

FYNA-LITE EDITORIAL

After 30 years of manufacturing stable tools, Leon Fynn General Manager at Fyna-Lite has seen the yard tools and equipment sector change beyond recognition. Back in 1985, the products that were available to muck out were extremely limited, as was the range of beddings. Today, the consumer has a startling array of beddings to use, and a wide range of tools designed to cater for these beddings.

In 1985, there was only a choice of traditional straw or shavings. The shavings that were on offer ranged from high quality flakes down to shavings supplied by the local joinery shop, often with empty crisp packets and used tea bags included! The cheaper shavings often were very dusty and unsuitable for use as horse beddings due to the fact that they were a by-product of the building industry, not purpose made for equestrian use. Straw was still extremely popular as it was readily available.

Fyna-Lite started manufacturing forks in 1985 as a reaction to the mucking out products that were available at that time. George Fynn realised that there was a lack of quality tools available, so he designed his own shavings fork. There has always been a strong interest in horses from the all members of the Fynn family, and this has certainly helped with the development of the business. We designed forks for our own stables; if they didn't work well in our yard, then that particular design or idea was discarded. Our aim was to create a fork that was light in weight, with good balance, yet strong to make the job of cleaning out stables as easy as possible. And with six horses needing constant attention, product development was often a quick affair!

The current marketplace has evolved dramatically in two main areas; the introduction of different bedding types and the widespread use of rubber matting. This change in how stables are used has been the main driver for different tools and equipment. However to fully understand what tools are required, you need to understand why we muck out.

Bedding must serve multiple functions. Firstly, it must protect the horse from injury. It must be soft and it should cover the whole stable floor. This will help alleviate the strain on your horses' limbs and joints after standing in the stable for any long periods and helps prevent the horse from slipping on the floor. Secondly, bedding helps to provide warmth and comfort to the horse. Although, most horses sleep standing up and for around 7 hours in a 24 hour day, many will at some point rest lying down, so a soft bed is essential to encourage your horse to lie down comfortably and without risk of injury. Thirdly, bedding should be used to encourage the horse to urinate in the enclosed space of a stable, as they dislike doing this on a hard floor. Finally, bedding exists to help control the spread of bacteria and ammonia produced from horses' urine and faeces. Ammonia is an irritant to the airways and is released by the action of bacteria on degrading organic matter. It inhibits the ability of the defence mechanisms in the airways to remove particles from the lung and can also increase the production of mucus. The more absorbent a bedding is, the lower the levels of ammonia will be. Mucking out regularly will also reduce the risk of a parasitic worm infestation.

Armed with the requirements of a stable bed, we have three different bedding systems which are designed to look after the horses' welfare. These are deep litter, daily removed bedding and semi-deep litter systems. Each has their merits and problems,

but this has been further complicated in recent years by the arrival of rubber matting which is now very affordable.

Tool design then has to reflect what bedding is being used. The fork must be light in weight, well balanced, yet strong. There is a trade off in between being very strong and light. To facilitate that the end user to actually lift the fork, high tech materials are used in the manufacturing process to ensure that the product fully satisfies the design brief. For example, when Fyna-Lite introduced the Pellet Master fork, the traditional design of a shavings fork had to be modified. A feature of wood pellet bedding is that the pellets dry out the horses' manure which left it in small pieces. On a normal shavings fork a lot of the manure was not being successfully removed from the bed which led to a redesign of the fork. The tines needed to be closer together, but this significantly increases the weight of the product and caused problems in bending the wire to create the tines. Slightly thinner wire was used which when placed closer together allowed the fork to successfully work. Side bars were also fitted to stop any bedding or manure from rolling off the fork. High specification specialist materials and processes have been used as well to allow the fork to fulfil its design criteria.

The best tools for mucking out are always the ones that have been specifically designed to work on the bedding that you are using. If you are using shavings, a Shavings fork is best, a Pellet Master fork is perfect for pellet type beddings. Cross over forks such as the Multi Mucka which is ideal for large shavings flakes, straw or chopped straw and a Rubber Matting fork is a great aide if you have rubber mats fitted as it stops the mats being damaged. Traditional manure forks are ideal for straw or chopped straw, however the number of tines you choose is down to personal preference. Whichever fork you choose, the balance of the fork is critical as this reduces the effort that you need to make to muck out, as is the quality of manufacture. Cheap or poorly made forks will fall apart quickly and will need to be replaced often.

Design also has to reflect the personal requirements of the end user as well as what bedding is being used. The height and strength of the operator, length of handle, style of grip, weight of handle and head material (metal or plastic) are all factors that a consumer will consider in their purchase. To try and satisfy these ever more complicated challenges has given the retailer a serious headache due to the large number of options the end user demands. It is very true to say that mucking out is a very personal thing and if you don't have the right fork for the job, mucking out takes longer, puts more strain on the back and can be an expensive mistake if the wrong decision is made.

But it is not only the function of a tool that is important, but its appearance that has increasingly been a key to its success. Bright colours, especially pinks and purples, have become a trend in the stable yard. Many people now have a colour theme where their fork, wheelbarrow, tub, bucket and even hay nets are the same colour. Pink is very much here to stay, although other bright colours are increasingly popular.

As yard tools have become more sophisticated, so are the needs of all yard equipment. The range of brooms that are available is simply mind boggling, and the level of passion that people have for their favourite yard broom is frankly a little scary! Buckets and feed buckets now come in a startling array of designs, wheelbarrow design is ever changing and new equipment is constantly being developed for use in the yard. Examples include trolleys designed to carry plastic tubs or tack and hot

water shower systems for horses. As with stable tools, the design is balanced with colour, cost and purpose.

Obviously the situation now exists where it is impossible for the retailer to stock all of this equipment. This is where knowledge of what is available and where to source it from is becoming increasingly important. The consumer now is an extremely well researched person who has a fantastic knowledge of what is available and where to purchase it from and will use a forum or social media for advice. The retailer must now be in a position to source whatever products a customer asks for and quickly. As the internet grows in strength and power, fast delivery times are critical. For a manufacturer, this change in business model has created a new world where production planning is key to predicting the correct stock levels to service the trade.

Using a Wall Display Stand and Point of Sale equipment is a great way to sell stable tools. Key product lines should be stocked to allow the consumer to purchase there and then, with the option to order further lines that are stocked with the distributor or via the manufacturer. This gives access to a huge range of products and allows the retailer to successfully supply any unusual items via catalogues or from manufacturer's websites.

In summary, the stable and yard tool sector is an integral part of the equestrian industry, and whose products people are passionate about as they are used several times a day. There is a huge range of products available, from the cheap to the more premium brands, each serving different parts of the sector. The retailer would overlook this sector at their peril, as big rewards are there for those willing to understand what they can offer their customers.

Fyna-Lite now offer a fork for every bedding system that is available with a handle variant suitable for every operator. Whether you use shavings, straw, wood pellets, paper, hemp or rubber matting, Fyna-Lite has a fork which has been designed specifically for your needs. We are currently working at adding to the range, and of course we are constantly improving our processes to ensure that the end user has the best possible tool for the job.

For full details of the Fyna-Lite range of products, please visit www.fynalite.co.uk or contact the factory on 01789 764848, or e-mail sales@fynalite.co.uk

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