

Vineyard Gazette Online

http://www.mvgazette.com/news/2004/09/24/scott_hershowitz.php?&format=print

Horse Sense: Scott Hershowitz Plies His Craft as Lone Farrier

By CHRIS BURRELL

The flakes falling around Scott Hershowitz's leather boots look like snow. But this is September, and Mr. Hershowitz is sweating like crazy, the droplets sliding down his nose and off his chin.

The white mound forming at his feet, the stuff flying off the end of a long rasp, are tiny bits of horse hoof - farrier dust. Mr. Hershowitz, 34, is the Vineyard's only farrier.

"Good boy, Cody. You're being an awesome dude," he says to a five-year-old quarter horse thoroughbred cross down on Hopp's Farm Road in West Tisbury.

To see Mr. Hershowitz in action - clutching the hooves of these huge animals between the knees under his heavy leather apron, talking to them in soothing, everyday tones - the last thing you would suspect is that he's a virtual neophyte.

But until January of last year, he had never been on a horse. Until last April, he had never shod one horse foot.

Mr. Hershowitz is what you'd call a very fresh farrier. He just graduated in August from a 16-week training program at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine in Ithaca, N.Y.

Offered three times a year, the farrier program accepts only three students for each course. Gaining admission is tougher than getting into Harvard, less than a four per cent acceptance rate. Mr. Hershowitz was one of 88 applicants.

"This is a love and an interest I didn't see coming," he says.

A couple of years ago, Mr. Hershowitz went to the movies to catch the second film in the Lord of the Rings trilogy and was instantly beguiled by the horsemanship depicted on screen. When he ran into his friend and longtime horse enthusiast Hannah Maxner, he asked her to teach him how to ride.

"I fell in love with these creatures," he says.

Before long, Mr. Hershowitz was doing more than pouring coffee and greeting customers at Mocha Mott's in Oak Bluffs. He was mucking the stalls at Netherfield Farm in Chilmark and



making an impression among the people and horses there.

They noticed something uncanny about Scott Hershowitz. Horses that didn't like strangers, horses that really didn't like men, liked Scott.

"It's just amazing the connection he has with the horses," says Jacqueline Valley, the former manager at Netherfield. "We used to tell Scott we thought he was a horse in another life."



In March, he was stunned to hear he'd been accepted to the prestigious program at Cornell. Maybe it was the letters of reference from people like Ms. Valley, or maybe it was the simple fact that he really wanted to become a farrier, driving up to Ithaca twice to check out the school and meet with the program director, a renowned farrier named Michael Wildenstein.

For 16 weeks, Mr. Hershowitz immersed himself in the science of caring for a horse's feet. Cornell's animal hospital is like the Mayo Clinic of the veterinary world, affording students the chance to see all kinds of equine medical problems.

"We had access to all the cadavers, could get feet out of the freezer, cut deep purposely, look at the tendons, see where they are. It was amazing," he says.

Outside the clinical setting, there was the practical work, learning old school techniques of blacksmithing and crafting custom horseshoes.

He shod 2,600-pound draft horses. One shoe could weigh as much as four pounds. In his third week at Cornell, Mr. Hershowitz got his first taste of just how dangerous a farrier's work can be.

A thoroughbred stallion kicked him. "I went up in the air and landed on my tool box," he says. "Three ribs busted."

Farriers take precautions. They bring along fly spray to keep bugs away, reducing the likelihood of kicking. "Flies can get you killed," he says matter-of-factly.

They wear special boots fitted with metal coverings from the toe all the way up the instep. Farriers also rely on their wits.

"When you're underneath one of these creatures, you have to be calm," he says. "A horse can read you before you walk in the barn."

Mr. Hershowitz prides himself on being able to understand a horse and conveying to them his intentions to help. "They sense me, they know I'm a good guy," he says.

In some respects, he tries to see the world from the horse's perspective.

"What we ask them to do, what we do to them, isn't their first choice in life," he says. "The least we owe them is the proper equipment to do what we ask."

That means the right shoes or hooves well cared for, cleaned and trimmed.

On Wednesday, Mr. Hershowitz roamed the backyard stables up-Island, making six house calls and trimming at least two dozen hooves by day's end.

Horses might like Scott, but like a kid who doesn't enjoy having his hair cut, they may not come running to the farrier for their appointment.

"Sometimes they're hard to catch. You have to trick them in with grain. Yeah, gotta do the grain trick," he says, carrying a red plastic bucket with some treats inside.

Mr. Hershowitz shows up to work clutching a portable stand with his four tools: a wire brush, a pair of nippers, a rasp and hoof knife.

Much of his work is spent crouched over one hoof at a time, scraping away dirt and manure and callouses, much like a dental hygienist attacks the tartar on your teeth. The nippers are like long-handled pliers, meant for snipping the edges of a hoof.

He grabs a rasp and smooths the edges, then sets the hoof on the center post of his stand for more preening. The work is grueling. "A couple more seconds, I'll be done. I promise," he says to Easy, a 26-year-old Appaloosa.

He tells Phaedra Fortes, the owner of Cody, that the hooves are like fingernails. "A little bevel eases the pressure," he says.



He also show Ms. Fortes a trick: Vick's VapoRub. Cheaper than the stuff sold at tack shops and very effective in keeping the hooves moist.

Beside loving horses, Mr. Hershowitz has found himself a potentially lucrative business niche. Other farriers come from the mainland. He's the Island's only resident farrier, and with close to 1,000 horses on the Vineyard, Mr. Hershowitz is quickly booking appointments.

A trim costs \$50. He still needs to build a portable rig for horseshoeing. That's next.

Last week, Mr. Hershowitz settled into his new rental cottage in Edgartown. It's year-round at a good price, but he knew it was home when he walked in the door for the first time and saw what was tacked up above the windows in the living room: three horseshoes.

[Home](#) | [Usage Rules](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Syndication/RSS](#) | [Site Index](#)

MVGAZETTE.COM - Copyright © 2005 Vineyard Gazette, Inc. - All Rights Reserved
Site Design and Development by [Metaface](#)