

You're a what?

FARRIER

by Olivia Crosby

Some of the world's largest athletes rely on the work of Paul Goodness. Paul is a farrier, a worker who makes and fits shoes for horses.

Average horses, horses with foot problems, and equine Olympians have all worn his handiwork.



Paul Goodness heats shoes and then nails them to the horse's hooves.

As a farrier, Paul trims horses' hooves, prepares shoes, and nails those shoes to the hoof. Hooves, like human fingernails, grow continuously. They have to be trimmed, evened, and re-covered every 6 to 8 weeks. The shoes Paul uses protect the hoof and keep it from wearing away too quickly. They also provide proper traction and, when specially designed, alleviate foot and leg problems.

Paul begins his work with a horse by observing its gait. He determines if the horse is comfortable by watching how it distributes its weight when moving. "An important part of being a good farrier," he says, "is knowing what's normal motion for a horse and what's not."

After becoming familiar with the horse, Paul lifts its foot and carefully trims the hoof using a hoof knife and file. He maintains the hoof's natural shape during trimming. A hoof that is ragged, too long, or shorter than the others will interfere with the horse's balance.

Following the trimming, Paul measures the hoof and either shapes a shoe or selects a ready-made shoe from his stock. "It used to be that ready-made shoes only came in three sizes: Small, medium, and large," says Paul. "Now, these shoes are available in almost every size and style." Shoes of varying weights and sizes are sold with or without prepunched nail holes.

The variety of horseshoes available means fewer shoes today are custom made. But knowing how to make a complete shoe is still important when working with some horses' hoof

problems. Competition horses, like all athletes, need shoes tailored for their body and their event. "Horses have wear and tear like other athletes," says Paul, "and shoes can help." With racehorses, for example, Paul uses lightweight materials such as aluminum, titanium, and plastic in their shoes rather than the standard steel; for a competitor with a strained muscle, he might use a shoe that helps the horse to balance better.

To make a custom shoe, Paul heats a piece of metal in his forge until it becomes flexible, places the metal on an anvil, and beats it with a large hammer. He curves the metal to fit the dimensions of the hoof and then punches nail holes.

Whether made from scratch or taken from inventory, every shoe Paul nails to a hoof is heated first. Heating creates a tighter fit for nailing, a process that requires careful precision to avoid hitting the edge and the fleshy part of the hoof. After nailing, Paul files the shod hoof and makes certain the horse moves with comfortable stability.

Farriers often travel extensively in their work. Paul shoes competitive show horses at events throughout the United States and Europe, sometimes traveling on short notice. Once, he flew to Kentucky the night before a show to reshoe a horse. The job was complicated, but he and another farrier worked until 2 a.m. to finish it. Their long hours were rewarded: The horse not only made it through the show with its shoes on, but it won the event.

Most shoeing jobs don't require much specialized care. But sometimes

Olivia Crosby is a contributing editor to the *OOQ*, (202) 606-5716.



Making custom horseshoes still requires use of a forge, a hammer, and an anvil.

horses have a cracked hoof, punctured foot, or slight infection. Farriers use antibiotic creams, shock absorbing pads, or some other form of protection to help these horses heal.

Experienced farriers like Paul often work with veterinarians to solve more serious foot problems. Each week, Paul visits equine patients in a veterinary hospital. There, he helps treat injured horses by creating prosthetics, cast-like shoes for broken feet, or any other device that allows an injured horse to continue competing or to stand and walk comfortably.

Farriery is strenuous work. Farriers often lift and hold a horse's hoof for 15 minutes at a time—no small feat, considering that large horses often weigh at least 1,200 pounds. In part

because of the physical demands of the job, most farriers are men. But the last decade has seen an increase in the number of women joining the shoeing ranks. According to unofficial estimates from the American Farrier's Association, 10 percent of today's farriers are women.

For both men and women farriers, experience lessens the physical demands. "When I see beginning farriers shoeing a horse, they're really struggling," says Paul. "But soon they learn to cooperate with the horse so it carries its own weight."

Over 90 percent of farriers are self-employed, with many working part time while maintaining separate careers. In 1997, full-time farriers earned an average of \$55,723 and

part-timers averaged \$19,148, according to a survey by *The American Farrier's Journal*. But business expenses, such as insurance and supplies, were not deducted from those totals; farriers' take-home pay was lower.

Earnings vary widely by region, sometimes for reasons as simple as supply and demand. "If you're the only farrier within 100 miles, you'll have a lot of business," says Paul. Training, experience, and formal credentials also affect earnings. The American Farrier's Association in Lexington, Kentucky, has information on farrier schools, apprenticeships, and certification.

Paul's interest in horseshoeing began at an early age. He grew up around his family's horses and watched intently when the farrier would come to work. At age 15, he started to think about a career as a farrier. He attended a farrier school after graduating from high school. The program he chose lasted 6 months and introduced him to the basics of horse handling, anatomy, forge work, and hoof pathology.

After farrier school, Paul apprenticed with an expert farrier. This practical experience was essential. "You need experience to develop the art and craft of shoeing," he says. "My advice to students is to find and work with an expert farrier. That is really the only way to learn. The longer you study, the better you'll be."

Following his apprenticeship and one year of independent shoeing, Paul enrolled in a shoeing program at the University of Pennsylvania Veterinary School to learn more about anatomy and specialty work. That added knowledge enabled him to begin the more complicated shoeing he performs today.

Paul has seen his patients grow from foals to champions to the happily retired. "I'm very lucky," he says. "I make horses comfortable all day, every day. It's very rewarding. I've been shoeing for 25 years, and I wouldn't want to do anything else."

