



Larry Bender shod some of the best for some of the best throughout his career. He was the official farrier at Devon (pictured) for 30 years.

The Man Behind The Hammer LARRY BENDER

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER



Larry Bender and Beverly Jean Clouser walked down the aisle August 29, 1964 and then walked through life together for the next 55 years.



Bender served the famed Penn National Horse Show as its farrier for 35 years. This scene was vintage 1972.

“I’ve known two truly great men in my lifetime:” said Pennsylvania trainer Gary Guz. “Garland Bradshaw and Larry Bender!”

Industry professionals over and over had similar reactions when responding to the November 5th passing of noted farrier Larry Bender (77) at his Lower Paxton Township, Pennsylvania residence. Bender had been battling with PSC, a rare liver bile duct disease.

The grandson of a horse doctor, Bender was the son of the late Mildred (Kelso) and Kenneth Bender. The Central Dauphin High School graduate went on to graduate from farrier school at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, California and did his “graduate studies” with Charles (Zimmie) Zimmerman of Linglestown.

The only thing he loved more than shoeing horses and the people in the show horse industry was his high school sweetheart and wife of 56 years, Beverly. They built a beautiful life and a beautiful home, both loving nature, animals and people.

A sought after farrier of American Saddlebreds, Hackney Ponies, and Morgans, Bender spent 55 years helping trainers and

owners make their horses comfortable and travel correctly. Among his clients over the years were George Nash, Gary Guz, Tom Caisse, Frank McConnell, Rob Byers, Mike Barlow, Charles and Wendall Jones, Sullivan Davis, Jim Koller, Rich Robertson, David Kerger, Todd Mathieson, Linda Coffin-Roman, Mark Mason, Jimmy Arnold, Bill Reed, Sr., Brad and Nancy Lukens, Beth Wentz, Bill Fields, Sally Eichlin, Harry Binkley, Marty Waldman, Jimmy Orphanos, Leonard Fishback, Vickie and Charlie Greer, Phyliss Zuber, and many others.

Some of the great show stars he enjoyed shoeing were Stonewall’s Final Addition, I’m A New Yorker, The Puppeteer, Symbolism, Sultan’s Supreme Secret, Hayfield’s Great Guy, Spencer County, Vindicator, R-Bar-B Lord Spence, HVK Vibrance, Trija’s Vigil Pepper, Lady’s Enticement, Braveheart, Diablo, JD Matthews, Oprah Winfrey, and Mr.’s Bones.

He also took great pride in watching his wife Beverly show such stars CH Rip City, Santana Sage, Anacacho Mayday, UNH Cameo, UNH Faraday, Tea and Honey, and Hickory Lane Pride.

“He was one of the top farriers in the Northeast,” said fellow blacksmith Tim Keller. “He was always willing to help anyone, he had a lot of fun, and loved to cook. We had a lot of great times in that shoeing shop. There were a lot of jokes and pranks played on one another. Besides being a well-respected farrier, he was great guy.”

“Larry did my work for 34 years,” said Gary Guz. “He was great, taught me so much about how a horse travels and shoeing. I think what he was the absolute best at was controlling the break over on a horse, keeping it travelling so correct.

“He was very dedicated. If he had been here working on a few changes, in a day or two he would call to see if the changes were working. He knew American Saddlebreds and the physics of motion. He always wanted to watch a horse work so he could understand what it needed.

“Also, if I had one that tore a foot off and he was away working at another farm, as soon as he was finished there he would be at my place to fix my one horse. That doesn’t happen a lot today.

“I think the thing that made Larry so unique was he shod a little different for each trainer because he said each trainer had a different

method, a different way of mousing a horse and that effected the way their horses traveled.

“As a person, there were none better. He was very intelligent. Larry’s amount of knowledge was unbelievable and he could fix anything. One thing that I hope has rubbed off on me is he never quit learning. He was always willing to learn from others, always watching and paying attention. He would say to me, ‘why didn’t I think of that?’

“I really miss him.”

The outpouring of love and respect for Larry has been remarkable, but that’s the kind of person he was. If you met him once and shared a passion, be it horses, shoeing, dogs, gardening, antiques, or tinkering, he was your friend.

As many have said, he was always willing to help. He took great time and pride with his apprentices, including Joe Alfano, Chester Sebastian, Brian Koch, Craig Colflesh, and Tom Johns.

“I’ve never had a farrier like him,” said J & L Stables’ Linda Coffin-Roman. “He knew everything and was especially good with a gaited horse. Larry was so great to work with and his knowledge was unbelievable. I loved

that he always wanted to watch a horse work before shoeing them. He would listen to what you had to say, but he wanted to see it work himself.

“I was so blessed he came to shoe for me when Dave Dorn retired. It was an absolute blessing! Julia Wester’s Domino Dots was the last horse he wanted to shoe before retiring in 2019. He loved her.

“When he put that last foot down, he quickly said, ‘Put her away.’ I asked, ‘Don’t you want to give her a mint?’ He said, ‘Yes,’ with tears rolling down his face.

“He had worked on that mare for five years and loved her so much. I can’t say enough great things about our friend and farrier.”

To have had a life-long partner and have a career that you were passionate about, along with friends all across the country, is the best anyone can ask for. The man behind the hammer for so many show ring greats was the same man who enjoyed many of God’s wonders on this earth and loved his days here sharing them with Beverly.

Larry Bender, you will be sorely missed by many.



With an assist from Dave Dorn, while Lonnie Lavery holds the horse, Larry replaced this shoe during one of his early years at Devon in this H. Leon Sargent picture.



Julia Wester’s Domino Dots was the last horse that Bender shod. Trained by Linda Coffin-Roman, the mare won many titles with Bender behind the hammer for five years they were together.



The shoeing shop was the scene of many great times and many great tales. Joining Larry (far left) in this group were (l-r) Joe Alfano, Brian Koch, George Nash, Dave Dorn, and Carl Kheun.