

Q&A

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GS: What are the beneficial properties of these gears, and who uses them?


JA: First of all, when we use the term “rawhide” we’re actually talking about using water buffalo hides as our raw material, riveted and flanged between bronze plates, although we do also make phenolic gears. Apparently the folks at Chicago Rawhide had experimented with a lot of different hides, including domestic cattle from the U.S., but found they just didn’t offer the same desirable properties as the water buffalo hide, which proved to be the most durable, resilient, and shock-absorbent of all. Applications include gears for big machines such as punch presses, forging hammers, tannery drums, even merry-go-rounds, and they’re also used in other operations where low noise is desirable and destructive vibrations are a concern. While these gears are very strong and usually last for many years, they are also designed to be the weak link, to fail before the metal gear they’re mated with, which is good because you’d rather replace a gear that costs around \$1,000 than one that costs a multiple of that.

GS: Since this is a fairly recent acquisition for you, how’s business?

JA: It’s been remarkable, really. When we made this purchase we found that Chicago Rawhide had kept detailed records of all the leather gears they had manufactured going all the way back to 1909, so we get calls from shops and distributors looking for

replacements. They’ll say “all I have is this six-digit number etched on the gear,” and we’ll actually be able to pull the original plans and make them an exact duplicate. We have also sold blanks to some gear-makers, who will then cut their own teeth, but most of

“We get calls every week from people needing replacement gears, and we’re able to pull the original plans and make them an exact duplicate.”

our business at this point involves replacement gears for existing equipment. But I want people to know that, should they require this type of special gearing, Osborne Technologies is the company with the direct connection to the original Chicago Rawhide, not to mention we’re an excellent source for rawhide mauls, the ideal striking tool that delivers a dead blow with minimal risk of spark or damage. It’s been great re-investing in these older product lines and seeing all the applications for these particular items. If anyone needs a replacement gear, and they purchased the original from Chicago Rawhide or Roger’s Manufacturing, then we should be able to meet their needs. 

GS: How did you get into the rawhide gear business?

JA: It will probably make more sense if I give you some background information. Our parent company, C.S. Osborne & Co., manufactures a wide selection of industrial hand tools. Late last year we had the opportunity to acquire the rawhide maul and gear-making assets of a company originally belonging to Chicago Rawhide, which had been around since the early 1900s. In the 1980s Chicago Rawhide was purchased by SKF, which used a lot of mauls in their normal sales and operations, but I believe they only held onto the division for a few years before selling it to another local manufacturer in Chicago. When the rawhide maul and gear division became available again we were initially motivated by the maul business, which really complements our existing product line. But understanding that the same machines were used to make the mauls and rawhide gears alike, and the fact that we are already in the industrial supply business, it made a lot of sense to continue with the rawhide gears as well. We are always looking for related businesses and have been quite satisfied with our investment in and development of the gear division. So that’s how we came to be involved in manufacturing rawhide gears.

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