

## **"The Care & Feeding of Your Farrier"**

*By Vicki Schmidt*

After five years of travelling from Maine to Massachusetts to shoe show drafts the farrier finally said, "If you want me to keep shoeing your horses, you have to move to Maine". Believe it or not, within months the family from Massachusetts was established in a small western Maine community and only a few short miles from the farrier. Though not everyone can be this flexible, the proximity to quality farrier care is an important issue to conscientious horse owners.

National Farriers Week is sponsored by American Farriers Journal and is used as a time for farriers and horse owners to reflect on the profession and to work to improve relationships that benefit the lives and performance of our equine counterparts. Of all the factors impacting a great shoeing job, none is as important as the horse owner. Any farrier will tell you: the years of experience, clinics and workshops, watching horses move, and consulting with veterinarians, all work best in conjunction with horse owners who know the value of their horses feet.

If your farrier is anywhere near the national average for career farriers, he or she works on an average of 6 horses a day, 6 days a week. He or she is responsible for the feet of approximately 270 horses, most of which are trimmed or reset every 8 weeks. Of the 270 horses, 85% need only routine shoeing work in order to perform to their owner's demands. The other 15% require more effort, usually due to injury, faulty conformation, or neglect. One other little tidbit: only 5% of the horses your farrier shoes are considered "a joy to shoe".

This leads us horse owners to wonder. Are we part of the 5% or part of the 95%. Are we expecting our farrier to give top notch service, but not willing to do what it takes to be a top notch client? Answering the following questions will help determine if your horses are part of what makes your farrier look forward to your business.

- 1. Do I provide a comfortable, safe, and level workplace for my farrier?*
- 2. Is the area well lit in all seasons and out of harsh weather? (wind, rain, cold, hot sun, dust & mud)*
- 3. Is the area clear of equipment and kept free of kids and dogs while my farrier is working?*
- 4. Are my horses clean and their feet free from mud; at least on the day my farrier arrives?*
- 5. Do I make sure either myself or a responsible party is there to assist my farrier as needed?*
- 6. Are my horses fly sprayed, not only for the comfort of my horses but for the safety of my farrier? (stomping at flies not only loosens shoes, the action severely stresses hocks and other bones)*
- 7. Are my horses on a regular schedule and if not automatically scheduled do I give ample notice?*
- 8. Are my horses mannered & disciplined? If not, am I consistently working with them to make them better?*
- 9. Do I buy (or breed) problem horses and expect my farrier to solve their problems without extra compensation?*
- 10. Do I pay the farrier when services are rendered or as soon as I receive the bill?*

Career farriers are responsible, they've learned to think like a horse, they always do their best, and they continue to learn. They won't survive in the trade if they don't. In celebration of National Farriers Week take the time to see what you can do to improve the degree of service shared with your farrier. Maybe pick up the latest copy of the American Farriers Journal just to see how much there is to know and learn about the farrier trade. Balancing the hoof is certainly a basic, but there are always more research reports to read, information on horse locomotion and physiology to study, new products and techniques to consider, and business skills to implement.

The horse industry in the US is as strong as it is due in part to the dedication of the farriers that service our horses. No matter what our favorite equine activity, lets all help to make the farrier trade a successful, safe and enjoyable one.

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