**Sarah Todd talks to a man who campaigned for proper recognition for equine dentistry.**

HAVING served 12 years as a paramedic with the Royal Air Force, Marcus Fasey was looking for a life outside the services.

"I feel very lucky to have spent all those years doing a job I loved," says Marcus. "But I had a 'now or never' feeling about starting a business of my own, having met my wife and approaching the age of 30."

The only question was what to do? He'd always had an interest in horses and when he couldn't find a qualified equine dentist the answer was – quite literally – staring him in the face.

"There was nobody out there so I thought let's give it a go," recalls Marcus, who lives just outside Rotherham with wife Rachel and their 13 month-old daughter Matilda.

The big dilemma was that there was nowhere in this country offering training. Until this point, a horse with dental problems had to be treated by a vet or "anybody with a rasp".

So, he set off for the American School of Equine Dentistry in West Virginia. "I met some really interesting characters, real horsemen of the old cowboy school," recalls Marcus. "It was a fascinating experience out there, learning the theory about a horse's mouth but also getting stuck in on the practical side."

Back home, even though he had the American qualification, there was still no equivalent in this country, and Marcus campaigned with others for a system of accreditation to be formulated over here.

Eventually, the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA) came up with a Defra-approved equine dentistry exam – which Marcus passed – allowing those that succeed to join the British Association of Equine Dental Technicians (BAEDT).

Seven years on, Marcus is incredibly busy and feels very lucky to have found a second career he loves as much as the first.

"People's perceptions of equine dentistry have been transformed over the past few years," he says.

"Equine dentistry is so respected nowadays – to the extent that there's even a degree course offered in it.

"At one point having a horse's teeth done was seen as something of a luxury – only for expensive racehorses or competition horses. Now it's seen as a necessity, just as vital as worming them and caring for their hooves."

Over the years Marcus has seen some remarkable transformations in his four-legged patients. "There are horses that quite simply, because their teeth have been so painful, haven't been eating and before you've even packed the equipment it's very rewarding to see them tucking into some food," he says. "It's usually as instant as that.

"This also has a knock-on effect when it comes to their performance. It stands to reason that if they are in pain they're never going to relax 100 per cent and give their best."

Up to seven years old, Marcus says he can be

"bang on the money"

when it comes to telling

how old a horse is by looking at its teeth.

"Sometimes it's hard when you visit a horse that somebody has bought thinking it's a certain age – usually younger than what it actually is. You don't want to disappoint them, but the only way is to tell them

the truth."

Marcus adds that it's possible to tell what sort of a lifestyle a horse has had by looking at its teeth. "If you have a racehorse in its stable eating hard food 23 hours a day, it's going to have a completely different set of teeth to an old cob that lives out in a field. The cob will have the better teeth."

When Marcus started out the job was much more physical, with hand-held rasps. "But now I have an electric motorised rasp and the difference is amazing."

A speculum, or gag, is fitted into the horse's mouth to keep it open for the treatment. Some don't bat an eyelid, while others take less kindly to the procedure.

"I've had my ribs broken and teeth smashed – quite ironic really given what I do," he laughs.

Marcus came to my horse and with him being part Arab – known for quite a flighty nature – I wondered how he would react.

He stood as quiet as a lamb. Sharp teeth had, Marcus said, caused some ulceration to his cheeks.

"It's important to take the time to find out about each horse and treat it with the attitude that the job will take as long as it takes.

"You'll never hear me raise my voice to a horse. The best way to describe my manner is probably quiet but firm. Old-fashioned horsemanship really – that they know that I'll treat them kindly but at the same time will not take any nonsense.

"Often it's owners that wind a horse up – they're holding the end of the rope looking so nervous and talking in such a scared voice that

it obviously transfers to

the horse."

Originally from Devon, Marcus has taken to his adopted Yorkshire – his last post was at RAF Leeming.

"There aren't many people who can be working on a 100,000 competition horse at a stately home one minute and on an old pony in an allotment the next," he says.

"It's that variation that makes my job so special. Also to know that not so many years ago that old pony on the allotment would probably never have had its teeth looked at."

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