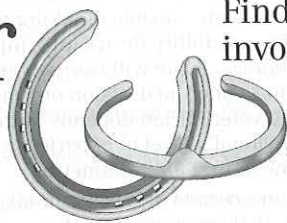


Looking for Mr. Right



Finding a farrier can involve frustrations, emotions, conflicts and longings usually associated with the dating game.

By Eliza McGraw

We sit by the phone, waiting for them to call. We plan entire days around meeting them. We hunt them down, spinning a wide and sticky web of mobile phone and barn aisle messages. Why do horse owners behave so desperately? Have we all been simultaneously affected by some extreme runaway crush?

No, some days just hinge on finding the farrier. Owning horses means involvement with a whole host of equine professionals, from trainers and large-animal veterinarians to feed salespeople and barn managers. But one of the most important relationships you'll develop is with the person who shoes your horse.

Whether called in because of a lost shoe, lameness or some combination of the two, the farrier will determine how to make the horse rideable. Although those I spoke with for the article "Learning Farrier Lingo" (page 52) argued to the contrary, I believe they can be miracle workers, getting horses back under saddle when riders and trainers are ready to abandon hope.

For many of us, the farrier is one of the first people called when a new horse has been purchased: We want the new member of the family out of old shoes and into our own farrier's care as soon as possible. Until then, the horse won't seem quite

settled. And awkward situations can develop when your farrier goes out of town. It seems that's always when a horse throws a shoe, which means you need to call another farrier. This substitute shoer may be perfectly obliging—"just this one time"—but it always seems wrong, somehow.

When I interviewed farriers for my article, I found their approaches to be very different. This didn't surprise me: Over the years I have talked to quite a few farriers, all of whom had their own way of dealing with my paddling, downhill Quarter Horse gelding Romeo. When I bought Romeo, he was 3 years old and overdue to be shod. He had been a backyard pet, and his toes were long and shelly. We lived in Tennessee back then, and Steve, my farrier at the time, patiently got Romeo's feet in shape. My gelding wore front shoes only, shoes on all fours, lighter shoes and heavier ones—Steve was always willing to adapt his approach to Romeo's needs.

Eventually, I moved to Maryland, where my new boarding barn was big enough to have many farriers. I asked the manager which one took care of his horse, and that's how Brett started working on Romeo. He watched my horse move for a long time before he decided to roll his toes to get him moving forward more easily. But then Brett's back gave out and he moved on to a job that wouldn't require bending over heavy-footed horses all day. So Romeo was shuttled to Dave, who had helped Brett learn to shoe in the first place.

Even though the two farriers had been teacher and student, I noticed a distinct difference in shoeing styles. Romeo had never had clips on his shoes, but Dave put them on right away. When I first saw them, I was put off. Suddenly, my own horse's feet looked unfamiliar to me. But when I asked Dave about the clips, I felt better. And he was right: Even in the sticky, deep spring mud, Romeo stopped throwing shoes.

The next winter, Dave recommended that I take Romeo's shoes off for the cold season—something I had never considered. But Romeo seemed to enjoy being barefoot. At the time, a fellow boarder commented, "You know you've got a good farrier when he says it's time to take off the shoes." I agreed, of course, and added, "You know what's even better? Dave calls right back." ●



ON FOOT: Romeo benefited from the handiwork of talented farriers in two states.