

~ Article by Julian Ross ~

Romania is an Eastern European country, ruled until 1989 by a communist dictator, that today has around one million draught horses in use. The number is rising yearly, tractors being too expensive for the peasant farmers who make up nearly half of the population.

When I moved to Romania in 1999, I knew that the country had problems with farriery. I had ridden five hundred miles across the country in 1994, during which trip the horse that I borrowed had to survive some bizarre and careless farriery. Toes are typically too long and heels dropped, resulting in tendon strain and lame horses. Shoes are often made to fit the foot, however over-long that foot might be.



Problems stem chiefly from lack of training. There is no farriery training college in Romania, no system of qualification, and no training material. Shortage of suitable tools is also an issue. Horse owners tend to wait too long before visiting the farrier, again partly due to lack of understanding. At the same time, blacksmithing skills - making and repairing steel items such as ploughs and carts - are good, and most blacksmiths are ingenious at achieving results.



<< An 8yr old stallion's hoof in the condition that it entered the village. Otherwise the horse was in good condition.



The second photo shows what a local farrier did, including (typically for Romania) cutting off the toe and dropping the heel >>



<< Overgrown Toe

~ This horse came in for shoeing. As I haven't an arc welder and can't add toe pieces and calkins without a delay going to another workshop, the owner insisted on having the removes refitted. I'll get K shoes on this horse next time round. Would you have cut the toe back as far as a K shoe requires, or would you have done something special? I reckon the removes were about 1.5cm longer than a K shoe of the same width, and the trimming at the toe would have gone back beyond the white line at the toe.



I just saw this shoe. It was made (not here!) for a horse that wears one side of one shoe excessively. It has a joint deformity. No doubt due to lack of farrier care as a foal >>



I have started an equine welfare charity, the first in Romania, called the Working Horse Association of Romania. My first approach was to the World Equine Organisation, a UK charity that seeks to provide training to overcome equine welfare problems.

We generously started to train a Romanian farrier to act as a future instructor, however the farrier ended up obtaining work in Spain (where it later emerged that some of his family had emigrated), such were his new skills. I applied for a variety of grants to bring WEO's instructor to Romania, however it became clear that the main development agencies were not interested in anything to do with animals or peasant agriculture. I also submitted an article to the Forge magazine, which resulted in a number of replies. Several UK farriers kindly donated tools. However the most important response came from Jeff Newnham, who wanted to provide training material.

From my point of view as an engineer and horse owner - I have 20 trail riding and agricultural horses - Jeff has provided an exceptionally clear set of instructions for my farrier to use. He made the mechanics of how to place shoes correctly easy to understand. Jeff also guided me to obtain the most suitable shoes (Kerckheart DF side clipped fronts), and a simple yet effective set of farriery tools.



The result has been a dramatic improvement in the quality of shoeing offered by my farrier, who incidentally is 19 years old and the son of a blacksmith. The photos show what has been achieved within months. The horses look and go better, and stay sound. They are probably the best shod horses in Romania. My farrier also understands why the new method is correct - how the shoeing matches the anatomy of the equine leg and the wear found on the hooves of feral horses.

<< A shot of our new workshop - nearer to completion that it looks as all the equipment exists and it just needs plastering and painting.



Here are two shots showing what my farrier has achieved using K shoes (with added tow pieces and calkins) on a horse that came in with very long toes. I didn't get a before shot, but you can estimate how long the toes were. We are very pleased with the result, and so is the owner.



A horse came in that had broken a shoe. The owner wanted just that one replaced. We put on one of our new draught shoes. Here are shots of the new shoe (left front) and also an old one (right front) for comparison. The old shoe is fairly typical of shoeing in this country, and has probably been on the horse for three months. The new one looks a lot better, supports the heel, shortens the toe, and generally has the relation of the shoe to the foot about right. The owner was very pleased.



One shot of a K show after removal. Here are the polished marks where the heel expands and contracts. Three shots of Romanian shoes. One standard shoe on removal (probably after three months). One winter ice shoe with tungsten points.



The next step is to spread out the benefits. This involves two main thrusts - dealing with more of the problem horses within this village (where there are some five hundred horses) and bringing the new methods to more localities. Some of the problem horses have very badly over-grown hooves, and we shall need Jeff's advice. I will be sending digital images by email for his advice. To reach other places, I need to publicise what is happening here. Television is a good means of getting the work known about. Then I shall need teaching material to supply to farriers and owners, which Jeff will provide and I shall translate into the Romanian language. I intend to create a Romanian language equine welfare website, which will include farriery training material.





Toe pieces and calkins have been welded onto K shoes for this 14hh Hutzul stallions. Experience shows they last about 200km (=10days) when fitted plain. The nail heads wear off very quickly on concrete roads, and then the shoes are soon lost.



Romanian tools



<< Harvesting potatoes

Whilst it seems implausible that village blacksmiths over here will look at the internet, a growing number of schools do have computers and internet access, and pupils will be able to download and print pages for local study. I intend to import and sell Kerckheart shoes, which will give farriers the best opportunity to achieve good results. I am hoping too that Jeff will be able to visit us here during 2003, which will be a great opportunity for training local farriers.

Here are three photos of a 7 year old Lipizzaner mare.. We re-used K shoes, adding a bit of weld to make them last longer. The image above right and the first image below show the foot before we have trimmed the toe.



Compare these latest photographs with others taken less than a year before.

<< Here is Gitana shod with side clips in the way that was demonstrated through the photo sequence. It looks like we could have got away with fewer nails and maybe rasped a bit less off the tow (left it more rounded) but we can work on these things.

Here are two more images. They show a TB-cross mare 6 weeks after shoeing and then freshly shod. She has been going forward well, with none of her former stumbling



Shots of an Ardennes cross goodness-knows-what 6 years old used mainly for riding. I have just added a bit of weld to make the shoes last longer. She seems to have rather flat feet, and has a history of lameness (usually after "traditional" shoeing).

