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**FINDING A FARRIER**

# FINDING A FARRIER



By Dr Louise Cosgrove

## Introduction

**Farriers can either make or break your horse. There is a saying - “No hoof, no horse” - and this is definitely true.**

If your horse has terrible feet or is unbalanced, it can make riding almost impossible. If your horse is not sound, they will resent being ridden and, if the lameness is severe enough, they will not want to move to graze or drink, and can start to lose weight.

If the lameness is mild and goes undetected, your horse can compensate and develop other issues, like over-developed muscles or muscle wastage in certain areas.

The horse has a large amount of weight on four pegs. At the end of these pegs are relatively little bones encapsulated in a bowl-like structure called the hoof, and they need to have the right amount of toe and heel length to be able to carry the weight, as well as side-to-side balance to keep these bones level and happy.

A horse should not be lame after a farrier has attended! We often go out to horses that are lame, where the farrier has just been and the owner explains the farrier said that was normal. If you have had their feet done regularly and the farrier is not correcting any issues, your horse should not be lame. Often, the lameness corrects itself after several days due to the toe growing, but the down time is often frustrating.

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## Choosing a Good Farrier from a Bad One

Before you get a farrier to your horse, you need to be sure they know what they're doing. It is too late once they have worked on your horse's feet to know they are no good- the damage is done then and you have to wait for the hoof to grow or for someone else to correct the poor farrier work.

These are some pointers to help you decide who to get to work on your horse's feet.

### 1. Qualifications

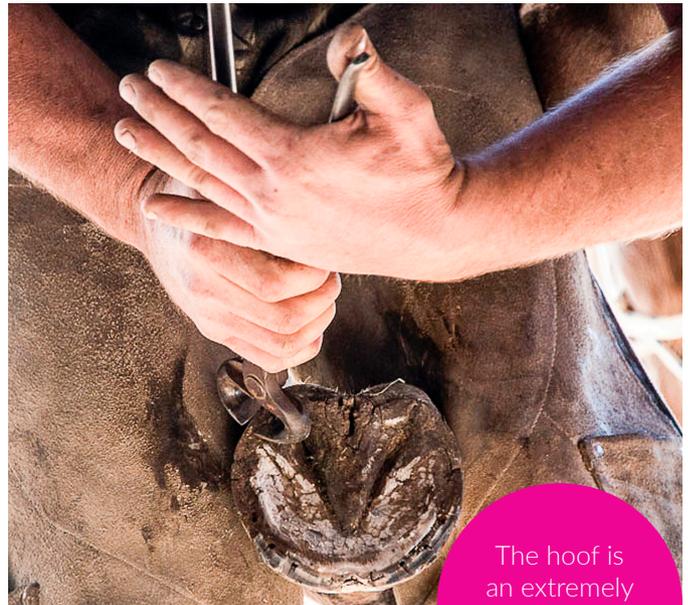
The first thing is their qualifications. However, in saying, that I have seen 'qualified' farriers who were hopeless. The national qualification is through the Master Farrier Association and most states have a list of qualified farriers.

The thing you can guarantee with members of the Association is they have a solid knowledge of anatomy of the hoof and lower limb, and the biomechanics of motion in the horse.

There are many people running farrier courses throughout the country and some are two-day courses! The hoof is an extremely complex body part, and a basic knowledge of angles and levels is really important.

### 2. Experience

Experience is also very important as the more cases they have seen, the more experience they will have. It is not something you want them to be doing on the weekends. The more experience they have, the better their skillsets are. Reading about how to put on heart bars is very different to actually setting them yourself.



The hoof is an extremely complex body part.

### 3. Word of Mouth

This, I find, is the best way to locate a good farrier. People are always happy to tell you who they use for their horse's feet. The only problem I find with this is, if you have a high-level competition horse that needs rocker shoes with a heel wedge, don't ask the neighbour if they have a lawn mower that gets their feet done every six months because they are starting to chip away.

The farrier that can trim a Miniature's feet is not necessarily able to do complex corrective work. The same as some farriers who just trim feet and can't set shoes. If your farrier is making your horse's hoof fit the shoe, this is not good. The shoe needs to fit the horse's foot.

There is a lot more skill in fitting a shoe than trimming a foot to fit a shoe. In saying this though, not all horses have to have shoes. It depends on what you're using your horse for and on what surface they are working on as to whether you put shoes on.

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Another thing to remember is a farrier works on feet... So, be careful with a diagnosis your farrier gives you if it is to do with teeth, injuries or conditions your horse may have.

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## 4. Ask for References

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If you do compete with your horse or your horse has conformational issues, it is important for them to be sound. There is nothing worse than getting the farrier out and your horse is lame for two weeks after. Be comfortable to ask for people they have worked with, or if they have experience applying shoes or doing corrective work. Often the way they answer this question tells you everything.

If a farrier is cheap, this does not make them a good farrier.

## 5. Cost is Not a Good Reason

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If the farrier is cheap, this does not make them a good farrier. But, it doesn't necessarily make them a bad farrier either. The opposite also applies. When a farrier is expensive, it doesn't necessarily make them a good farrier. Another thing to remember is a farrier works on feet; unless they have also studied horse's teeth and dentition, they are not dentists or chiropractors - or veterinarians, for that matter.

So, be careful with a diagnosis your farrier gives you if it is to do with teeth, injuries or conditions your horse may have.



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## Being a Good Client

On the other side of the equation, certain things farriers look for in a good client are:

- > Make sure your horse is used to being handled and having their feet picked up.
- > Bring your horse in, dry off his legs and pick out his feet. Take off his turnout rug if it is wet.
- > Make sure he is tied up on a hard surface in an area with plenty of shade, but well-lit.
- > Stay with your horse while he's being worked on, just in case anything goes wrong.
- > Book your next appointment so you know when your farrier is coming next. Farriers hate nothing more than someone ringing and expecting them to come out that day or the next day!

Farriers can make owning a horse the most pleasurable experience.

## Conclusion

Farriers are amazing professionals and worth their weight in gold. It is a job I would not want to do if you paid me. It is hard work and, often, they have to deal with horses that won't stand still or cooperate.

Every farrier may encounter bad days, but make sure your farrier has more good days than bad. Remember to have a look at your horse's feet, and understand the importance of balancing a foot and the stress that can be placed on the bones in the hoof if your farrier is not getting this right.

Farriers, like veterinarians, are an important relationship to have if you are a horse owner. They can make owning a horse the most pleasurable experience, so choose wisely!

