

Becoming a Farrier

Nathan Powell

Many people who grow up riding horses want to find ways to stay in the industry in order to mix work with passion. Becoming a farrier is a great way to do just that. Nathan Powell is a renowned and accomplished farrier based in Southern Alberta; he is a five-time Canadian team member for the international farrier team championships in England, four-time Canadian Champion, and is particularly interested in working on sport horses. ABSJ caught up with Nathan to learn about his path with his trade and his love of horses.

ABSJ: Being a farrier is a very old craft, is it something that has been passed on to you, or was it something that you discovered on your own?

Nathan Powell (NP): It's a very old craft... apparently the second oldest! My dad was shoeing horses until I was 12. I must have liked it, as I went on to farrier school at 18.

ABSJ: How much schooling did you have to go through to become a farrier?

NP: I attended Olds College for their one-year program, which included a 400-hour apprenticeship that I filled with long time Calgary farrier Ron Tucker. Further education came from more apprenticeship, attending clinics and traveling to farrier competitions internationally.

ABSJ: How does the quality of farrier work affect the sport of Show jumping?

NP: I feel that the quality of farrier work has a large effect in show jumping. It can change many of the functions of the horse's body for a higher performance level. Joint alignment in the lower limb can potentially reduce times between necessary maintenance. Adequate traction can also affect soundness and performance.

ABSJ: How often do horses need new shoes or care? How does this vary with sport horses compared to pleasure horses?

NP: Care intervals depend on the horse: it can vary from 3 to 8 weeks. A healthy functioning foot will grow from the hair to the ground in 1 year. An unhealthy foot, whether it is due to poor farrier work or an unhealthy horse, will not grow enough foot to have strong feet. For show, work or pleasure, the care intervals will depend on the horse, its activities, and its living environment.

ABSJ: Do you work as a team along with other health care providers and trainers to assess any lameness or issue?

NP: Working with the other people involved with the horse is key to doing a proper job. It has taken years for me to be able to shelve my ego and learn how to collect information. As a farrier you generally only see the horse every 6 weeks. Grooms, riders,

body workers, saddle fitters, barn staff and veterinarians all have information that is potentially useful in better understanding what and how the horse lives between farrier visits.

ABSJ: Is it a very physically demanding job?

NP: Yes it is a physically demanding job. Many factors play into it becoming that – work environment, client relationship and horse behavior. It is important to have

a safe, clean, well-lit place to work, preferably with a hard floor. I don't expect the best working conditions on farms, just the best that is possible. Having clients where trust is shared and communication is open allows the farrier to relax and be able to concentrate on the shoeing, making it more enjoyable and therefore much less tiring.

ABSJ: Are there different techniques or new technologies you use?

NP: New ideas and techniques are important to keep up with in this day and age with the technology that we enjoy. That being said, it is sometimes very difficult to separate the trends and fads from the evolution of the craft itself!

ABSJ: Do you attend shows to help with maintenance? Or is it all done before the shows begin?

NP: In my own business I much prefer to perform work at home barns, as often the working conditions are better and safer and the horse is familiar with the surroundings. It is helpful to go and watch some of the horses showing in order to have a good understanding of what is the goal and end result of everyone's efforts.

