

Farrier, Oh Farrier

Where For Art Thou, Farrier ?

In Saskatchewan, you'll hear that lonely cry quite often, as the equine community struggles with too few, and too over-worked hoof care professionals.

But, at a May 16th Clinic and Open House, hosted at USHU Farrier Supply near Saskatoon, a new Provincial Association – Prairie Farriers - was launched to improve this situation: as a valuable resource for those in need of services, and those desiring to improve their skills or start their business.

Prairie Farriers, together with Laurie Tonita of USHU (pronounced 'you shoe'), presented this clinic featuring 2007 Canadian National Champion Blacksmith, Adam Degenstein of Abbotsford, BC. Twenty keen men and women from Humbolt, North Battleford, Beechy, Hanley and the Saskatoon region spent the day pounding and shaping shoes hot off the forge, under Adam's experienced eye.

Degenstein has been on The Canadian Farrier's Team four different times, representing our country at numerous competitions around the world, including England – the birth place of blacksmithing. "Competition there is extremely tough," said Adam, "and Canada usually sits about middle of the pack."

Adam, originally from Shellbrook, Saskatchewan, was enthusiastic about the formation of a Provincial body here. "There is a definite need for this Association because communication is the key to success. Farriers need to talk to each other and work together to promote proper farrier skills so the animal they're working with can receive the benefit," he said. "Clients can also have confidence that their farriers, who are Association Members, are educating themselves," Adam commented.



In general, a farrier expects and deserves the client's respect. As a horse owner, if you are having a hard time finding a farrier – or if he won't return your calls – perhaps you should ask yourself a few basic questions: Do I have my horses caught and ready with clean feet, when the farrier arrives ? Do my horses stand quietly ? Do I provide some shelter from the elements for my farrier and his equipment, and a hard flat surface for the horse to stand on while work is being done ? And, do I sometimes question my farrier or nag him about "is that level" or "should you take more off here or there" ? Do I expect him to tolerate a badly behaving horse ? The farrier is a unique, magical kind of person, that tends to save most of their patience for the horse – but an un-cooperative horse or owner can cause the farrier to vanish into thin air.

Adam Degenstein explained that new farriers beginning their business can expect to run into distrust from horse owners. The standard first question is "So, how long have you been a farrier?" And some clients have read a little about the process or heard what worked well for a different horse in a similar situation. "But *a little information* can be a dangerous thing," Adam cautioned, "There are three schools in North America that teach good basics, and it takes at least two years of working with other farriers, after your course, to learn the craft. That's a considerable investment in time. You learn anatomy and how things work on the inside of the foot – instead of just hammering on shoes – and you develop an instinct of how to correct problems. The most satisfying experience is taking a lame horse through to soundness. Trust and respect your farrier as the professional he or she is, and they'll come back next time with a smile on their face."

The farrier's equipment is also a considerable investment, with anvils costing from \$500 to \$1500, and a forge from \$350 to \$1000. Degenstein estimated that, excluding the truck, set up costs would be approximately \$5000. "I make almost all of my own tools, and all of my own shoes," he remarked, "It takes me about 18 minutes to make 4 shoes, and I probably spend one third of my time doing exactly that." Adam works with about 50 different horses a week, in his BC practice, everything from jumpers to trail horses, minis to draft horses to mules (and the occasional cow, he admitted). "I do consult, via the phone or email (adamcjf@hotmail.com) with Vets, other farriers and horse owners," he added, "And there is another great positive for this new Association – because it will give contact information for everyone to find a particular product, piece of equipment, or advice."

Prairie Farrier's plans include developing an on-line list of all "known" Saskatchewan farriers and contact information at Laurie Tonita's website www.USHU.ca. They will also be organizing clinics and workshops in various parts of the province. (Proceeds from the May 16th Clinic were allocated to the 2009 Canadian Farriers Team to help them offset expenses.)

Todd Bailey and Norm Kohle, both busy farriers in the Saskatoon region, enjoyed Degenstein's clinic. "Norm and I have been covering the USA and Canada for years, attending clinics and workshops," said Todd, "and I am very excited about the formation of Prairie Farriers, as a way to bring support and encouragement to farriers across Saskatchewan and to bring world class clinicians here."



Laurie Tonita, Norm Kohle and Todd Bailey have years of experience in the field, yet all share a thirst for more information – taking them to events like the International Hoof Care Summit held in Cincinnati. "There are people from more than 17 different countries in attendance at that event," said Todd. "And we always tried to sit in the front row at the seminars," joked Laurie.

Todd explained, "Going to Farrier School is step number one. But, attending clinics, seminars and workshops are what keep you excited and motivated, and always give you new ideas. This is better for the horse, ultimately. Sharing experiences with other farriers on time saving tips and ways to help the horse by making it easier for the horse – these are learned by open channels of communication. I've been working as a farrier for 19 years, and have studied under some top farriers, but it is

rejuvenating to attend a good clinic. Prairie Farriers will help horse owners in this province, by raising the standard of work available here." Norm Kohle agreed, "It's all about continuing education - for those practicing the trade as well as for horse owners, so they can better recognize quality work. I'd like to thank Russell Back of Humboldt, and everyone who has helped launch Prairie Farriers. Stay tuned for more clinics!"

No hoof – no horse, they say. The foundation of everything we do with horses starts with their feet. If they can't comfortably walk, they obviously cannot do any of the millions of things we ask them to do. Prairie Farriers hopes to promote a better understanding between farriers and horse owners, to provide a resource for information no matter what part of the province you are from, to improve educational opportunities for our current farriers and encourage newcomers – all for the benefit of the horses in Saskatchewan.

For further information, visit the website at www.USHU.ca

or contact the following:

Laurie Tonita: ltonita@sasktel.net or phone 306-242-2678

Todd Bailey: todshurite@hotmail.com or phone 306-668-1967

Norm Kohle: phone 306-329-4654



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"People say there is nothing new about farriering," remarked this Champion, "but there is *always* 'perfecting the basics'. There are constantly new improved products being developed, which your farrier will know about first."

Adam spoke about the clinic situation as his way to help farriers become more efficient. "The farrier's most important tool is his or her body," stated Degenstein "A shiny truck or a new hammer has no comparison to a healthy body. Unruly horses will cause the farrier to break down rapidly and will cause him to ignore your in-coming calls," he smiled.

