

# A Wee Bit O' Scotland ...in Nevada

## *Edward Martin and Jack Miller Join Forces to Put On a Memorable Clinic*

by Frank Pickell

**T**he salesman, his arms folded confidently across a dreary polyester sweater-vest, spoke: "I know what works best; I just invented a blow-dryer for dogs." Jack Miller looked across the store and smirked at Art Labour; Dave Richison nodded with a controlled grin; I pulled out my notebook—a story was brewing.

We were in Gardnerville, Nevada, for the Nevada Professional Farriers Association's (NPFA) eighth annual fall clinic; for us, it began at the Vac and Sew, a small store in Gardnerville specializing in vacuum cleaners.

Edward Martin had flown in from

Scotland and had suspiciously eyed the antique electric blower-motor mounted on the table forge he was to use in the clinic. "It won't do, lads," he said. "I'll need more air than that can give me."

Jack Miller swore a Kirby vacuum-cleaner motor was the remedy. So we found ourselves procuring a motor from a perfectly good, used, upright Kirby, and the salesman was puzzled.

"Why," he asked, somewhat befuddled, "do you want just the motor?"

"We need to blow coal, not dog hairs," replied Dave politely.

"I'll need sixty-five dollars for it," the salesman demanded.

"Fifty," said Jack. "You can keep the handle and the wheels."

An hour later, we had the blower hooked up to the forge, and with nothing to do while the AFA certification was in progress, we headed for eighteen holes of golf under a magnificent Nevada sky.

### **Start with a Bit O' Forging**

On Saturday morning, October 6, the air was still, crisp, even cold. A thin ribbon of clouds hung just below the eight-thousand-foot peaks of the Sierra Nevada Mountains that pose as guardians over the green floor of Nevada's Carson Valley. Edward Mar-



*A clinic like this enables participants to get up close with Martin.*



tin was putting on his chaps and speaking to the fifty-five farriers surrounding him. They had come to Gardnerville from Oregon, Arizona, California, and Idaho to watch this man—a living legend—work the fire.

"I'll do a wee bit o' forging for y'ah," Martin chimed, his words thick with a Scottish brogue and hard to understand—the trilling r's of one word end in the middle of the next; it's imperative to listen closely. "There's a man out there says he shoes Shires," he continued. "So, I'll make y'ah a quick shoe for a Shire, just so's y'ah can see how it's done. I can't work slowly, only fast. So, if y'ah any questions, shout 'em out now, or hold 'em 'til I'm done."

Martin turned to the fire and plunged a healthy slab of bar stock into the coals, hit the switch on the Kirby, and stood back as the flames leaped four feet into the air. In a seemingly short period of time, he reached back into the fire with his tongs and pulled out fourteen inches of evenly heated yellow steel. Martin's hammer never sits idle—it dances a Gaelic jig between blows and there's music in the air—and four heats later a finished (and fullered) draft shoe slid across the cement floor toward the audience.

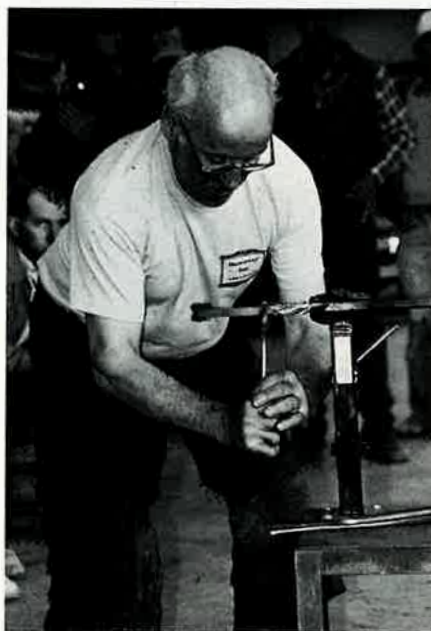
The Scotsman wiped his brow with a clean white towel, sat on the anvil's face, and began one of his recitals: "When I was a young lad in the forties, I had to make 72 pairs of draft shoes a day." He extended his left hand: "This is the hand that makes the shoes," he said with authority, "not the right one. It's the fire hand that's important."

Martin is an accomplished blacksmith as well as a farrier; he has strong convictions about being both. He was still sitting on the anvil when he delivered this point: "Y'ah need to have more than one string in y'er quiver," he expounded. Martin believes that you should be both black-

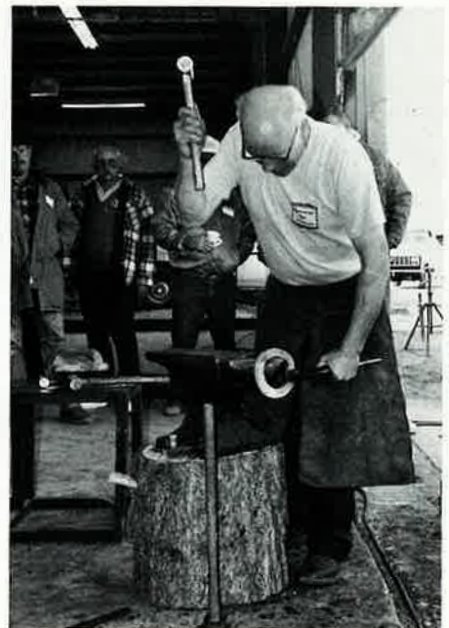


*Flames . . . four feet in the air . . . as Martin goes to work.*

smith and farrier; in his world, the twain are inseparable. To prove it, he cut a piece of square stock and stuffed it into the fire. While it was heating, he knelt on the cement floor and with a piece of chalk drew a diagram of the steps he was about to



*Martin's eyes are always focused on his work.*



*Edward Martin—poetry in motion.*

perform. Forty-five minutes later, the sixty-five-year-old farrier/blacksmith slid a finished and finely detailed ram's head poker, complete with twisted horns, across the cement. He wiped the sweat from his brow and pointed to the other end of the build-



*Miller holds as Martin scribes the ram's-head poker.*



## Wee Bit O' Scotland



*Miller solicits comments on how to trim this horse.*



*Miller makes welding aluminum in the firepot look easy.*

ing. "It's Jack's turn," he concluded.

### Miller Takes Over

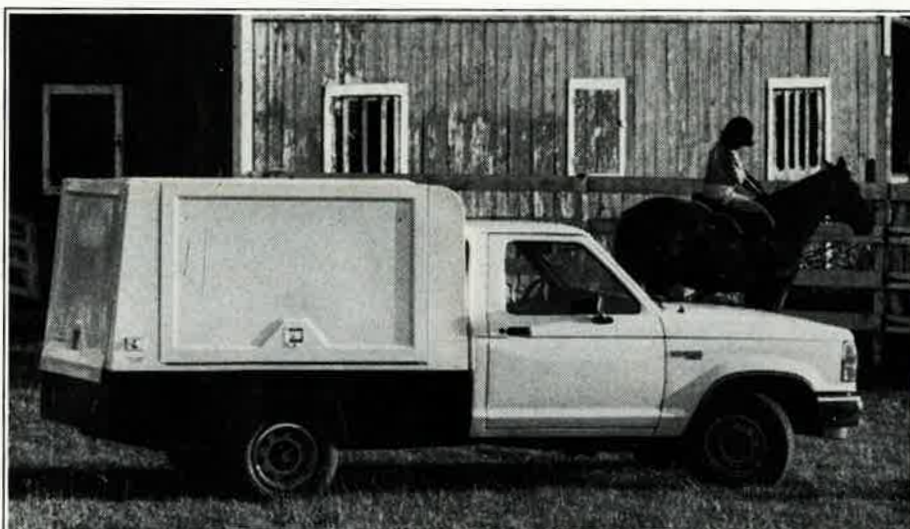
Jack Miller, renowned farrier on the hunter/jumper circuit, was standing by the rig set up for his demonstrations. Miller's assignment was to pre-

sent his version of shoeing the performance horse and to give Edward Martin time to breathe.

Miller began with the topic of traction. "Aluminum is good for traction," he said in his jovial way, half-laughing, half-talking. "I got a

rancher down south comes by my shop and gets all my old aluminum shoes for his ranch horses. He swears they're the best for chasing cows. They don't last long . . . he must have to shoe them twice a week." Miller sees things realistically and has no qualms about emphasizing the basics, something we all need reminding of periodically. "Too much traction is just as bad as not enough," Miller pointed out. "I like a fourteen-foot stride on my jumpers. If you cut their stride to twelve feet due to traction, you're crippling them."

Miller spent the remainder of the morning demonstrating the ease of drilling and tapping shoes (aluminum and steel) for studs. He explained the proper placement of added traction and gave the audience the only clue necessary for determining how much traction to use: "Know what the footing is for the horses you shoe," he said. "In Arizona, the ground is like cement—a drive-in, tungsten-carbide stud gives just a touch of traction and works well on ground like that. In Florida, they're in deep sand, and in Del Mar, California, they're on grass. Each area has its own demands for traction and there is a stud to compensate for each."



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## Diversified Format

For two days, Miller and Martin took turns demonstrating. This diversified format was a wise choice for Dave and Sharon Richison, the NPFA organizers. The clinic flowed with continuity—no one got bored and no one left. Miller continued after lunch on Saturday with a hands-on aluminum welding workshop. After two hours, the supply of aluminum shoes donated by the Delta Horseshoe Company was exhausted. Eight rigs were set up with two or three farriers working from each tailgate as Miller moved back and forth among the anvils, offering instruction. "As soon as that metal wear plate turns blue, it's ready to weld," he said to one man. Another farrier, frustrated over the aluminum clogging his grinding wheel, questioned him for a solution. Miller grinned and pulled a large tube of metal wax from his traveling tool box. "Dress the wheel with that," he said.

Ezra Brooks was face-down over his anvil, mumbling. "Worry about the shape later," he said to himself, as he made the weld. Miller stepped in front of Ezra's anvil and offered this advice: "Lay it over the horn and go to whipping on it," he said. "You won't break the weld. And you've got all the heat you need for everything else on the shoe."

When the last forge shut down, there was a pile of tortured aluminum shoes at the base of each anvil, but on the tops of more than a few anvil faces was a nice collection of aluminum bar shoes—heart-bars, egg-bars, straight-bars, and a few no-name bars.



Miller says, "I don't care if they wave at the crowd as long as they land flat."



Studs the easy way, as demonstrated by Jack Miller.

## A Class of His Own

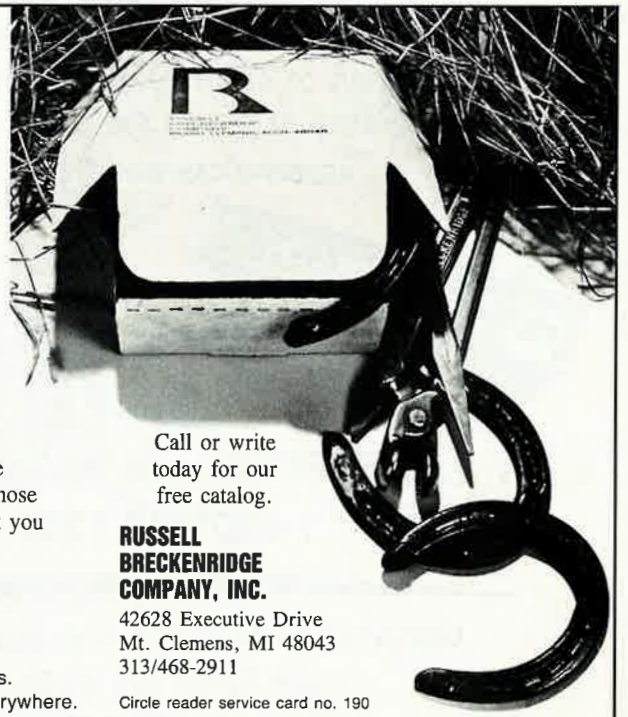
Edward Martin was the NPFA's main attraction. They had flown him all the way from Scotland just for this clinic. "The airfare was \$1500," said Dave Richison, "and we pay him well.

He's worth it." Dave is right. Edward Martin is in a class all his own; he's a living link to the past. He's the fifth generation in a family with an unbroken heritage of 200 years at the forge, and he is most noted for his

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## Wee Bit O' Scotland



*Gene Armstrong strikes heavy metal with Edward Martin.*



*Sparks fly when Martin hot-rasps.*

talent as a master of the draft horse shoe.

But Edward Martin is much more

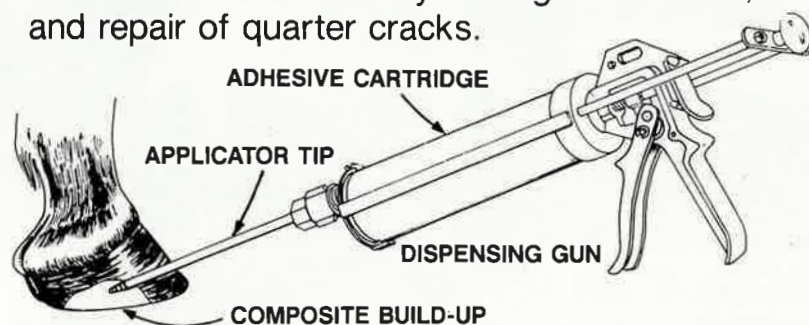
than that. He's just plain good at anything from the fire—horseshoes, toolmaking, and ornamental iron. If there was a shadow of doubt in any-

one's mind about Martin's abilities, it was soon erased by his continuing display of versatility with hammer and tongs. With these, the simplest of tools on planet Earth, Edward Martin leaves a trail few can follow. His hammer control is poetry in motion; his tongs move so subtly it takes an appreciative eye to recognize their effect on his craft. His eyes always stay focused on his work, his concentration is always keen.

Martin likes to recount tales of his past between demonstrations. He had just finished a heavy metal, deep-seated bar shoe—a shoe used to keep sore-footed, light-draft horses pulling their loads through the streets of Scotland—when he related this story: "When I was a lad," he began, "me grandfather was tight, cheap y'ah might say. Matches were scarce then. We'd beat a piece of iron over the horn 'til it got hot; then we stuck it in a pile of straw and blew on it 'til we got a fire to start the forge. Horseshoe nails were hard to come by, too," he continued. "When we'd pull a shoe, we'd save what was left of the nails; when we'd enough of them gathered, we'd weld them all together in the forge, draw the mass into a bar, and make nails from it all over again."

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### Clinic Auction

When Martin finished the last of his forging projects on Saturday, Rusty Brown from Southern California took over, and, with the help of Jack Miller's irresistible pleas for more money, conducted the auction. Auctions have become a very popular way to help defray the cost of clinics. Shoe and nail manufacturers, shoeing supply stores, and farriers themselves donate various items. In this case, the auction brought a total of \$2,900 back into the operating funds for the NPFA. The items made by Edward Martin during the clinic brought in \$900, not bad when you

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consider the man you hired also provided a good portion of his own expenses.

No gathering of farriers in Nevada would be complete without a round of Old West hospitality . . . a time for encouraging camaraderie. In most cases this is called a banquet, but in Gardnerville it was a feast. Filling every seat in the back room of the J and T Bar, an authentic Basque hotel and restaurant, fifty farriers attempted to show the Basque cooks what real appetites were like. But the farriers failed. The Basque have been feeding hungry shepherds for centuries and this gathering of farriers was no challenge to them. It was all you could eat—homemade cabbage soup, breads, salads, potatoes, and a bottomless stack of pan-blackened Charolais steaks that melted in your mouth.



*Ramirez's draft shoe begins to take shape.*



*Ron Ramirez holds his finished \$125 trophy.*

### Back to the Forge

The Sunday morning air was one de-

gree away from cold, the sky was clear blue, and Edward Martin was

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## Wee Bit O' Scotland

back at the forge making his version of the roadster shoe. During the second heat, his balding head glistening with beads of perspiration, Martin peeled away his outer shirt, exposing a tee shirt inscribed with "UNIVERSITY OF ALCATRAZ." "Where's the hot-rasp?" he questioned. Jeff Lovig, NPFA secretary, reached into his tool box and handed Martin one of his rasps. The old Scotsman took one look at the rasp, tipped his head forward, and peered over his black-rimmed glasses. "That's a good rasp, lad," he said. "I could get three more months of flooring out of it yet." But he used it anyway and thirty minutes later the finished roadster shoe was sliding across the cement.

The word "clinic" is too medicinal for a gathering like this. It should have been termed a workshop. Everyone had an opportunity to participate, both physically and vocally. It

was easy to talk one-on-one with Edward Martin and watch him up close, something that's impossible at larger farrier gatherings.

With Jack Miller it was hands-on at the anvil and vocal in the parking lot when he asked for opinions about flooring the Thoroughbred brought for evaluation. "It's my job to keep the horses sound and make sure they don't fall down," said Miller, discussing balance. "Trim them flat. I don't care if they wave at the crowd as long as they land flat. I charge a hundred dollars at home and one-forty on the road. Everything except soft acrylics is included in that price. I provide a service, and whatever it takes to keep the horse sound is part of that service."

### Anything Else?

Edward Martin finished the afternoon and the "workshop" with a display

much like the finish of good Fourth-of-July fireworks. He turned out four more shoes, including a competition draft shoe, the shoe that has earned him a spot in the history books. But, before the straight piece of cold steel hit the fire, Jack Miller picked it up and auctioned it off. Ron Ramirez bought it for \$125, sight unseen. "I drove all the way up here, seven hours from Los Angeles, just to watch him make that shoe," said Ramirez. "And I plan to keep it."

"Anything else ya'd like to see?" Martin questioned the group in the final hour of the clinic.

"How about just a plain stamped shoe?" came a voice from up in the bleachers.

"OK," Martin replied. "Thirteen inches. Front shoe. Plain stamped."

"With a toe clip, and all in one heat," heckled another.

Martin spun around, looked over

# Go Ahead. Drive Us Thro





## Wee Bit O' Scotland

his glasses with a glint of the devil in his eyes, and said, "It's not impossible, y'ah know. One of me grandfather's apprentices made a shoe . . . toed, heeled, fullered, and scotched . . . in one heat. I'll not say it was a beautiful piece of work," he laughed, "but by-jeeez it was a fast one."

The last shoe Edward Martin made was from concave bar stock, complete with a perfect block and diamond-wedge calk. When it hit the cement, the clinic was over and Martin sat on the anvil's face one more time and told another story. In two days, he had hand-turned seven different and difficult-to-make shoes, three blacksmith projects (including a cluster of leaves with multiple jump-welds), and an assortment of tools and jigs.

The sun was still two hours away from the horizon as Martin sat atop his favorite perch, a half-eaten ice-cream bar in his hand, and said his



*Martin says his good-byes from atop his favorite perch.*

good-byes. "I've been one of the lucky guys," he said. "I've been out doing a job I like for fifty-one years

and getting paid for it. And y'ah can't do better than that." His actions prove his words. The years of experience have made forging second nature to him and in the process he has maintained a special humbleness. "I'm very, very grateful to y'ah for being patient with me and I'm sure we'll meet again someday," he said in sincerity, as he closed the clinic.

It has been said: "In every real man a child is hidden that wants to play." For Edward Martin this is certainly true. Perhaps that is the unconscious appeal that makes watching him fun. At sixty-five he is still amazingly agile, but predictably his days of playing in the forge are numbered. It has also been said: "Showing up is eighty percent of life." No matter who you are—hot shoer, cold shoer, or blacksmith—if the opportunity arises for you to watch Edward Martin in action, don't miss it . . . if for no other reason than to witness history. ■

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