

A Farrier's Work Is Never Done

Clients throughout the West rely on farrier Carnell Erickson

By Dianna Troyer

Carnell Erickson says he assumed he would mainly be shoeing his family's horses after graduating from farrier school nearly three decades ago.

Instead, his client base stretches far beyond the family ranch near Almo. He has loyal clients throughout the West, including nationally renowned rodeo competitors.

"My dad suggested I learn to do it after high school, so we'd always have someone to take care of our horses," says Carnell, 46, who graduated from Montana State University Farrier School in 1990.

Carnell shoes about seven or eight horses a day, several times a week.

"Carnell has so many clients because he has a reputation for doing corrective shoeing and being conscientious about his work," says Ron Jenkins, a friend from Logan.

Ron sometimes accompanies Carnell when he works in southeastern Idaho.

"He's also known for his horsemanship and being able to calm horses with all kinds of temperaments," Ron says.

Based on the ranch where he grew up, Carnell says he goes wherever he is needed.

"I work from Sun Valley to Twin Falls and down to Utah and Nevada," he says. "In winter, I'll go to Arizona for a month. I shoe all kinds: racehorses, jumpers, working ranch horses, dude ranch horses and ropers."

He also has a contract to shoe horses at feedlots near Malta and Oakley.

Carnell says he often rebalances



Carnell Erickson shoes Bella, a roping horse owned by Kent Benson of Burley.

horses' hooves, enabling them to perform at their peak.

"The hooves have to be short enough at the toe and long enough at the heel to provide support so the horse is comfortable," he says. "Some farriers trim the heel too short because it's easier to trim a heel than a toe, but that puts too much

pressure on the heel."

Wherever he goes, Carnell says he thinks of his clients as his friends.

"After shoeing horses 27 years, it's a small world," he says. "Once I was in Fort Worth, Texas, and a client there happened to know someone in Idaho I knew."



Clockwise from above, Carnell often rebalances horses' hooves so they perform better. He says some farriers trim the heel too short. Carnell has worn out multiple metal anvils he uses to shape shoes.

Carnell has had many clients for decades, including Dr. Alan Clark, a renowned equine veterinarian in Albion.

"I'm thankful for him getting me started and what he's done for me over the years," says Carnell. "After I graduated, he'd tell me what he needed for a horse, and I did it. His clients come from all over. We even worked with the trainers of racehorses owned by a Hawaiian princess."

Princess Abigail K. Kawanakoa, a renowned breeder of winning racing American quarter horses, is descended from the Hawaiian royal family.

Carnell says he is impressed with technological advancements in shoeing options.

"At school, I forged 167 shoes from a straight piece of metal," he says. "These days, specialty shoes are readily available."

Carnell admits his work ethic takes a toll on his equipment. He has worn out metal anvils, portable wooden toolboxes and trucks.

"Sometimes, I'll have a new box made, and a horse will step on it after I've used

it only a day or two," he says.

His truck racks up thousands of miles a year.

"I had a Ford truck with 475,000 miles on it," he says.

Carnell attributes his work ethic to his parents, Dennis and Pauline.

"I've been blessed to have them in my life," he says. "My dad made us work, but he did it in such a way that it was enjoyable."

During his career, Carnell has been hurt, but generally not by horses. About four years ago, a driver T-boned him, saying he did not see Carnell driving because the sun was in his eyes.

"I lost some of the use of my left arm," he says.

About 10 years ago, he ruptured a disk in his back.

"I've been accused of being a workaholic, so I took a day off and went fishing with my uncle up Elba Creek," Carnell says. "I jumped across the water and my foot landed in a hole I hadn't seen. I blew a disk fishing! I couldn't believe it. It felt like someone put a knife in my back."

Roping and Riding

Carnell Erickson and Ronnie Scott, a jockey he met in Boise while shoeing racehorses, are team-roping partners.

Carnell has qualified the past three years for the prestigious World Series of Team Roping Finals, scheduled annually in Las Vegas in December.

"Ronnie and I met about 20 years ago at the Boise racetrack when he was a jockey," Carnell says. "We reconnected, and he's a great header," says Carnell, a heeler. "We're looking forward to competing in Vegas in December."

He took about a year off to heal. Wanting to pass along his skills, Carnell has had apprentices in the past.

"I'd like to find others to pass on my knowledge to, so they can learn to shoe a horse right," he says. "A good farrier will never run out of work."

"I've spent my life around horses and have been blessed by them." ■