

The New Forest vet

Besides treating the New Forest ponies, Laura Trigg ‘unpacks’ alpacas and has to explain her blood-stained face at the petrol station

My mum said that from when I was five or six, I was saying I wanted to be a horse doctor, so I'm living the dream really. It's not like some equine practices where you only really see competition horses or racehorses; I treat the New Forest ponies, point-to-pointers and competition animals — but we also treat a variety of other animals.

I think the most unusual thing I've done is “unpacking” an alpaca — the term for alpacas giving birth. I was called to go and help deliver a cria (alpaca baby) and I was told I'd have to unpack it. I thought they were joking.

I've also had to do a Caesarean on a pygmy goat.

She was so small, the owners just put her in a car and brought her in, and because pygmy goats are as round as they are tall, I had to have nurses holding her on the operating table. But she had a tiny, healthy kid.

The moment I knew I wasn't destined to be a small-animal vet was when, about two weeks after I qualified, I was on the yard I kept my horse at and someone said the yard cat was looking fat, and did I think she had worms.

I said, “Yes, definitely,” then two days later she produced four kittens. I thought I'd never live that one down, so I'd better stick to horses.

One of the worst things is if you've been stitching an arterial wound

and no one's thought to tell you your face is covered with blood.

Then, if you go to get petrol on your way home, the attendant looks at you like you're something on *Crimewatch*.

A lot of people think the job is just patting horses and having a jolly old time but you're often out on your own, in the middle of nowhere, having to make crucial decisions quickly in an emergency situation. The pressure of the job is huge.

‘You're out on your own, in the middle of nowhere, making crucial decisions quickly’

My advice to anyone wanting to do this job would be: don't be afraid of hard work, and persistence is key. When I was about 13, I was trying to get work experience, as you need it for vet school. I must have run around 15 to 20 practices and they all said no, I was too young, or just no.

Finally I found one, and I used to go after school to clean kennels and help out. They ended up giving me my reference.

Being a vet is about being a people person. People assume you're not a doctor because you don't like people but every horse, or alpaca, has an owner, and often

the horse is their pride and joy.

You have to have people skills — these owners have to trust that you're doing the best for their animals.

One of the most rewarding cases was a pony who stood on a blackthorn. It had gone straight through her frog and she had a septic tendon sheath. We had to do a standing tendon sheath flush as she wouldn't have been able to travel. It was life or death but we managed it and she's now sound

as a pound and you'd never know anything had been wrong.

I've got an Irish Sport Horse mare whom I've had since she was four and we've evented up to novice. But now I have two children, a baby and a toddler, so although I only work four days a week, it's a juggling act. I've been known to scan a tendon with my son sitting on my knee. I don't know if that will make them want to be vets or put them off! **H&H**
● As told to Eleanor Jones

NEXT WEEK Falconer
Martin Whitley

Picture by Peter Nixon