

When I first heard about the EVSA, I immediately recognized what a brilliant opportunity it would be. When I found out that I had been selected as the recipient of the award for 2023/2024 for Surrey Vet School, I was absolutely delighted.

I spent a fantastic week with Jason Richardson in East Yorkshire, my first visit to the area and the farthest north I have travelled in the UK, much to the amusement of many clients I met during the week. Jason, a true horseman with extensive knowledge, was an incredible mentor. I learned an immense amount throughout the week.

On our way to the first yard of the week, Jason and I discussed the proportions of the hoof and reviewed some distal limb anatomy. Jason demonstrated how a horse's shoe can reveal a lot about its movement, such as whether they drag their toes or wear down the outside edge of the shoe more than the inside. These insights are crucial for optimizing the horse's movement and determining appropriate shoeing, which became more evident throughout the week.

A goal I had for my placement was to learn how to remove shoes, a skill we only practice on models at vet school. Over the week, I had ample practice and learned three different methods for shoe removal. By the end of the week, I was comfortable enough to remove all four shoes from a pony, a testament to the progress I made under Jason's guidance.

From the very start, I observed the respect Jason's clients have for his expertise. Each horse's individual needs were considered when they were being shod, making adjustments through discussions with riders and by examining the growth of the hoof and wear of the shoe.

One highlight was crafting my own set of shoes in Jason's forge, a challenging yet hugely rewarding experience. The shoes I made are already on display at home, and I will never forget the brilliant experience of making them with Jason.

I observed a wide range of horses during the week, which was great as it meant I learned about a variety of issues. I witnessed a young horse being shod for the first time and learned the importance of preparing the horse for the sight and smell of smoke. I also observed a foal trim, focusing on maintaining the frog's length to stimulate hoof growth. We discussed various corrective shoeing options for foals with angular limb deformities, which was good to learn more about as many of these cases require close collaboration of vets and farriers.

We also attended to horses in retirement who, in the drier weather, needed more support on the hard ground and could benefit from shoes. In one case, we used aluminium shoes for an elderly horse recovering from an abscess, providing more support without putting too much strain on the distal limb. I also learned about the considerations that should be made for horses in between these two life stages, depending on their use and lifestyle. For example, Jason explained the importance of preventing shoe loss in hunters by bevelling the heel to match the hoof wall's angle.

We explored the anatomy of nails and their role in shoeing. I learned about different sizes of nails, the materials they can be made from, and their pros and cons. We also discussed various therapeutic shoeing options for different injuries, such as suspensory desmitis, pedal bone fractures, navicular disease, and for managing the impact of laminitis.

Jason kindly showed me a huge variety of therapeutic shoes he had made in the past, including hospital plates and heart bar shoes. We talked through different opinions on treatments and shoeing options that have evolved as knowledge and evidence have become available.

The week concluded perfectly with me removing, paring, trimming, and rasping Daisy, a lovely little cob driving pony, applying everything I had learned. Throughout the week, I often said, "Wow, you make that look so easy." Jason, among other farriers I've observed, really does. Despite being a horse owner myself and knowing how crucial good farriery is, it is easy to underappreciate the skill and craftsmanship it takes and the attention to detail. I have such respect for the talent, knowledge and understanding that farriers have.

Having reflected on the placement and all that I learned; I realised that farriers often see the horses they care for much more frequently than vets do. They observe these horses throughout the year, both when they are healthy and when they are not. This frequent contact provides farriers with invaluable insights into each horse's nuances and behaviours. In many cases, they will have a better understanding of the practicalities of different treatment options and are likely to be more aware of subtle changes in a horse's condition. This knowledge is extremely useful and can be crucial in bringing horses back to peak performance or aiding in their recovery.

Thanks to my placement with Jason and all that I learned in the week, I am now much more equipped to work alongside farriers. I look forward to utilizing their knowledge and expertise in the future. This placement has been an invaluable experience, significantly enhancing my practical skills and theoretical knowledge. I am deeply grateful to Jason Richardson for his mentorship and to the WCF for providing this opportunity. The skills and knowledge I gained will undoubtedly be instrumental in my future career as a veterinarian.