

# LICENSE HORSESHOERS ???

A recent survey conducted by the American Association of Equine Practitioners, an international association of Doctors of Veterinary Medicine who practice predominantly in the equine field, found that about 82% of lameness in horses, mules, burros, and asses is caused by neglect or negligence. By their nature, the feet and lower legs of equines are particularly susceptible to injury or disease caused by neglect or negligence. There is no way to statistically quantify the extent of loss or suffering, since many incidents are probably never examined or treated by a professional farrier or Doctor of Veterinary Medicine. The malaise may never be noticed by the owner until or if lameness or debilitation results. Whether this is through ignorance or neglect is a moot question. If the former, education of the horseman by the professional tradesman may solve the problem; if the latter, education may be only partially effective.

If the majority of domestic equines are "used" in one or many ways, they come under the scrutiny of the owner periodically. Usually, the demand of the use requires that the feet and lower legs be cared for, depending on the use or purpose for which the animal is kept. The most common care is trimming or shoeing of the foot to extend and protect the ability or usefulness of the animal. If this care is given by an incompetent individual, or by a competent tradesman in a negligent manner, the usefulness and value of the animal is lost. Conversely, if proper attention and care are rendered the animal, congenital defects or the adverse effects of disease or injury can be relieved or diminished and the utility of the animal preserved or regained.

It is obvious that competent, professional diagnosis and treatment is mandatory, not just in the case of disease or injury, but in the routine, day-to-day care of the animal. With the wide variation of uses of the animals, differences in conformation, the "way of going," anatomical differences, equipage, and relative weight and skill of the rider or driver, all animals cannot be treated identically in order to maintain optimum performance. It seems inescapable that in order to render competent advice and service, the farrier must be well grounded in his knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the animals with which he works, have a basic understanding of the biomechanics of shoeing and trimming, and of cause and effect relationships of a certain treatment (or no treatment), verses another. No less important are the interpersonal relationships between the owner(s), the Doctors of Veterinary Medicine, and the farrier; and the common "horse sense" and good judgement demanded of the farrier in his handling of the animal.

Depending upon the circumstance, a horseman may spend from a few hundred to several thousand dollars a year for care of

his animal's feet. Multiplied by the numbers of animals that receive such care, a sizeable amount is spent by the industry annually for farrier services. In return for the money spent in good faith by owners, it is imperative that the highest quality service be rendered by the farrier. His standard of service should be the same whether the animal is a backyard pet, a national performance champion, a Triple Crown winner, or a horse earning his living working at whatever he may be called upon to do. In each instance, he deserves to be as comfortable as possible and have all the advantages he can in carrying out his job. Only those who believe an animal has no sense of well-being, no feeling of pain, discomfort, or neglect, or who could care less about these factors, could disagree with the tenet that they deserve to be treated humanely.

Almost all of the basic manual skills, understanding, and knowledge of anatomy and physiology of the equines, and competency as a farrier are subject to measurement in a reasonable way, by testing of the tradesman. Weakness or gaps in knowledge or ability may be exposed before an unqualified or incompetent practitioner inflicts or perpetuates damage or harm to an animal. Not only would suffering of the animal be prevented or alleviated, but his utility would be maintained or restored at a minimum cost to the owner.

To be objective, a test should be administered by a disinterested third party. This immediately precludes testing by the trade itself and by horseman or horseowners, acting alone or in concert. A political subdivision, by default, becomes the obvious choice. A State Board of Examiners, called by whatever title is convenient or appropriate, made up of those knowledgeable in the trade could perform the testing adequately and fairly. The size of the Board is not too critical, but should represent the animal medicine field, recognized experts in the art of the farrier, and horsemen in general. It may be argued somewhat successfully that licensing by such procedures isn't fool-proof or fair; that there will be those who pass because they are a "friend of a friend," who have political pull, or by spending some folding green. This is probably true. However, these should not represent the majority of instances; they should be the exception, rather than the rule. If one who is unable to pass a reasonable test advertises and performs his substandard level of work, the industry will soon filter him out and his service will no longer be in demand.

Another argument that may be raised to dispute the desirability of licensing is that it can't assure the industry of better service. Reflect, if you will, on the myriad of other trades that must be or are licensed to protect the consumer from the unscrupu-

lous or incompetent. Is pain suffered when your hair is cut? Isn't the worst that can happen is for your visual appearance to be temporarily impaired? Are two water or gas pipes "hurt" if they aren't properly joined or routed in a structure? A mortician deals with totally insensitive matter. A medical doctor, either human or animal, must prove his competence in handling living beings; he must know causes and effects and techniques for relief or reduction of suffering; of restoring mobility and usefulness to a body. To a certain degree, a farrier has no less responsibility, although the result of this work is not as often recognized or as dramatic as the saving of a life. Licensing would assure in a majority of cases that the farrier is capable to meet the critical demands placed on him for competent, reliable service.

A third area deserves attention. Many, both within an outside the trade, believe that licensing is only forerunner of unions, or that unions are the answer to the problem. Either may be partially true, depending upon circumstances or past occurrences. Labor unions, including horse-shoers and platers, are organized solely to further the best interest of the members; to represent "labor" in controversy with "management." In such a bipartite arrangement, the real client is left out. No one speaks for the animal, and he can't very well speak for himself. By involving the animal, represented by a Board of Examiners, a tripartite arrangement is reached that includes the horse, the horseowner, and the farrier. If farriers in any area wish to form a union, or participate in union activities, this is totally within their prerogative; but membership should not be considered as proof positive of competency or reliability in every case. Remember, there are different ends to be served by the different means.

In almost all states where pari-mutual horse racing is conducted under auspices of a State Racing Commission, platers or horseshoers are individually licensed by the Commission. This licensing admittedly goes beyond competency in an effort to screen "undesirables" from the racing scene. This is proper. It does not, in all cases, screen out the poor tradesmen and should not be considered the epitome of licensing standards. Nor does the licensing extend to animals not on the track. The implications are obvious.

License farriers? Why not! Give the horse a break for a change. When the foundation is firm, the whole industry is in good shape, including the owner and the farrier. If he could speak for himself, your horse would be the first to agree that he needs and deserves the best we can give him.

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