March , 2013

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The Hands-On Magazine For Hoof-Care Professionals

Hot T	ps T	o Fir	e Up	
Your	Forg	2		38

2013 Hoof-Care Summit Highlights ... 10

Hall-Of-Fame **Welcomes For Five ...22**

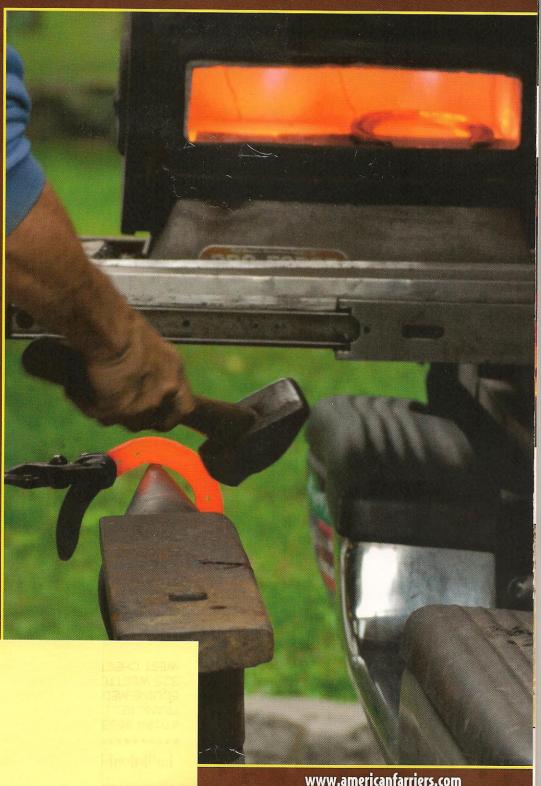
Sub-Zero Day Shoeing For A Living30

Hammer-Handed Florida Farrier46

More On Building Your **Hoof-Care Brand.....52**

The Outlook For Stem Cells In Hoof Care61

Heart Bar Vs. Z-Bar For Hoof Avulsions ...74



The Farrier And Pre-Purchase Exams

Give some thought to how you'll respond if you're asked to give an opinion of a horse's feet before a sale

By Pat Tearney, Managing Editor

magine you arrive at a barn and a client asks you to look over the feet of a horse he or she is thinking about buying. How do you respond? If you don't know, you should probably start thinking about it before the question does comes up.

Pre-purchase exams are the norm for high-end athletic horses, and are becoming increasingly common for sales of less expensive horses. While pre-purchase exams are conducted for the most part by equine veterinarians, more and more farriers may find that they are asked to participate as well.

An equine veterinarian and an experienced farrier, who co-moderated a Hoof-Care Roundtable on the topic during the 2013 International Hoof-Care Summit, shared their thoughts on these exams.

Farrier Expertise Wanted

"Obviously, the farrier has the greatest expertise in the foot and the foot is the number one cause of lameness in the horse," says Frank Reilly, an equine veterinarian from West Chester, Pa. "More and more owners are going to say I'd like to have my farrier look at this horse, too."

But if asked, make sure you know what you're getting into. Reilly points out that pre-purchase exams come in high on the list of liability problems for equine veterinarians.

Reilly suggests it's best to have the farrier as part of an evaluation team that also includes the vet, the seller and the perspective buyer.

"The ideal thing is to have the vet, farrier, owner and buyer all at the same place for the exam," says Reilly. "That way there is no miscommunication."



Frank Reilly, DVM



Steve Prescott

Steve Prescott, a farrier from Hardeeville, S.C., does take part in prepurchase exams, but says he limits his contribution.

"I try to offer two things to aid in pre-purchase exams," he says. "I offer my services to pull and reapply shoes for the veterinarian to facilitate the X-ray process and I will pass judgment on the hooves for my client."

But he chooses his words carefully. "I am very careful with the wording I use when I judge a horse's hooves," he says. "If the veterinarian is present, I try to involve them in the evaluation in a conversational format. I keep the scope of my evaluation to the areas that are in my control — mainly can I keep these feet together for the horse's intended use."

What About Documentation?

Veterinarians take a much more formal approach to the process than most farriers. Many equine veterinary practices have standardized forms, usually based on guidelines developed by the American Association of Equine Practitioners, that guide the veterinarian through an exam. Some also have forms and agreements that spell out to the person paying for the exam what it does or does not cover, options (radiographs or ultrasounds for example) and costs.

Reilly believes farriers should also deliver their evaluations in writing. He thinks farriers should charge for the service — separately from the veterinarian.

Prescott, on the other hand, says he doesn't view doing evaluations as a "major income stream," and instead prefers to use them to enhance relationships with veterinarians and his clients.

"The clientele I have do not change horses very often, so I'm not asked to perform many pre-purchase examinations," he says. "This is usually an established relationship and I know that I'm going to have to shoe the horse for years to come. I try to make it cost effective for my client to have me there at the time of the exam."

Prescott is also not sold on putting his evaluation down in print.

"I don't leave written evaluations as I am nervous they may come back to haunt me," he says. "If I ever do decide to do this (leave a written evaluation), I will definitely have a lawyer draw up a release document that will help me legally should the need arise."

If you have liability insurance, Prescott suggests if would be wise to talk with your agent and see what, if any, protection your policy provides for pre-purchase exams. Reilly made a similar suggestion. Ω

