

SUPPORTING ROLES

Name:	Simon Hopcraft
Based:	Northampton
Profession:	Foot trimmer
Highs:	'Happy' feet means happy cows
Lows:	Kicks and cuts

Simon Hopcraft: "Painful scrapes and nicks are all part of the job"

Pedicures with passion

text Rachael Porter

Northampton-based foot trimmer Simon Hopcraft trims the feet of between 250 and 300 cows a week. He often works six days a week and he never tires of it, which is a good thing as he says he's busier than he's ever been, to the point where he's taking on a third member of staff to join the Midland Cattle Services team.

For him, foot trimming is a passion that started 17 years ago and today he prides himself on giving cows the best pedicure that money can buy, within a 100-mile radius of his Northampton base. With this pedicure there's no time for a social chat – Simon says it's vital that he concentrates on each and every cow as invariably there are a lot to get through. "I have to remain focused on what I do. It's the only way I can lift the feet of between six and 10 cows per hour – my usual work rate, depending on the set up and the condition of the cows' feet."

Foot condition is improving among his clients in the sense that Simon does see more cows on a preventative basis. "I do more 'functional' trimming now than I've ever done – rather than simply being called in to 'firefight' when lameness is already a problem. But that said, I still think that I see too many lame cows – about 40% of all the cows I lift the feet of in a typical week are lame."

In fact, he believes that the incidence of lameness is twice what it was when he started trimming feet back in 1992. "Larger cows, cubicles that are too small, fewer trained staff looking after larger herds, intensive management systems – they all have a role to play."

Hydraulic crushes, with built in lights, aid his day-to-day work. "They're safer than the old style crushes that have the wind-up ratchet mechanism and they're also better for the cow. The whole experience is less stressful on the animal – and the foot trimmer. The cost is quite stressful though – we have two of these modern crushes and each one cost just shy of £25,000!"

But they're vital tools that allow Simon and his team to do a good job. "We take a lot of pride in our work and much of the new work that comes in is through 'word of mouth', so we know that producers – and their cows – are happy with what we do.

"It's a satisfying job and the painful scrapes and nicks, that we pick up almost routinely because the knives we use have to be razor sharp, are all part of the job. If we didn't enjoy foot trimming we wouldn't do it. And if we didn't do it well we wouldn't have any customers."

