

How To Become a Farrier

Whether you're interested in actually learning the farriery trade, or simply just looking into the details of how this interesting profession works, the information on this page will serve to advance the discussion of how to properly prepare oneself to become a farrier.

As a full-time second generation farrier I have a unique insight into the industry and encounter this question on a regular basis. If you are truly interested in becoming a farrier, weigh the pros and cons and make sure you know what you are getting into. I've listed some of my thoughts and further resources regarding the farrier trade.

Farriery Introduction: You REALLY Love Horses Right?
This job requires some extreme patience and persistence

How to become a farrier is a question that many people engulfed in the horse world come to at some point. Watching the blacksmith forge the horses shoes, shaping and nailing them into place can be an engaging experience. There are many reasons to become a farrier, yet many circumstances that WILL inevitably arise that are perhaps a drawback.

A farrier realizes at all times that danger is nearby. Even if the situation appears completely calm - you are working on another persons animal, and even the most friendly horse CAN be spooked.

It is one thing to work around horses, it's another thing to work under a horse. Keep in mind that there will be lots of horses kicking and biting at you.

The physical demands are enormous. The saying goes that 4 hours of farriery is equal to 8 hours of a heavy construction job. If you have ever picked up a horses hoof that is not cooperating and attempted to hold it there for more than a few seconds, you have glimpsed how hard this job could be. Of course proper handling and setup is part of any good farriers work concept.

Hard work is not the only thing a farrier must be concerned with - the actual theoretical body of work that a

farrier must digest and experience to become fluent is truly enormous. The UK has a standard that North America does not hold to - enforcing standards of education and apprenticeship.

Unfortunately the US and Canada have been very lax in realizing the important role the Farrier plays in every domesticated horses life. As of this point, anyone can claim to be a competent farrier. Word of mouth is truly the determining factor of most North American Farriers careers - if you do good work people will notice, if you don't do good work, even more people will notice, not to mention the poor horse!

In short, if you are looking into how to become a farrier - keep in mind that you should really have a natural interest and ability with a horse before you decide to go at it full force. A tip would be to ask one of the local farriers in your area to take you out for a day or two, allowing you to do some of the basics to help out. This will give you a slight feel for how an average day may go for you as a farrier.

Study and Experience: Preparing for the Farriers Work Field
Forward Thinking Farriers Constantly Update Their Knowledge

A farriers job is very complicated. With all the theories and varying viewpoints on every single issue to do with trimming or shoeing a horse, it's important to note that reading all the books and watching all the videos in the world will not truly prepare a person for the farriers work field.

On the other hand, without constant self appraisal through critical reasoning, the farrier trade would not be what it is today. Scientific studies of this past century have provided enormous advances resulting in a huge body of work for potential farriers to study. Preparing yourself through study of horse anatomy, the methods for trimming, making, molding, shaping horseshoes, how to properly apply a horseshoe and the handling methods involved during the process is a very important factor for becoming a farrier.

Apprenticeship is a fantastic way to offset the theoretical training with on-job experience. Seeing the results of applying a particular shoeing package to a horse that was lame and now is not, can be a very rewarding and informative experience. To find a competent farrier in your area (for us North Americans) that is accepting apprentices, it is often advisable to go to the nearest "Farrier's Supply" store (yes, there is such a thing!) and ask to put up an ad offering to apprentice.

IMPORTANT:
There are CONSTANT updates on the leading edge of farriery to do with treatment and application for various conditions of a horses movement and hoof condition. The internet has brought this information closer to becoming accessible to all farriers no matter what their location.

The Basic Farriers Tool Kit General Guide for New Farriers

Every farrier has their own tool preference. For basic farriery, there are a few tools that you will need to start with. Listed here are those basic tools, and the uses that you will get from them.

- Anvil - All farrier's will need an anvil to mold horseshoes into the proper shape and style needed. Each horse hoof is different and as such, every shoe will need to be custom fit by shaping it on the anvil.

- Farrier Knife - This is one of the three main tools you will need when trimming a horse. Used to cut out excess sole and frog.

- Hoof Nippers
 - Used to cut the hoof wall down to the correct length. When used by an expert farrier, the viewer may notice that the farrier uses the nippers to cut off any overly excessive sole and hoof areas that reduce the need for extra rasping.

- Farrier's Rasp
 - Multi-purposed, the rasp will both finish a trim by rasping off any extra hoof and rounding up the edges or finish a shoeing job by rasping down nails and wall as needed.

- Farrier's Nailing Hammer
 - This is the little hammer that you see a farrier punching nails through the horses hoof to keep the shoe on with. The one side has a small head to drive the nails, while the other side has two protruding claws that allow the "wringing off" of the nail when it comes out the side of the horses' hoof.

- Farrier's Nail Clinchers
 - These are used to fold over the nail to ensure that the horseshoe stays on the horse. Clinching is a very important step and one of the details of finishing a horseshoeing job that can really add stability and shine. Clinchers come in two different kinds one with a short ball-like head, and the other with an "alligator like" head - personal preference will determine which one you use.

- Horseshoe Nails
 - Of course we need nails to nail the shoe on! Horseshoe nails come in many different lengths and head sizes made by many different manufacturers.

- Farrier's Clinching(Nailing) Block
 - This is usually just a small piece of metal with an angled edge. The block is used to put underneath the wrung off nail when "setting" the nails before clinching.

- Farrier's Forge
 - Forgework is part of every successful farriers repertoire. The need to custom make or fit a horseshoe for a specific horse in a specific

situation will arise. This can be made smooth if the farrier is skilled at working out of the forge. Nowadays the selection of "keg" shoes or "Store-Bought" horse shoes is enormous. As such, the necessity of making a shoe from scratch has been reduced, but the ability to really custom fit a particular horses needs is obviously increased with skill at the forge.

- Farrier's Hoof Stand

- This is an issue that every farrier will need to get comfortable with in their own way. Usually how you are taught when you apprentice is how you will follow. Every farrier has a personal preference on what kind of stand to use and what situations to use the stand in. Commonly a hoof stand is used for finishing a nailing job, or easing the strain of lifting an injured leg.

- Horseshoe Pullers - These look like Hoof Nippers, yet bigger. They're used, as the name implies, to pull off a horses shoe when necessary. A farrier uses these whenever resetting or removing a horses shoes.

- Horseshoes! - Of course you'll need to stock horseshoes in order to be a farrier. There are many sizes, styles, and types of horseshoes ranging from steel to aluminum to plastic - the farrier will have his own individual tastes as to manufacturer and specific shoe type per horse.

- Blacksmith Hammers - Used to make and shape horseshoes, a blacksmiths hammer choice is one of both practicality and personal preference.

- Farriers Apron - After the first few times of not wearing an apron(or "chaps" as some prefer to call them) the novice farrier will realize that the Apron is a necessity. Guarding from knife strokes and rasping is only one of the bonuses of wearing a farriers apron.

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Further Reading on Farriers and Horseshoeing