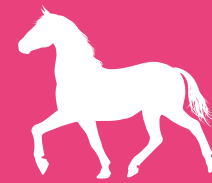


# FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

by Seadown Equine Vets



## What it's really like to become a veterinary surgeon, by a local lad and equine vet.

NOT many children fulfil their dreams. Life can be fraught with difficulties, big and small for both the young and old. Whatever age, it takes passion and dedication to keep focus, to keep on track and to keep committed. And we all need a little bit of luck, along the way.

Alex Tooley was only eight years of age when he made the decision to become a vet. It was a boyhood dream, and growing-up around horses he had a natural and a deep connection with animals. He cared about their wellbeing and their welfare, so taking care of them was in his DNA.



## Challenges

Despite his passion for all animals, Alex, now 23 years old, is the first to admit that becoming a veterinary surgeon was difficult at times. There's lots of hard work and studying, at GCSE, A-levels and university to even get into vet school.

He messed up his interview for Nottingham. When presented with a chicken's leg and asked to talk about its anatomical features, he decided to open with: "Well, from the appearance of the foot I can tell it is a chicken's hind leg." He cringes now as he recalls the memory. "That was pretty embarrassing," he says.

But that mistake was soon behind Alex, who went onto study at the University of Surrey in Guildford. Challenges however, are never far away and for Alex these included the difficulties of finding work experience placements, before and during university - simply because they require applicants to have seen a reasonable amount of practice.

How did he do it? He says: "I made sure I revised plenty, but also made time for my hobbies to unwind." Alex is a massive water sports enthusiast, especially surfing and paddleboarding. As a keen rider, he's grown up following all the equestrian disciplines, including tetrathlons. He's certainly not one for

letting the grass grow under his feet.

## Horses

Why an equine vet, in particular? For Alex, the answer is relatively simple: "Before university I had decided I would like to specialise in equine medicine, though I was tempted by small animal surgery during my studies. However, the ambulatory lifestyle of visiting yards etc appealed to me more and I quickly reverted to equine."

As someone who cares deeply for equine and all animal welfare, Alex recognises that it can be difficult to see any creature hurt and suffering. He finds it upsetting, it's a perfectly natural instinct, but Alex is quick to find the positive and to stress that it can also be fulfilling: "The great thing about being a vet is that you have the power to change that and to help animals heal."

## Seadown

He now works at Seadown, the mixed veterinary hospital in Hythe that has three practices.

For Alex this is a home from home: "My family have been Seadown clients for as long as I can remember and I had met the team members, such as Gillies and Laura, when I was growing up. I knew first-hand how lovely everyone was, and what great service they provide.

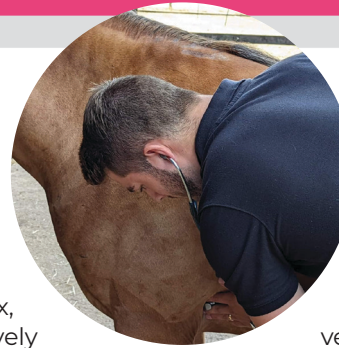
"I also visited the practice whilst at school and during my studies at University, so I built up a rapport with the team and experienced how supportive and willing to teach they were. They also have excellent facilities for inpatient work-ups and treatments.

"Finally, because I'm born and raised in the beautiful New Forest, there's nowhere I'd rather spend my days driving around."

## Future plans

Since Alex is just starting out, he is keeping his mind open and is trying to become proficient in all areas of veterinary medicine. He would like to further his knowledge of equine dentistry and feels it is a growing field in equine practice. Lameness and poor performance investigations is another area that particularly interests him.

There is no doubt that as a passionate vet and as a horse owner himself - he has a Dutch Warmblood called Zed, he really enjoys helping clients get the most out of their horses.



Not surprisingly, Alex is ambitious. He aspires one day to either own or be a partner at a practice, or a leader in his chosen field. For now though, he just plans to hone his skills as an all-round vet, follow his interests, and see which avenues open up to him.

## Advice to wannabe vets

What advice would Alex give others who may be interested in a veterinary career?

"I would say, go for it! If you want to do it then what's stopping you? Just be prepared to work hard and for a long time. But it's worth it at the end, and you will have so much fun throughout.

"I remember I was very nervous when going away to uni as I had always lived in one place. But you will have the best time and make so many lifelong friends and colleagues.

"Take as many opportunities as you can to see vets in action and spend lots of time around animals - it will make your time at university much nicer and easier.

"And last but not least, hold the thought that the wonderful thing about being a vet is that you have the knowledge to improve an animal's life."

Alex Tooley is an equine vet at Seadown Equine Hospital, Frost Lane, Hythe.

Contact **023 8084 2237** or in an emergency **023 8084 1424**.

