

How to find a hoofcare provider

Whether you want to have your horse shod or keep him barefoot, who is the right person for the job? Charlotte Ricca-Smith investigates



Farriers in the UK have been trained and regulated since 1356

Have you ever wondered what the initials after your farrier's name stand for? Those letters (see panel, below) represent years of hard work and training, and without them they wouldn't legally be allowed to shoe your horse.

They are also what make British farriers among the most respected in the world.

These high standards were first established back in 1356, thanks to a forward-thinking London mayor who recognised the importance of a well-shod horse, and set up the Worshipful Company of Farriers (WCF).

"His mission was to deal with those who kept forges and meddled with practices which they didn't understand, to the greater detriment of the horse," explains Charlotte Clifford, WCF clerk.

"The Mayor summoned all the farriers of the City, and chose two of them to govern the trade."

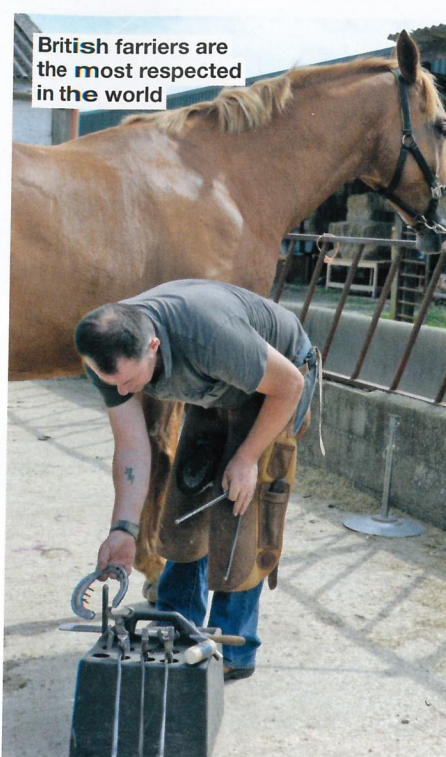
It wasn't until 1890 that the Company set up a Registration Committee, aimed at reducing the number of unskilled farriers working.

Shortly after, they introduced exams. The first was held in 1891 and is the equivalent of the qualification known today as the Diploma of the Worshipful Company of Farriers.

Two higher levels of examination were later introduced – the Associateship in 1907 and the Fellowship in 1923.

Controlling the trade

"However, registration was voluntary," says Charlotte. "So the WCF held a referendum, which showed that the vast majority of



practising farriers were in favour of better control of the trade.

"A working party prepared a draft Bill to go before Parliament, and it finally became law on 22 May 1975."

The Farriers (Registration) Act 1975 ensures all farriers in England, Wales and Scotland are officially registered. It also aims to:

- Prevent suffering by cruelty to horses arising from the shoeing by unskilled persons;
- Promote training;

Farriery qualifications

Diploma of the WCF (DipWCF)

Candidates must be able to make and fit a set of shoes. They also need a good knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the hooves and lower limb, and common causes of lameness.

Associateship of the WCF (AWCF)

Formerly known as the AFCL (Associates of the Farriers Company of London) this exam is taken by those who hold the Diploma and focuses on therapeutic and remedial farriery. Candidates must have a more detailed knowledge of the structure and function of the legs, causes of lameness and specialist shoes.

Fellowship of the WCF (FWCF)

The Fellowship demonstrates the highest level of technical competence. To achieve this level

- Provide a register of qualified farriers;
- Prohibit the shoeing of horses by unqualified persons.

To qualify for registration, farriers have to complete a four-year apprenticeship and then pass an exam, set by the WCF.

The training consists of two parts: on-the-job training with an Approved Training Farrier (ATF), and around 23 weeks training at a college.

Successful candidates are awarded the Diploma of the Worshipful Company of Farriers, which is what the letters DipWCF after a farrier's name stand for. Further training is encouraged, which leads to higher qualification and new letters.

Whether yours is a DipWCF or a FWCF – the highest level of farriery awarded – you can be sure they have years of training and experience.

"Qualifications are important, but even the basic certificate takes at least four years to complete," says farrier Wayne Upton AWCF.

"When finding a farrier, word of mouth is essential. You should also ask them how many Continual Professional Development (CPD) points they got last year.

"This is a system put in place for professionals – including doctors, lawyers and vets – to continue learning while they're working. It's not mandatory for farriers yet, but is widely encouraged by the WCF."

Barefoot trimming

Things aren't quite so clear cut if your horse is barefoot, as any layperson can trim his feet – qualified or not. ▶

farriers must be able to present their knowledge to an audience in a lecture or paper form.

Master Farrier

WCF registered the title 'Master Farrier' in 2010 as the term was being misused by those without enough experience and/or qualifications.

Farriers have to apply for the name and must hold either the Associateship or Fellowship. Applications have to be signed by an equine vet and a Fellow.

In addition to the above, practising farriers can take a Foundation Degree in Farriery (FdSc), which provides an entry route for the AWCF exam. They can then go on to take an Honours Degree in Farriery (BSc Hons), if they want to get their Fellowship.



Horse sense Hoof care

The Farriers (Registration) Act 1975, defines farriery as “any work in connection with the preparation or treatment of the foot of a horse for the immediate reception of a shoe.”

This means that trimming alone is not covered by the Act and therefore not regulated.

“Currently anyone can set themselves up as a barefoot trimmer, potentially without holding any qualification or having relevant experience,” says equine podiatrist Jayne Hunt.

“This poses a number of welfare risks, ranging from lamming the horse by over-trimming, to wrongly advising the owner about what work the horse is capable of, which could then damage his feet.”

Jayne is trying to change this, however. She trained to become an equine podiatrist (EP) at the Institute of Applied Equine Podiatry (AEP) in Florida, which was set up by former farrier KC La Pierre. Jayne and fellow trimmers decided to set up a similar association over here.

“We were concerned by the lack of regulation of non-farrier hoofcare professionals,” explains Jayne. “Because the profession was so new, no legislation was in place to guarantee the standard of work of the practitioners.”

“With this in mind, we launched the Equine Podiatry Association (UK), to regulate and support qualified EPs working in the UK.”

The Equine Podiatry Association (EPA) was also a driving force behind Lantra’s National Occupational Standard in Equine Barefoot Care, which was published in 2010.

Gold standard

Jayne’s mission is to develop a nationally recognised qualification that is the ‘gold standard’ in non-farriery based hoofcare. This is why she then set up Equine Podiatry Training, with her colleague Richard Vials.

The company runs a two-year course, designed to meet the National Occupational Standard.

It includes seven weeks of classroom work, 200 hours of guided self-study, time spent shadowing a qualified practitioner, and a set of mentored case studies – totalling over 600 hours of study.



The Equine Podiatry Association (UK) aims to regulate trimmers



Trimming hooves is not protected by the Farriery Act 1975

“Teachers on this course are a mixture of experienced, practising EPs and some of the most acclaimed researchers and equine professionals in the world,” says Jayne.

“The course is tough, and requires a high level of commitment, but the students who qualify have a standard of education which is unparalleled in the field.”

Vikki Fear is a graduate of Equine Podiatry Training’s course and holds its Diploma in Equine Podiatry.

“The course is fascinating and teaches about the hoof and how it works and is affected by environmental influences, including trimming, diet and exercise,” she says. “As a member of the EPA (UK) I am required to undertake 40 hours of continuing professional development per year.”

However, Vikki doesn’t believe equine podiatry is the only route for barefoot horses.

“Every farrier is taught to trim the hoof before they put a shoe on, so if your horse is sound and you’re happy, stick with him,” she states.

“We simply offer an alternative. Often people come to us as a last resort if they’ve had on-going lameness problems.

“Whoever you use, make sure they have had some kind of formal training course, or lots of experience, with good references.” ■

Contacts

- www.epauk.org
- www.equinepodiatrytraining.co.uk
- www.wcf.org.uk
- www.farrier-reg.gov.uk

The vet’s view



Imogen Burrows from Cliffe Equine in East Sussex gives her thoughts on who is best equipped to care for your horse’s hooves.

“My approach on foot care is to stick with farriers listed on the Worshipful Company of Farriers website,” she says.

“There is a current trend to employ a more ‘natural’ approach to foot care and involve barefoot trimmers or equine podiatrists. But we need to bear in mind that the vast majority of horses are far removed from a ‘natural’ lifestyle.

“However, when shoeing or trimming feet, one approach does not fit all, and each horse must be treated according to their needs.

“Even within the individual equine, each foot must be assessed, both independently and in association with the attached limb and other feet. You also need to consider age, weight, breed, workload and environmental management.

“I am not insinuating that podiatrists do not have knowledge – but I personally believe there is currently no substitute for a well trained, experienced farrier in the first instance.”