

From Contest to the Real Test

Throughout the years of my shoeing career I found little use in competitions. I enjoyed watching the people compete but never thought of myself as a competitive type. After taking office in the GPFA I felt that it was only right to support our own contest and compete in it. My very first class will always be unforgettable to me just as most folks remember theirs. Mine especially for me since I made the wrong shoes for the class. It pays to highlight the shoes in your class on the shoe list.

I developed friendships that I would never have had through the few contests that I have been to. There are people that I can call anytime to get advice from about horseshoeing. Several don't even live in the same state as I. At contests I would watch them warm up and if I was unsure how to make a specialty shoe they would give me tips or even walk me through it right before the class. You don't get that in other types of competitions where people want to keep their secrets.

At our 2008 GPFA contest one of the shoes in the open division was a patten bar shoe. At the time of the contest I had very little idea of how to conjure up such a thing. I had tried to make one at home and thought I did a pretty jam up job until I got to the contest and saw some others. I realized that I was a bit lost. I watched Daniel, Todd, and Mr. Lewis warm up and asked a few questions of which they were more than willing to answer. Needless to say, my patten bar shoe was a flop in the contest. It is buried somewhere toward the bottom of the pile in case someone comes into my shop. I don't throw away handmade shoes so I can check my progress through the years but I might hide them for a while.

The education that I obtained from that contest about how to and how not to make a patten bar shoe paid off for me last week. I got a call from a horse owner who wanted me to come out to put a special shoe on his horse. After a discussion we decided to meet at the veterinary clinic on Wednesday morning. He had told me over the phone that his horse was diagnosed with a severed tendon on the hind leg. My wheels started to turn and already I was hoping the vet would ask this special shoe to be a patten bar shoe. Well sometimes we all get lucky. When he pulled him off the trailer I thought this may be a waste of time. I have not dealt with any of these before. With the horse standing still and me standing in front of him I could see the bottom of his foot on his hind leg.

I took some measurements and began to work. First, I had to decipher how much stock to cut. His foot measured eleven inches from heel to heel and that was being generous. I started with nine inches added two for the elevation, three and a half for the bar, and then two more just to lengthen the shoe back way past his bulb line. I built it just like I had been taught last year at the contest by some exceptional teachers. The shoe turned out alright and nailed up very well. I sure didn't feel as if we had wasted our time after all.

I don't know if this will save this little horses life but I have done my part and he has a better chance now. And I didn't feel like building this shoe was over my head. After participating in some Horse Shoeing Competitions I have gained education, friendship, experience, and most of all confidence. A pretty cheap fare to gain things that are priceless.

