

# Grooming Gear Makes Great Gifts

By Thomas N. Tweeten

**GROOMING EQUIPMENT THAT CONTRIBUTES TO THE COMFORT OF THE HORSE IS KEY TO MAINTAINING A HORSE WHO IS HAPPY TO HAVE YOU AROUND BEYOND FEEDING TIME.**

### The holiday season is quickly approaching.

It is a time of the year when parents are looking for items to get their horse-loving children. Also, horse-loving owners are looking for things for their horses, which have provided them so much enjoyment over the soon-to-end show and trail riding season.

The art of marketing horse-related stuff to horse owners gets more sophisticated each year. So many products seem to offer a short cut to some better outcome. I always marvel at the number of non-horse product ads I see on television that in some way have a horse woven into the product promotion. As horses have moved out of the labor segment of the workplace, they have become an integral part of many people's recreational lives, either as horse owners or as friends of horse owners.

As you consider a gift for your horse friend or your friendly horse, I want to share some thoughts on items you may want to think about as you make a selection. For this discussion I want to focus on items you may consider for the care of the horse. As many of you know, caring for and maintaining a horse takes time and money. Having grooming equipment that contributes to the comfort of the horse is key to maintaining a horse that is happy to have you around beyond feeding time.

In our training barn, I have two sets of grooming boxes. One consists of the tools with which I am experimenting. This is a rather large, cluttered box with many different items and liquids that I am trying to see what really works for the good of the horse. The second is a much smaller, neater groom box with tools that I use when time is limited and I really want to focus on communicating with the horse and build trust. I would like to share with you what I have in that box.

Depending on your situation, you may want each horse to have its own grooming equipment. This will minimize spread of fungus or other skin diseases. Equipment should be cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis. Following are the key tools I have found most useful for the horse.



● **Curry Comb** The curry comb is a must-have item in my grooming arsenal (see *Horse & Family* magazine, September 2007, Page 18). It is used to remove mud and filth from the coat without having to wet or wash the coat. It is also simply referred to as a mane and tail comb. I use it in the same fashion as a dandy brush. A short, rolling motion or stroke is used to loosen dirt, scurf or dandruff and work it to the coat surface. It also massages the skin and muscles beneath the coat, along with lifting the natural skin oils onto the coat. The backside of the curry comb works well as a sweat scraper when shampooing or rinsing down the horse after a workout in the summer. The curry comb is usually plastic and comes in many different colors. It is both the most versatile and the least expensive item in the groom box. Avoid using metal curry combs as they do not flex easily and metal scrapers can damage hair!



● **Rubber Curry** Rubber curries are softer and work well to remove dirt and loose hair. I have a jelly curry in my box. When using the curry, always work it in the direction that the hair lays. Many of us were taught to "scrub" with a circular motion. While that motion may shorten the cleaning process, it can be uncomfortable to the horse. Many animals (cats are especially expressive) do not care to have their coats rubbed the wrong direction. This motion can also easily generate static electricity. Remember, grooming is part of horse care that should lead to the comfort of the horse. To avoid coat dryness, I suggest

applying a light, natural, non-oily moisturizer to the coat to also help reduce the potential for static electricity.

● **Dandy/Stiff Brush** Brushes with natural bristles (tampico fiber, boar's hair or rice root) work the best and will be long lasting. Use this brush on the body of the horse with short, strong strokes to penetrate through the hair to the skin and lift out the filth. I do not use brushes with plastic bristles. While they are often times more colorful than the natural fiber brushes, they are prone to generating static electricity, creating discomfort for the horse.

● **Finishing Brush and Body Brush** A finishing brush is used to remove fine dust and scurf from the hair. It will also distribute the sebum (natural skin oil) and any applied moisturizers, finisher or polish over the coat. The body brush works well for hair around the face, ears and legs. Use of a natural fiber brush (horse hair or fine natural fiber) greatly reduces the potential for static electricity.

● **Mane and Tail Comb** A long-tooth rake comb works well for combing out tails and manes. I like it especially for cleaning and maintaining the upper area of the tail. It works well for working shampoo down onto the skin of the tail and mane for deeper cleaning. I also use it to work natural moisturizers onto the skin of the tail.



● **Curved Pin Brush** The pin brush works well to put the finishing touches to shaping the tail and mane once the tail hairs have been manually picked through with my fingers. The flexibility of the pins seems to cause less breakage of the long tail hairs.

● **Vacuum Cleaner** Vacuum cleaners are useful for cleaning horses in the colder weather or for horses that do not care for getting wet. There are vacuums designed specifically for horses that are quiet, maintain a good vacuum, and do not develop static electricity. A traditional shop vac will work but can be very noisy,

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can create static electricity, and has a strong vacuum. The shop vac filler unit will also quickly clog from the fine dust removed from the horse's coat, requiring frequent cleaning. Be sure to introduce the vacuum to the horses so they get used to the sound before actually using it on them. Keep the vacuum attachment away from sensitive areas such as the ears, eyes and mouth.

● **Blanket and Sheet** Blankets can be used to reduce hair growth and protect horses that have been body clipped in the colder months. Blankets can also be very hard on hair if used extensively. The hair can become thin in areas where there is excessive rubbing from the blanket. Certain fabrics can cause excess static electricity. Heavier blankets tend to mat the hair, reducing the natural protection of the coat. A light, tightly woven sheet (wind breaker) can be used to break the wind without severely matting the hair. A soft and unmatted coat is an excellent insulator. Natural, non-oily coat moisturizers should be used to keep the hair soft to minimize hair damage and reduce static electricity.

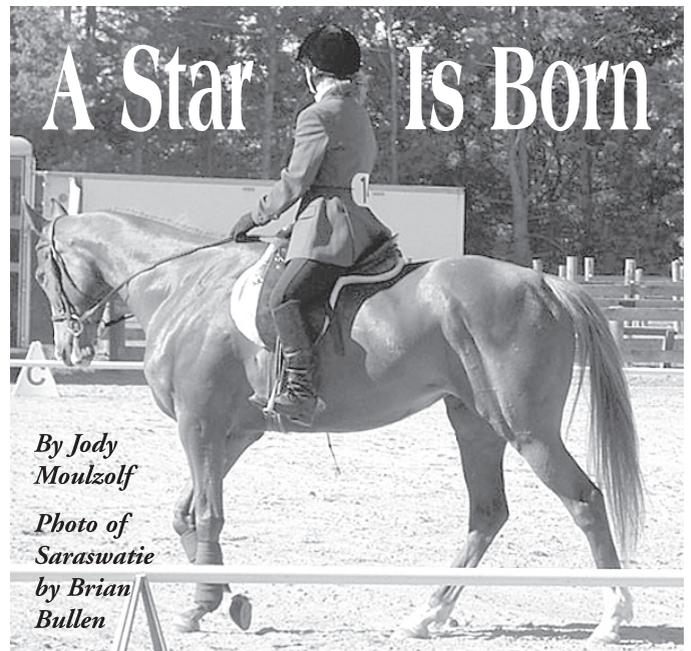
● **Cooler** A cooler is very useful after a workout in cold weather. The cooler helps keep the horse warm as it wicks moisture away from the body of the horse. The cooler is generally made of wool fiber and fits loosely over the horse, covering the horse's body from well up on the neck to the base of the tail. We use them as we walk the horse out after the workout, but rarely leave the cooler on the horse in the stall unless we have the horse in cross ties.

● **Hoof Pick and Rasp** A good hoof pick is essential for cleaning hooves. Select one that fits your hand well. Be sure it is not too pointed, as a sharp point can damage the frog area of the hoof. Once cleaned, the hoof can be examined for signs of thrush, bruises, cracking, chipping or dryness. Having a rasp available (and knowing how to use it), one can round off any chipping or nominal cracking that occurs between farrier visits. I like to have an old dandy brush to quickly clean out any remaining filth from the pad of the hoof. Perhaps here one can use that old plastic dandy brush that was replaced by the natural fiber dandy brush preferred for the horse's coat.

Having grooming tools that work for the comfort of the horse is one of the cornerstones of good horse care and horsemanship. After all, good horse care contributes to the comfort of the horse, which can then lead to a supple horse that can more easily be collected. I hope you find that special gift that truly helps you or a friend better enjoy your horses. 🐾



*Excerpted from "Grooming for Horse and Rider, Importance of Groundwork" clinics presented by Thomas N. Tweeten, Ph.D., of ATH Science, Inc., Prior Lake, Minn. For information on grooming clinics, call 952-226-4192 or go to [www.equiscentials.com](http://www.equiscentials.com).*



**The Minnesota Hooved Animal Rescue Foundation** is happy to announce that two of their horses have been selected to perform in a forthcoming documentary movie called *Ida's Story*. Beth Branca, who works hand in hand with the animal rescue by fostering and training or retraining these horses, explained, "My partner Joe Thomas and I were approached by a client who works in the cinematography industry. The film crew was on the lookout for horses that could perform before the cameras. They needed to be able to run and also look the part."

This movie is based on the story of a young Jewish girl who escaped with her siblings from government oppression in the Ukraine in the early years of the 20th century. One of Ida's strongest memories is that of being chased by Cossacks, who were mounted government soldiers.

"Joe and I needed to make a decision on which horses we could trust for this job," Branca said. "The two horses that came to mind were Calming Effect and Saraswatie. Both of these horses are calm, trustworthy, dark in color, and were in a previous life flat-track race horses.

"It did take a few hours to complete the filming," Branca said. "Joe and I worked as stunt riders for the filming, which was done literally in our back yard. The horses were asked to run and rerun scenes, and Calming Effect and Saraswatie had just as much fun doing this as Joe and I did." Branca also mentioned that the film crew they worked with that day was really great. "They had nothing but the utmost respect and regard for horses, especially when the animals needed a break between scenes," she said/

Calming Effect has been adopted out to a new family, according to Branca, but Saraswatie is still up for adoption and can be visited at Blue Horse Farm just south of Princeton, Minn.

The producers hope to have *Ida's Story* ready for release sometime in 2008. Branca has promised to keep us informed on release of this movie, or you can check with [www.idasstory.org](http://www.idasstory.org). For more information about Saraswatie or other horses waiting for adoption, visit [www.mnhoovedanimalrescue.org](http://www.mnhoovedanimalrescue.org). 🐾