

JEFF NEWNHAM FARRIERY SERVICES

Interview with Peter Biddlecombe from www.HorseyTalk.net

In 20 - 30 years time most horses will be going barefoot. Who says so? A farrier. But not an ordinary farrier. For Jeff Newnham is a farrier, who is proud to boast that he takes "a holistic approach to Farriery"

"Over the next few years," he forecasts the emphasis will shift from, "How can I shoe this horse?" To "can this horse go barefoot?"

That's not all.

He also forecasts that

- The decline in the number of people riding/hacking will continue.
- Hacking will become another organized event
- Every stable will be built with a ménage
- More and more stables will have their own indoor school.

The future, he maintains, will be "working with horses rather than forcing them to do something against their natural being."

But even though he forecasts less shoeing of horses, he foresees a bigger, and more important role for farriers as the demands for performance from the horse increases.

"The level of care for horses will increase," he says. "Horses will need farriers to look after them. There will still be horses that need shoeing. Horses that don't need shoeing will still need their hoofs treated. Everything will become more scientific and more holistic. The farrier will continue to be in the forefront of the horse healthcare programme."

In the last 25 years he has seen the "useful" working life of the horse increase by 50%, if you were still riding or competing your horse in its late teens, you were doing well, now that age is nearer 30 years. He puts this down to 4 main things: better nutrition, better parasite control, better dentistry and better farriery. He added that veterinary intervention although better diagnostic equipment has produced a better understanding of lamenesses, the treatment is still pretty similar to that of 25 years ago : either box rest or field rest with basic drug use to control the discomfort.

It's well worthwhile listening to what Jeff Newnham says. For when he speaks people around the world listen. Based in Bexhill, East Sussex, he has an international following. He is well-known as a lecturer, presenter of DVD's and speaker at specialist conferences both here and abroad. He has worked extensively throughout the United States. With clients in Holland, Germany and Romania he has also worked closely with the American Eventing team for over 20 years.

Jeff's ambition, however, was not to be a farrier but a zoologist.

"When I was a kid I used to watch this television programme, Daktari, (Swahili for Doctor) based in Nairobi all about animals. This interest in animals continues to this day, but it was not until, he says, "I was in my teens that I started riding at our local riding school just outside Canterbury. My secondary school had an arrangement with the local riding school. Instead of taking part in the usual football/cricket, I used to go riding. "

He was 17 when he decided he wanted to become a farrier.

"Throwaway lines can change your life," he says. "A lady at the stables said to me one day, ever thought of becoming a farrier? I'd never thought about it until then. I then checked it out. I investigated it. I ended up working as an apprentice for 4 - 5 years at Wittersham Forge, just outside Rye.

"When I qualified I was all set to go to Denmark to work but one of the lecturers at college gave me the name of a farrier in America and told me to give the guy a call. I called him. He offered me a job. I sold my car, a cheap, old Ford Escort, bought my ticket and off I went."

For the next 2 years he worked first in New Hampshire alongside one of Americas leading farriers' of Morgan, Saddlebacks and Quarter horses and then Pennsylvania working with Steve Teichman who has been the Farrier for the USET for the last 4 Olympics who, without doubt is one of the finest farriers in the world. Jeff says being a good farrier is simple, "just find a good farrier and copy what they do" the problem, he goes on to say "is that "when you are learning, you simply do not know enough

to recognise what is good and what is not" and if ,when you have newly qualified, you start up in business immediately the only influence you would have had id the one person you worked for" Jeff then goes on to say " by travelling and working with many farriers you can have a thousand experiences if you don't, you just have the same experience a thousand times"

The availability of the internet and e mail has enabled Jeff to continue to work closely with Steve Teichman, a friendship that has lasted over 25 years,.

"We still keep very much in touch," he says. "I often send him pictures of broken, badly damaged hoofs and he sends me pictures of broken, badly damaged hoofs."

If you look at Jeff Newnham's web site, www.jnfs.co.uk, you will see how unselfishly he continues to share his knowledge with other farriers and horse owners around the world.

In 1987 Jeff returned home to Hawkhurst, Kent and set up his own business, Jeff Newnham Farrier Services. From day one he was in business.

"At first I had horses people had given up on. I had problem horses. I had horses other farriers didn't want. But I had benefitted from my US experience, I had worked with good people. At first I had watched and copied other people's methods, strategies and principles. Then gradually I developed my own methods, strategies and principles. I was more than able to cope."

Today J.N.F.S. is recognised as one of the leading farriers in the country.

It is also recognised for its holistic approach to horse care.

"The first question I ask is, Can this horse go barefoot? If it can then it should go barefoot. If it cant then we should use off-the-shelf boots. If that's not possible we should then ask, Can this horse be shod for only part of the year rather than the whole year? If we decide that it has to be shod then what is the best way of shoeing the horse. For me I believe the best way of shoeing a horse is glueing the shoes on.

"It's a whole question of philosophy. The best feet are on shoeless horses. Even racehorses today are racing shoeless. The feet are natural. They are tougher. Dont forget every time you shoe a horse you weaken its hooves. No shoeing. No weakening. No wrecked hoofs. Some horses, of course, have to be shod, eventers, for instance, need additional traction and shoes enable the use of studs. But I think the policy now is becoming, Shoe if you have to. If not, dont "

While Jeff is concerned about horses, he is also concerned about farriers.

"It is shocking the way some people expect farriers to work," he says. "Riders have a duty to present their horses to their farrier in the best possible conditions. In the best possible facilities. They should also make cartain everything is as safe as possible. You cant change the wheels on a moving car. Similarly you cant shoe a horse if the conditions are not right."

Nobody can say that whether it's on behalf of horses or farriers - Jeff Newnham is not frightened to put the boot in.