

# Horses Need Yearly Dental Checkup, Veterinarian Advises

Do your horses' teeth need a check-up?

To prevent serious tooth problems, a horse's teeth should be checked each year, according to Dr. Robert C. Hammond, University of Maryland Extension veterinarian.

Horses' teeth naturally wear off so unevenly that after a time chewing hay and oats may become a painful experience. Sharp enamel edges remain on the outside on the upper molars, cutting the inside of the cheeks, while the lower teeth develop sharp points on the inside, cutting the tongue.

When this occurs, some horses refuse to eat, some eat only sparingly, while others hold their head to one side while chewing. Colic and indigestion often follow improper chewing.

A veterinarian can correct this situation by floating (or filing off) the sharp enamel points and edges. This is done with a special instrument called a float. Usually no anesthesia and only a minimum of restraint is required, Dr. Hammond explains.

For many years, horse-owners have used the incisor teeth to tell the age of horses. The first pair of permanent teeth come in at three years of age, exhibiting cups in the wearing surface. These cups last about three years. By the time the second set erupts at four years of age, the cups in the first set are one-third worn out.

When the third and final pair show up at five years of age, the first set is two-thirds gone and the second set is one-third gone. An experienced horseman can thus tell the age of the horse quite readily.

At five years of age, all the permanent teeth are present

and the horse is said to have a full mouth.

As the horse matures and finally reaches old age, the incisor teeth meet each other at an increasing angle. They also become farther apart. This eas-

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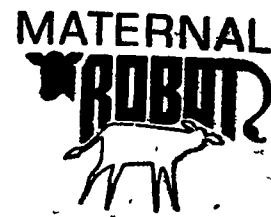
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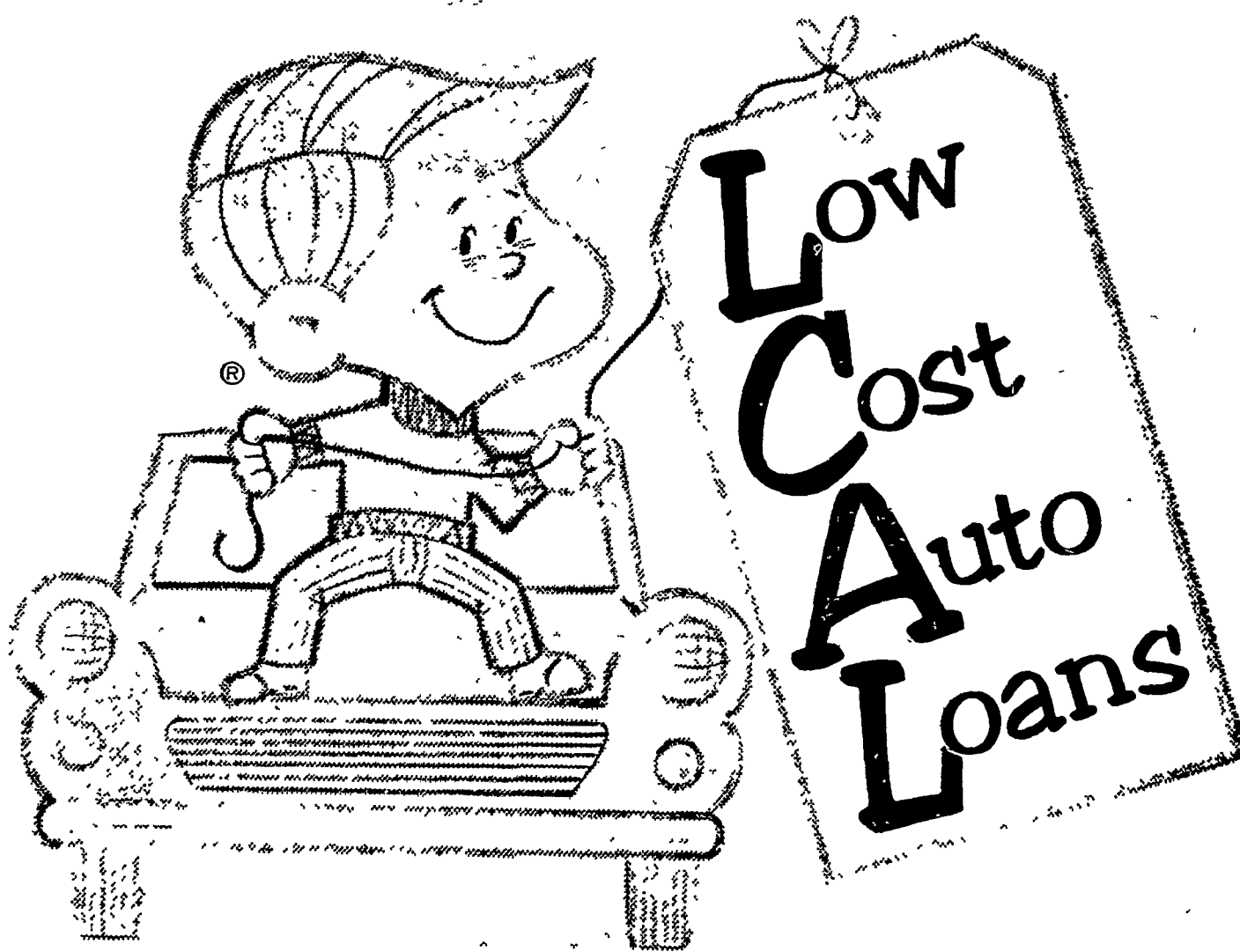
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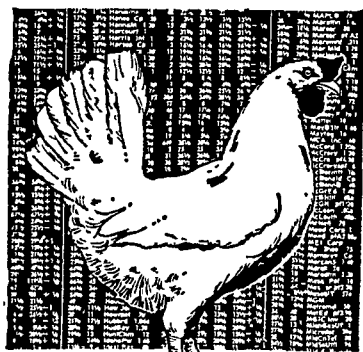


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