markers, how to start and stoke the furnace, get the steel hot enough without burning (it goes white and “sparkles”!), and how to successfully bend it into shape to get the perfect, symmetrical horseshoe. It ended with punching in the nail holes, with Paul showing me how to measure them up correctly to ensure they were in the right place – front nail holes placed just above the start of the toe curve and in line with the heel, and the last nail holes in line with the widest part of the shoe. My shoe now takes pride-of-place in my living room, a great memento from the week!

Case 3

Background – Long toe, flat heel, navicular area pain

- Long toes and sunken heels can cause increased pressure on the caudal structures of the foot – navicular bone, navicular bursa, DDFT.

Remedial farriery performed

- To relieve this pressure, a full pad was placed under the shoe to raise the heel. Paul also applied a form of putty under the pad to provide a softer solar surface. This also allowed the foot to continue its natural process of swelling and contracting normally (acts as a blood pump). Quarter clips are used on the shoes to reduce the toe length and keep distributing weight towards the heel.



I'd like to thank the Worshipful Company of Farriers for providing such an amazing opportunity to learn such an important art at a first-hand level. Lydia was fantastic in organising the whole process – thank you for making it run so smoothly from start to finish. The skill and expertise displayed by these farriers is awe inspiring – and definitely has inspired me to get just as proficient as they are at removing shoes!! I would encourage anyone to take up the opportunity to learn from them.

Finally, a massive thankyou goes to Paul and his team for hosting me. The week with them really was a fantastic insight into the world of farriers. He provided me with so many opportunities to get hands on experience, which is a vital part of any vet student's education. My little notebook is full of notes that I will remember for a long time to come, along with this wonderful experience! I can't wait to take all his teachings to not only better my own knowledge and practical understanding of the equine lower limb, but also to be able to effectively work with farriers in the future, building a strong relationship to be able to effectively tackle lower limb issues with a multi-disciplinary approach.

