

Shoeing The Draft Horse

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To shoe, or not to shoe? There has been a considerable amount of debate lately as to the benefits and disadvantages of putting shoes on a horse. Pony, light horse or draft horse, the answer seems to lie with the individual. If the answer lies in favor of shoeing, then the next question should be, "How to shoe?" This is particularly important to the draft breeds. The foot is critical to the way the horse moves and his ability to perform the work that is asked of him. How he is shod will either accentuate his physical strength, allow him to efficiently work on unnatural surfaces, or give him exaggerated animation. Farm horses, pulling horses, carriage horses, hitch horses, riding horses—all have the same basic needs for proper hoof care, but each will have a very distinct way of being shod, unique to the horse's purpose. It is therefore imperative that the draft horse be shod not only by a competent farrier, but by one who is familiar with the needs of the individual's work "style." Farriers with consistent draft horse experience are harder to find than those that only shoe light horses, but they are out there. An Extended Family of Farriers Now nine generations strong, the Kriz family is, quite honestly, horseshoeing royalty. Joseph Kriz first came from Czechoslovakia to the United States as an immigrant in the late 1800s, making his living not only by means of family tradition as a farrier but as a horse trader. "Back then, my grandfather would bring home train car loads of horses from the Midwest," says Tim Kriz of Bethany, Connecticut, the eighth generation in this famous line of farriers. Like his grandfather before him, Tim is also a well-respected draft horse dealer, and is training his son, Cody, now 17, to become a horseshoer. Tim's father, Johnny, and Tim's uncle Joe followed in their father's footsteps as farriers and draft horse men, not only working on draft horse feet, including the Budweiser Clydesdales, but showing Belgians, Percherons, and Clydesdales. It's in the blood. "I have always, always been around horses, and draft horses in particular—it was just natural for me to pursue this business." Tim Kriz is the third generation to work directly with the Budweiser Clydesdales, a position held by a Kriz since his grandfather started shoeing the original Budweiser hitch in the 1930s. Today, Tim estimates that 40% of his business is shoeing draft horses (about 140 draft horses every eight weeks), and about 50% of his draft horses are with the Budweiser account. "I shoe sixty to seventy horses for Budweiser, every eight weeks," says Tim. "I shoe for the St. Louis and New Hampshire hitches, so wherever they are traveling, I will go to them." The other 60% of his clients are light horses, mostly hunter/ jumpers and Quarter Horses. Not only has Tim's lifelong involvement with draft horses given him the edge as a farrier, but, as with his father and uncle before him, he has gained a reputation as the man to apprentice with in the industry. Matt Lewis of Old

Lyme, Connecticut, who started working with Tim 10 years ago at the age of 16, is nothing short of excellent at his craft. With a strong back, good horse sense, and four years of apprenticing with the best in the business, he now shoes approximately 500 horses every eight weeks, and works with Tim Kriz on many of the Budweiser Clydesdales as well. "Really, there isn't much difference in shoeing a draft horse or a light horse," says Matt, "except to say that shoeing a draft is just harder work." Tim Kriz concurs with this, and adds, "Not a lot of people want to shoe drafts today. Many are intimidated by their size, and plus the work can be more physically demanding with draft horses than light horses." What, then, motivates them both to work on drafts? Matt says, "There is a market for it, because there aren't too many out there that do it. I first started shoeing drafts to save money on my own horses, but now, it's meeting people, going places. I enjoy working for myself." When asked what they both would recommend to draft horse owners to make shoeing their horses an easier task, both were emphatic with their replies. "Work with your horses' feet!" says Matt, especially regarding the younger draft horse. "I find more draft horse owners are less likely to pick up their horses' feet on a regular basis. This creates problems when it is time to trim, and even worse when it comes time to pound the shoe on, if the horse doesn't want any of it." Matt continues, "If the horse stands real good, has real good manners front and back, I have no preference for shoeing either a draft horse or a light horse—it's the same for me either way." What's Your Style? As with light horses, there are many different ways of shoeing a draft horse, all of which are use dependent. It is becoming fashionable to let a horse go barefoot, and although ideal in some cases, Matt doesn't believe this practice is for all drafts. "The weight of a draft horse can affect the quality of the hoof, as does genetics," says Matt. "Even a good hoof wall won't necessarily hold up well under a tremendous amount of weight and force, however. Some draft horses, no matter where or how they are kept, just cannot go barefoot." The type of shoes, and the specific way in which a draft is shod, again depends on the work the horse is performing. "A commercial carriage horse, or horse that is expected to work on asphalt all day, may benefit from having pads," says Matt, who also runs Foxglove Farm, a commercial livery service, with his parents Bob and Beverly. Matt prefers leather pads over synthetic, as the leather is more flexible and allows the foot to "breathe" more. "But it is important to properly pack the hoof when using pads," says Matt. Like his mentor, Tim Kriz, he prefers to pack with pine tar or oakum. This helps to keep the foot moist, and is particularly important since pads prevent the foot from naturally absorbing moisture out of the ground. "It can also help a horse grow a better foot, with less cracking and chipping," says Tim. Matt prefers to use a 1/2" thick plate on his working drafts, with borium or drill-tex to keep the horse from slipping on the street. 1/2" usually allows him to reset the shoe, rather than replace it, the first time around. According to Matt, "The average draft wears a size six or seven shoe. Often the front is a size bigger than the hind, but not always. Size six or seven shoe will take a size 10 nail." The larger the shoe, the larger

the nail. Nail clinches are usually left "big and heavy" on a draft horse, because they help to hold the shoe on better. "Everything needs to be bigger, heavier on a draft horse," says Matt, "extra strong. Especially horses that really pound the pavement." Another common practice with drafts is the toe clip. Matt will typically recess the clip into a notch he makes in the toe, which sets the toe back and helps to keep the shoe from slipping. Heel caulks are seldom used for horses that work on the roads, but are often seen on pulling horses and logging horses, helping them get added traction on soft ground. These caulks will drop down as much as three-quarters of an inch. As with their commercial cousins, the foot is kept short and rounded, more natural to help them gain the proper footing, to waste less energy with excessive leg action. By contrast, draft horses that spend most of their time working the fields in soft ground, off the road, can easily be worked barefoot provided they have good quality feet and aren't subject to sore soles without shoes. When asked what helps to keep a horse's foot healthy, Matt feels that good nutrition is important, and both Tim and Matt agree that timely, proper shoeing is a must. Tim says, "Good hoof care is what will make a difference, and for horses that have problems to start with, it is important to put them on a tighter schedule, maybe every four to five weeks instead of eight." Matt agrees. "One of the worst things you can do is wait so long that the shoe starts to fall off." Doing so creates the danger of tearing off chunks of hoof wall, especially when the nail clinches are designed to hold the shoe on. The toe clip poses another danger—horses that throw their shoes run the risk of stepping on the clip, causing injury to the sole of the foot. "Flies are one of your worst enemies," says Matt. "Keep the horse inside during the day in the summer, and you'll notice a big difference in the condition of the hoof." Although that can be said of all breeds, draft horses can be particularly forceful with their feet as they relentlessly stomp the ground to ward off flies. Scotch Bottoms Having literally inherited a family legacy of shoeing hitch horses has naturally given Tim Kriz the advantage when shoeing drafts, and show horses in particular. Unlike the working horse, whose foot is generally kept short and natural, the hitch horse is shod with a style of shoe called a "scotch bottom." "Scotch bottoms have been used since the turn of the 20th century, at least," says Tim, whose grandfather used this style of shoe on the first Budweiser horses. "Scotch bottoms are flared in the back and square in the toe. They enhance the action of the horse and give it more animation as it moves." This style also adds a considerable amount of weight to the foot, more than twice that of an average plate. "It's kind of like walking with boots on that are too big and clunky for your feet. Your walk becomes more exaggerated." Some show people prefer to trim back their horses in the off months and remove scotch bottoms. Tim, who has always shown Percherons, often leaves them on year-round. Because his horses are generally on shorter trim schedules, he does not find he has to keep his horses constantly stabled the way others in the show world often do. If a horse does not keep a scotch bottom year-round, he suggests that "the half-round shoe helps in the transition from basic plates to scotch bottoms if the horse

can't take a full shoe." Tim says that many hitch horses with good feet have a natural flare, and rarely need hoof repair, but those with not-so-good feet may need hoof repair (such as epoxy) to attain the benefit of a scotch bottom for the show ring. "Breeding also plays a big part in how the horse will go. The horse should have a good deal of animation and leg action whether it has scotch bottoms or not. Putting scotch bottoms on a horse that wasn't bred for that kind of action won't make it a hitch horse." Learn to Live the Trade So, you think you want to shoe draft horses? The first thing to do is find yourself a good mentor. "Farrier schools last about three or four months," says Matt, "but it takes years of consistent experience to make a good farrier, to be comfortable enough to strike out on your own. If you love what you are doing, it's worth all the hard work!"