

Techniques and Technology in Hoof Care

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A few years ago, Oldsmobile[®] used the advertising slogan, “This is not your father’s car.” The message being imparted by that commercial could well apply to hoof care products and techniques today. The advancements in hoof care range from increased knowledge regarding trimming and balancing the foot to diagnosing and treating diseases of the foot to technologically advanced products for working on the foot. Additionally, there are certainly more products available to help care for the feet. There are moisturizing agents for dry feet, drying agents for moist feet, hoof sealants, and numerous products to use, either topically or orally, to increase the quality of the hoof horn. There are a multitude of products to treat and/or prevent disease.

This revolution began approximately twenty-five years ago, and has intensified, particularly, in the past ten to fifteen years. Researchers became serious about the horse in many areas including nutrition, laminitis, and lameness. Farriers began forming associations allowing the presentation and sharing of knowledge regarding shoeing techniques. Veterinary medicine made advancements in diagnosing and treating lamenesses. Veterinarians and farriers began to work together to help the horse and toolmakers and shoe companies started collaborating with the farriers to produce more and better products. The result of these events has allowed for significantly improved care for our equine friends.

Hoof care has truly become an international community. Research on the horse, hoof, shoeing techniques, products, and medications occur worldwide. There are competitions and educational events held in this country and many others aimed at disseminating this knowledge. These forums may be attended by both farriers and veterinarians and in many instances, by horse owners. Companies designing and producing farrier products have increased in number many fold. The resulting competition has produced such a vast array of products that it is difficult for anyone to keep up with all the technology and products available to the farrier.

Many of the technological advances made in the farrier field have been borrowed from other fields. These fields include medicine, dentistry, automotive, space, building, and metallurgy. No longer is it necessary to attach shoes to the foot using nails or to accrue a lot of down time waiting for a damaged hoof to regrow. We now have products that can rebuild or repair feet or be used to attach shoes to the foot. We have shoes that are designed to be glued onto the hoof. We have many products to protect or support the sole of the hoof. The available shoe selection is phenomenal. There are so many designs, styles, and materials available. Rubber, plastic, steel, aluminum, titanium, and composites are all materials that are being used to produce horse shoes. Even the horse who doesn’t require anything but the basic shoe is a winner because today’s shoes are much better than past shoes. Among basic shoes, there are so many brands yielding different nail patterns, stock dimensions, design features, and other criteria that it is possible to find just the right shoe for a given horse under given conditions.