

A farrier wearing a headband and glasses is focused on working on a horse's lower leg. The horse's leg is held steady, and the farrier is using a tool. The background shows a stable with wooden walls and various equipment.

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Shoein' For A Living...

Last year, Black Tie Affair won over \$2 million and veteran farrier Joe Trhlik nailed every shoe on this Thoroughbred.

*By Michael R. Gallenberger,
Assistant Editor*

IT'S OFTEN HECTIC and confusing with 35 farriers shoeing in excess of 2,000 racing horses at Arlington International Racecourse.

Plus there are hundreds of train-



EARLY MORNING TRAINING. A few of the 2,000 horses on hand at the Chicago area's Arlington Racecourse head out for early morning training.

ers, veterinarians, horse owners and even bettors at the Arlington Heights, Ill., track who have their

own opinions on the best way to shoe a horse.

Yet veteran track farrier Joe

Trhlik of Downers Grove, Ill., wouldn't trade places with anyone when it comes to shoeing almost year-round at the three largest Midwestern tracks located around Chicago.

And as fellow farriers and trainers told me during my workday with Joe, he's one of the best. Here's what I learned yesterday.

6:00 a.m. Ringggggggggggggg! The telephone rings for my wake-up call at the Rolling Meadows Motel 6 just off Illinois Highway 53 in Rolling Meadows, Ill. I am no more than 5 minutes from the Arlington Racecourse which is where I will soon meet farrier Joe Trhlik.

As I'm dressing, I think how exciting it will be spending the day with Joe at the race track. I dress lightly because the weather calls for temperatures near 90 with high humidity.

6:35 a.m. I hand in my key at the motel's desk, then throw my duffel and camera bag in the car.

6:45 a.m. I stop at McDonald's and order two scrambled eggs, sausage, muffin and a large orange juice.

7:00 a.m. I drive up to Gate 9 at the Arlington track and ask security for my pass. The security people tell me a pass wasn't left for me, so I am asked to drive inside the gates and talk with the lieutenant. He tells me he didn't know there was a magazine for farriers and eventually I get Joe paged over the public address system.

7:15 a.m. Joe arrives and informs me he was running a little late this morning. I park my car and ride with Joe in his blue Chevy van. Joe says we'll start the day with a quick tour of the race track before we do any shoeing.

7:17 a.m. Joe shoes Thoroughbreds at Arlington, Hawthorne and Sportsman's race tracks in the Chicago area. Joe has also shod pleasure horses, Clydesdales, saddle horses, show hunters and jumpers, Standardbreds and harness horses.

Joe shoes at Arlington from mid-May until October. He shoes every



BUSY DAYS. While Joe Trhlik shoes an average of seven race horses a day, he often does as many as 14, depending on their racing schedule. With this many horses to shoe, Joe admits it can often be a long and very tiring day.

race day, which is Wednesday through Monday. On Tuesdays, Joe tries to sleep late, but because of his routine he is usually up at 6:00 a.m.

Joe tells me it bothers him sometimes that he doesn't have much time off, but then he quickly adds, "It's what keeps me going."

7:19 a.m. While driving to the track's blacksmith shop, Joe tells

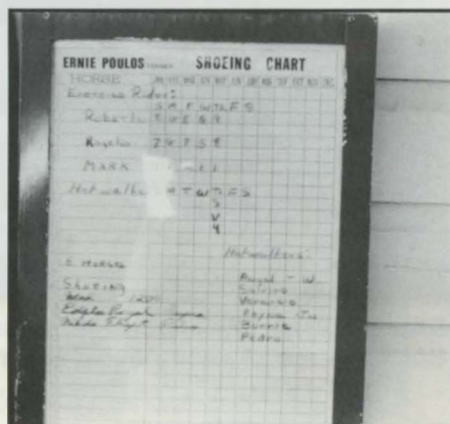
me about the prestigious horses he shod. "I shod Black Tie Affair, King's Sloop and Peach Of It," he says proudly. "Black Tie Affair won the \$3 Million Breeders' Cup Classic and was the 1991 Horse of the Year. I put every shoe on this million dollar horse last year.

"I've shod horses for top trainers Charlie Bettis, Chris Block, Eddie Cole, David Hinsley, Ernie Poulos, Danny Switzer and Emmett Sylvester."

Trhlik also says he is the first farrier from Illinois to ever shoe the Horse of the Year and the horse that won the \$3 Million Breeders' Cup.

7:22 a.m. We arrive at the blacksmith's shop. I'm quickly impressed and in awe of the entire race track. While walking around the 20-by-60-ft. shop, Joe tells me there are 12 spots, each complete with forge and anvil for farriers.

Joe says the reason for the farriers' shop is the Illinois Racing Board doesn't allow open fires in or between barns and stable area.



SHOEING BOARD. Each trainer has a board where essential shoeing information will be written out.

"What farriers have to do is make a pattern of the shoes at the barn, then go to the blacksmith's shop and forge them," he says.

Joe tells me he generally goes to the blacksmith's shop only once a week, but sometimes it can vary. "There are times I won't go to the shop for a month," he says. "Then there are times when I am there all the time. For instance if I need special shoes for tomorrow, I would have to go to the shop and make them later today.

"Most of the time there is nobody at the shop because all farriers'



TRACK VETERAN. Henry Butler has been at the track for 35 years and works closely with Joe Trhilk.

schedules vary. But then there may be times when there are five or six farriers working there. We have many fine shoers here and we all get along well. Years ago that wasn't the case."

He says there may be as many as 35 farriers at Arlington Park servicing well over 2,000 horses. "There are horseshoers from all over the country," he says.

Joe tells me the keen competition for work at the race track makes it imperative for farriers to work closely with each other.

7:24 a.m. Leaving the shop, Joe tells me was born in Berwyn, Ill. just a few miles from Sportsman's Race track. He originally wanted to be a carpenter, but later went to horseshoeing school in California.

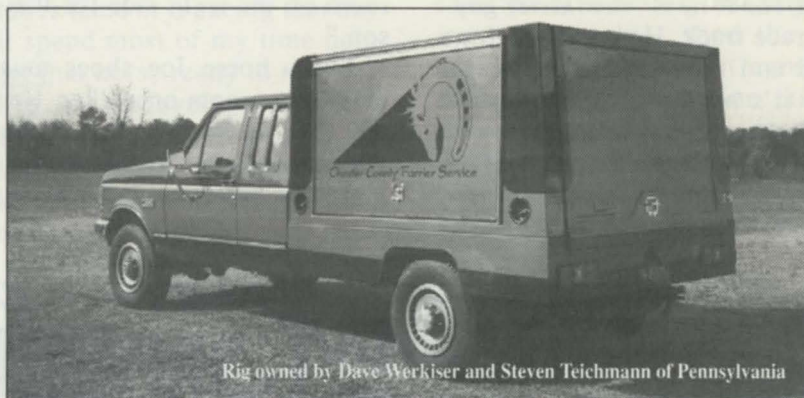
Joe graduated from Porterville Horseshoeing School in Porterville, Calif., in December, 1965. He later became a member of the Journeymen Horseshoeing Union in March of 1971.

"It's kind of funny," he says. "When I first started shoeing, I was shoeing in cheaper races and now I shoe the more expensive races."

He scheduled four horses for shoeing today, but on an average he shoes seven horses a day. "Sometimes I shoe 13 or 14 horses a day," he says. "But when I shoe that many, it makes for a long, tiring day."

Joe says fighting the Chicago traffic can be a problem. "In the morning it's not too bad," he says.

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"I can make it from my house in Downers Grove to the track in 35 minutes, but at night it can take as long as an hour and a half."

7:26 a.m. Joe's typical day starts at 7 a.m. and ends at 4:30 p.m. "Some days I am here till 6 p.m.," he says. "Some days I come early to make special shoes for the day. There are times when it can be a pain, but that's what keeps me going. It's like being a chipmunk on a wheel. You're always on the move."

7:30 a.m. Driving around the grounds we are stopped by a trainer who asks Joe for his advice on treating a lame horse. I pick up quickly that Joe is very knowledgeable and well respected by trainers.

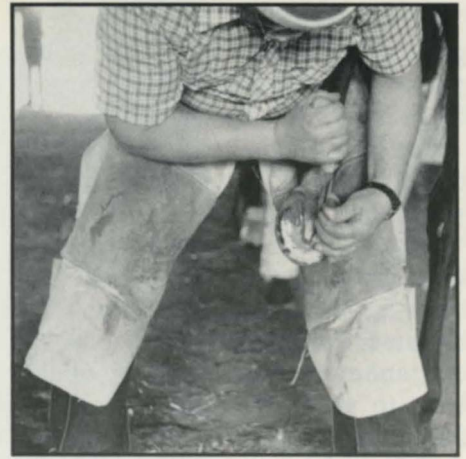
I ask Joe if he is "the farrier guy" at the race track. He pondered for a second and then says, "The way I see it, it's not how good or bad a horseshoer you are, but if you are shoeing the winning horse, then you are the guy."

7:33 a.m. We pull up to barn No. 9 and meet trainer Ernie T. Poulos. Joe tells me Poulos is one of the top trainers at the track. Joe walks to a stall and checks on the horse Leading Ballerina who is scheduled to race this afternoon.

Joe tells me he used a set of glue-on shoes on this filly. He uses the glue-on shoe when he feels he has "nothing to nail the shoe to."

7:35 a.m. As we walk through the barn, Joe tells me it is important to stay on the left side when walking by a horse in the barn. That's because a horse usually will kick to the right. "If the handler is on the left and he shanks the horse's halter it will usually kick to the right," he says. "They usually leave more room on the right side for that reason."

Every horse Joe shoes must be held by a groom or walker. He says the Illinois Racing Board doesn't allow the horse to be tied. "They feel it's a safety hazard," he says.



TRIM BOTH SIDES. Joe Trhilk recommends trimming both sides of the frog on race horses so no foreign objects or diseases can enter.

7:40 a.m. Joe says a horse must pass many checks with different people before being allowed to race. "The veterinarian will check the horse for soundness in the barn," he says. "The horse will be checked again in the paddock area."

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Then before the horse goes into the starting gate, it is checked again. If at any point they find something wrong with the horse, it is scratched from the race."

7:45 a.m. Joe tells me about a horse named That's A Fleet who developed a bruised frog. "He stepped on a rock," he says. "The healing process was like a blood blister on humans. The horse eventually shed the frog and I made a special frog pad to help the frog heal and to lessen the frog's load."

7:51 a.m. Joe tells me he's been shoeing at Arlington since 1977. He joined the track union in 1971. "When you join the union you must pass an exam," he says. "Most tracks aren't regulated by a union."

"To pass the union's exam, a farrier must swedge four shoes from bar stock. They must make two bar shoes to fit a pattern and two hind block or plain or sticker shoes. Then you have to correctly shoe a race horse. There are no written or verbal exams."

8:00 a.m. We ride by another barn and I ask Joe how he plans his day. "I read the *Daily Racing Forum* the night before," he says. "That way I can see which horses will be running the next day. Then I

"I read the Daily Racing Forum each night and this determines which horses I will shoe first the next day..."

plan around how my customer's horses return to the stables after being on the training track or if the horse has problems. For instance if a horse is lame or is racing that day, I will spend most of my time helping get that horse ready to race.

"If a horse develops a quarter crack, I'll check it regularly depending on how severe the quarter crack is. I may patch the crack and put on an egg-bar shoe."

"My last priority for scheduling are the horses needing regular maintenance."

8:10 a.m. Joe explains more about the quarter crack problems in race horses. "A horse will sometimes grab a quarter jumping out of the starting gate," he says, "or a hyper horse just dancing around will tend to grab a quarter. The quarter crack tends to heal on the outside but not on the inside. An infection will start and bust out as a quarter crack in front of the old injury (the spot he stepped on)."

8:15 a.m. Trainer Art Blaze walks up to the van and talks with Joe about his horses. After they talk, Joe tells me he shod for Blaze some months ago and his shoeing resulted in a mutual friendly parting. "I thought I shod the horse correctly, but he didn't agree," he says. "So we parted on friendly terms. Disagreements happen quite often at the race track."

8:30 a.m. Joe doesn't carry an anvil and forge in his truck like



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most farriers, because the equipment is housed at the blacksmith's shop. He's more than happy to let any farrier use his blacksmithing tools.

8:45 a.m. Another trainer tells Joe about his horse that's pulling pads and wedge egg-bar shoes. Joe later tells me that he would try putting a glue-on shoe on to prevent

It. Joe tells me the trainer for Peach of It is Eddie Cole and that this mare has won over \$600,000 and recently won \$250,000 in the 1992 Sixty Sails Stake Race.

9:10 a.m. On the way to see trainer David Hinsley, I find out what a farrier celebrity Joe really is. (Later in the day I find out how true this is—more on this later).



ALUMINUM SHOES WITH TOE GRABS. Thrillk finds trainers prefer horses shod with aluminum since they are lightweight and give better traction.

the horse from pulling the shoes.

8:50 a.m. On the way to the training track, we stop at another barn to see when the horses will be back in the stables. Joe explains he must do this so the grooms don't pack or grease the horse before shoeing.

"Most of the time it is taken care of for me," he says. "But very few times it's not. If they rub furacin or poultice all the way up the legs, you can't shoe the horse."

9:00 a.m. We stop by the training track, then head for the racetrack kitchen to have something to cool us down. Temperatures are already nearing 80 degrees. Joe buys two cans of Coke and we take a short break. After our break Joe takes me to Barn 2 to take a look at another big money winner, Peach of

"I've been on TV about eight times," he says smiling. "In the early 70s I was on Ray Rayner's morning show that was broadcast to Chicago and I did an interview for another show that went to Singapore and Hong Kong. I talked about horseshoeing and race horses. I also talked about what it was like traveling across the country shoeing Clydesdales.

"At the time I was also shoeing Clydesdales for Wilson Meat Packing Co., based in Chicago. One of these Clydesdales stood 19.2 hands and tipped the scales at 2,600 lbs."

Joe also once shod zebras for a Hollywood movie.

9:15 a.m. We stop at Barn No. 7 to shoe Endonada Gold for trainer David Hinsley. Joe checks with Hinsley to make sure the filly isn't

hurting and there isn't anything wrong when running or walking. "If there are any problems with the hooves hitting, it is my job to change that," he says.

9:20 a.m. Joe stocks his truck every morning. "I have to restock every day," he says. "I sometimes stock at night, if I get home early."

9:30 a.m. The tools that Joe carries in his farrier box are a foot stand, files, rasps, nippers, hammers, clincher and stall jack. Joe does not need to carry an anvil or forge because he's stores them at the race track's blacksmith's shop. "That's why some track farriers are able to shoe out of the trunk of their cars," he says.

9:45 a.m. Joe starts trimming a hoof and tells me that he injured his back shoeing race horses a couple years ago. "I've had many horses fall on me," he says. "I've been kicked a number of times as any farrier has. I've been to the hospital for X-rays, broken bones and bad bruises.

"About 3 years ago at Hawthorne, I had a horse fall on me. I wasn't out of work, but I couldn't stand up straight or walk without hurting. Bending over was all right so I could still shoe. This is one of the reasons I still use a foot stand. It saves my back."

9:50 a.m. While shoeing Endonada Gold, Joe explains why the

"A race horse left with long hooves will more than likely injure itself..."

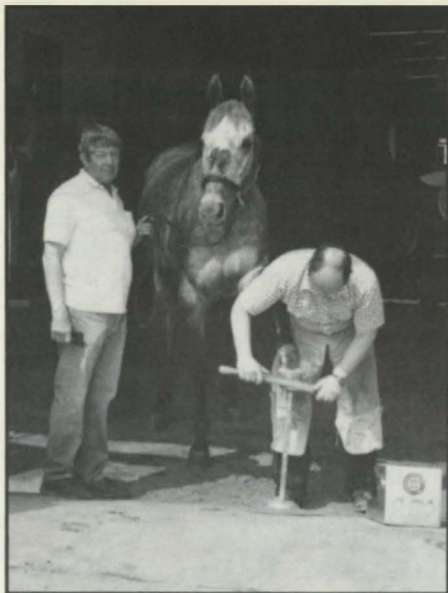
hooves of race horses are trimmed short. "A race horse left with long hooves will more than likely injure itself," he says. "Less hoof puts less stress on the knees, tendons, ankles and ligaments. A horse at top speed puts a tremendous amount of stress on the lower limbs and tendons. It's part of my job to make sure I groom the horse's hooves to the groomed race track surface."

10:00 a.m. Joe tells me a typical farrier would probably rather shoe race horses than show horses. "Most race horses are trimmed flat," he says. "Typically, no special shoes are needed. What you're using with race horses are flat shoes with good toe grabs."

Most shoes he uses are aluminum. "I would say 90% to 95% are aluminum shoes," he says. "But I do use some steel. I use Victory Racing Plate, Mustad's Race Glue, Dalric and Dalmer. The type of shoe used depends on the horse and the problem.

"Every once in a while I'll also get calls from the Illinois Equine Hospital in Naperville to put on a set of glue-on shoes."

10:13 a.m. While Joe finishes the fronts we talk about other farriers from other areas coming to the track to shoe. "I really don't have a problem with it," he says. "Some farriers come from Florida, California or New York and get more



IT'S THE LAW! In Illinois, the State Racing Commission requires that every race horse be held while being shod for safety reasons.

money. But that's because in the area they are from, they get more for their shoeing. It doesn't bother me. I am making a good living.

"I've always loved horseshoe-

ing. It's a nasty job but someone has to do it. I like what I'm doing. What I enjoy about horseshoeing is talking to people. My customers are very nice."

10:19 a.m. Joe tells me his shoeing business has kept him very busy. "Right now I'm in a position where I have more work than I can handle," he says. "I turn down work all the time."

I ask him if he thought about hiring an apprentice and Joe says he's not tough enough for an apprentice to learn and still allow him to make money.

"I'm just an easy going guy," he says. "I've had five apprentices. I don't require the work they need to do so I can make a profit, which is the name of the game.

"Insurance and lawsuits are also a concern. An apprentice could get hurt so easily in this business. Everything I have is paid for and I don't want to lose it.

"Last year I had such a success-

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ful year I had to borrow money to pay my taxes."

10:30 a.m. Joe finishes shoeing while I ask him if insurance bothers him. "It does concern me," he says. "Years ago insurance wasn't that bad. The problem is health insurance. I pay well over \$12,000 a year just for health insurance. And that's only coverage for me and my wife."

Joe's done shoeing and says "muchas gracias" to the groom.

10:32 a.m. I help Joe pack the truck and he tells me theft can be a big problem at the track. "You hear stories all the time about stuff being stolen," he says. "But not long ago I left a drill in the street at a barn where I was shoeing. A trainer picked it up and returned it to me. The amazing thing was I didn't even know who the guy was."

10:35 a.m. Before we leave, we check a board to see which horses are scheduled to receive a lasix injection. "The lasix treatment for horses with bleeding lungs is a diuretic type of shot," Joe says. "It affects the horse's urinary tract. The key is to get the horse shod before they get the shot. If you don't, you have to wear a wet suit when shoeing."

10:45 a.m. We stop at barn No. 2 to shoe Danny Switzer's Fancing Ed Dancing. Joe talks with trainer Switzer and later tells me this mare walks to the outside. Joe doesn't get alarmed and says it isn't really a problem because most horses tend to walk to the outside. The trainer told Joe this horse may be going bad.

Joe has a lot of respect for trainers and gives a lot of weight to what they tell him. "They're all professionals," he says. "Most are watching the horse all day to see what's wrong. The majority are good at noticing problems. They see the horse all the time, where I only see it once in a while."

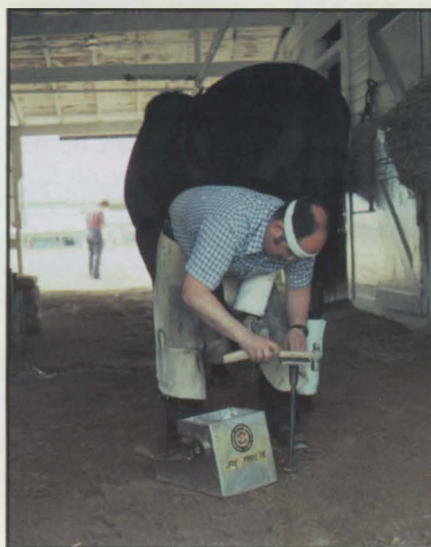
11:50 a.m. After examining the horse and having the horse walk in the barn, Joe determines the right front needs a 3 degree wedge and the left front needs a 1 degree wedge.

11:55 a.m. Joe uses a special rubber wedge to protect the heel. According to Joe, this wedge will take pressure off the wall and give it to the frog. "You want to have equal pressure on the wall and the frog," he says.

"The special pad is easy to take off on race day. I just use my nippers and cut out the wedge and don't have to reshoe the horse.

"An egg-bar shoe may be better for training, but in this case it would have to be changed when the horse raced."

12-Noon. Joe starts to rock the toes to keep the horse from developing a shin problem. He tells me



FEW TOOLS. With a forge and anvil located in the blacksmith shop, Trhilk only carries a few tools. They include foot stand, stall jack, files, hammers, clinchers, nippers and a few other assorted shoeing tools. This is why Trhilk says some track farriers can shoe out of the trunks of their cars.

horses that run slow usually don't have problems. "Most horses that run have minor problems and I stress minor," he says.

12:10 p.m. Joe shows me the correct way to trim the frog. "Both sides of the frog on a race horse should be trimmed nice and neat," he says. "The reason is so no foreign objects and diseases can get in

the frog. It's a must for the frog of race horses to be neatly trimmed."

12:20 p.m. Joe puts the finishing touches on Fancing Ed Dancing and we pack up Joe's van. "Muchas gracias."

12:30 p.m. We stop at the track kitchen for lunch which is a hot ham and cheese sandwich. We split

"I shoe most horses the way I feel it will best help the horse..."

the sandwich because there isn't much time till the next shoeing.

Over lunch, Joe tells me he raises miniature horses. He says he's been raising them for 7 years and he currently has 15 head. He has shod a number of miniature horses that went on to become champions.

We are joined by farriers Ron Morris from Pennsylvania, Jim Milner from Florida and Bill Sculzitti who goes back to Louisiana in the winter to shoe. They all tell me what a great farrier Joe is.

12:55 p.m. We stop back at Ernie Poulos' area to shoe Cozy Miss and Tory Sound. Joe checks with the trainers to see if both are running well.

1:00 p.m. Joe tells me he will use Oak Victory Bond shoes with synthetic backing on Tory Sound. "I tend to use a lot of these shoes," Joe says. "It's just a preference I have. I shoe most horses the way I feel it will best help the horse."

"I know most of my customers' likes and dislikes. Some trainers like pads and some use none at all. Overall most trainers prefer pads.

"When I use pads it gives the horse a cushion. Plain shoes without pads will stay on longer than shoes with pads.

"I don't use full pads too often, because they cover up the entire hoof and reduce traction. I use mostly rim pads on race horses. Very rarely will you find you need a full pad. But as every horseshoer will tell you, there are exceptions."

1:17 p.m. While rasping a hoof on the foot stand, Joe tells me the horses he works with are very fit and he may not be able to solve all of a horse's problems. "I work with healthy athletic horses," he says. "If they have major problems they will go back to the farm. If the horse isn't raceable, it's not going on the track."

"My job as a professional is to help the horse race better. The best thing a horseshoer can do, if he does nothing else, is not to hurt the horse. If a horseshoer can keep the horse sound and the horse has the ability, he can help the horse race well. If the horse doesn't have the ability, it won't do any better no matter what you do."

"There is a rule of the track that says you can always slow a horse down, but you can't necessarily make it go faster."

1:35 p.m. While Joe clinches the final nails on Tory Sound, I get my Espanol lesson for the day. I have found a majority of hot walkers and grooms are of Spanish decent. When Joe has to communicate with them, he speaks Spanish. I learn caballo is horse; un caballo is one horse; dos caballos is two horses and cuatro zapatos is four shoes.

1:45 p.m. Joe starts shoeing Cozy Miss. She is a little jumpy and is kicking. Joe says he doesn't have

Thoroughbred horses are very sensitive. If you talk to them, they'll respond. "Cozy Miss is ready to race," he says. "But if you notice since I started talking to her, she has settled down."

2:10 p.m. Joe doesn't have a set way of shoeing a horse. "Sometimes I'll match the front and sometimes I'll go all the way around from front to rear," he says.

"I have found horses are more comfortable if I work from front to back. If you move the horse around a lot the horse will get excited."

"One other thing I try to do is put the shoe on immediately. I try not to trim the hoof down because you may break the hoof wall."

2:25 p.m. Joe's done shoeing and says "muchas gracias."

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"I have found horses are more comfortable if I work from front to back..."

many problem horses. "If the horses are fit and the trainers hasn't found a race that is right for them, they tend to be more anxious," he says.

"But if the horses are raced regularly, then they are OK. The trainers want the horses on the fine edge when they race. Usually Thoroughbred horses race every 10 days. Right now she is very fit and ready to race."

1:56 p.m. Joe tells me most



Circle Reader Service No. 712

billed once a month. He sends a bill to the trainers who bill the owners.

2:48 p.m. We walk over to the next barn and watch farrier Lynus Baldwin from Hot Springs, Ark., finish shoeing. Lynus is having problems shoeing this Thoroughbred because of the warm weather. Flies are really bothering the horse.

3:00 p.m. We head to the track. We are particularly interested in races seven and eight. In race No. 8, Joe shod Leading Ballerina and she happens to be the favorite in the race today. "She doesn't grow much hoof," he says.

In race seven Joe shod Socialize. Joe says this filly was just out getting some racing exercise.

3:30 p.m. It's funny when you hear all the stories about what happened on your way to the track, but this one is better than most. Joe and I were walking through the paddock area when a woman with a microphone stops us. Joe tells her I'm doing a story for the *American Far-*

riers Journal. Right away she wants to put me on TV. I declined the invitation, since I wasn't dressed for it anyway. Instead, Joe gets an interview set up for tomorrow.

3:57 p.m. Joe tells me a little about his family. Joe met his wife,



BLACK TIE AFFAIR. A \$2 million dollar winner, Joe Trhlik put every shoe on the Thoroughbred in 1991.

Janet, almost 30 years ago and has two sons, Jamie and John. "My wife is great," he says. "She really takes good care of me." And that she did.

She packed two of everything in the insulated lunch box for Joe on this farrier/editor field trip. Wait till she learns we ate out twice today!

4:00 p.m. Joe's relationship with track vets is very good. "I kid around with them," he says. "We get along well. We are both out to do what is best for the horse. Basically, our interests are the same."

4:00 p.m. Joe and I catch a quick bite to eat and take our seat for the races. Socialize takes a lead in its race, but then runs out of gas to finish fifth, while Leading Ballerina, in a close race down to the stretch, was held off at the last moment and finished fourth. Joe says both horses raced well.

5:00 p.m. Joe takes me to my car and I bid him farewell. I thank him for spending the day with me. As I drive back to Milwaukee, I think about coming back and spending another day with Joe and learning lots more about shoeing race horses. O

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