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We'll Go "Solo" Trimming Manes

Modern grooming tools have virtually eliminated archaic mane pulling.

A short mane takes nearly constant retrimming and care to keep it even and thin, so it lays well on the horse's neck and braids easily. As we all know, the classic method is using a tiny pulling comb and literally yanking the horse's longer hair out, a few strands at a time.

While some horses accept this procedure, others object pretty strongly. Understandably. Twitches and tranquilizers are sometimes used to force a horse into submission. Some people pour liniment on the roots of the mane to help lessen the reaction to the pulling/trimming (if you choose to do this, don't overdo it, as you can't pull a wet mane; just dampen the root area). No matter what, though, you are pulling the hair out of the horse's crest, and that can hurt.

As most of us have learned, using scissors to simply cut the mane is usually disastrous. We're not saying it can't be done, but you've got to be pretty clever and experienced to make a cut mane not look like you just gave your horse a haircut straight out of *The Three Stooges*.

Razor blades have been used to



We trimmed manes with, from left, the Lincoln Mane Comb, the Folding Stripping Comb, the Mane Trimmer/Thinner, the ManeMaster and the SoloComb.

quickly chop off the long hairs of the mane, but handling a bare, sharp razor blade is riskier for you and the horse, and it's time-consuming.

We tried a variety of tools designed to make trimming manes simpler and easier. They're all basically a plastic (or wooden) tool with a blade of some type. They all shortened the mane, but most required honing your technique to do a professional-looking job thinning the mane. You may find that holding the tool at one angle or another works better for you. That's fine. You should experiment a bit. One of the tools even allows you to change the design for left- or right-handed people.

Each tool is used sim-

ilarly to the method you learned for traditional pulling, except you're cutting, the mane. Grab the long hairs you want to eliminate, and comb back the shorter hairs you want to keep. Cut the long hairs. Comb again. Focus on the straggling long hairs and repeat. This method will effectively shorten the horse's mane. You may begin at the horse's withers or the poll, although we find it simpler to begin at the withers.

Be sure you take the time to comb the mane and then step back after doing a few inches of mane to be sure you're creating the line you want on the horse. If you're not going to braid your horse's mane and simply want a classic, trimmed look, we recommend a six-inch mane length. For braiding, you'll want to be closer to four inches.

If you need to also thin the mane, you need to cut hairs up close to the root. This takes time, and we recommend doing a small section at a time. Remember that if you don't cut the hairs close enough to the actual root,

Consider This . . .

- Many manes only need shortening, which these tools make a breeze.
- It's worth practicing to thin manes, just to avoid what your horse may feel when you pull it.
- At \$3 for our Best Buy mane trimmer, there's little reason to use a pulling comb anymore.



We needed to press upward on the lever when using The ManeMaster.



The SoloComb easily comes apart and has replacement blades available.

you'll end up with a stubbly look. Note: There may be some manes that are so thick that there is no alternative to pulling. However, we recommend you try to avoid that.

Keeping up with the mane's growth is your best bet to using these tools. It's easier to give the mane a quick going over monthly than to wait six months and do the whole thing. Remember, no matter what you do—cutting or thinning—that mane is going to grow back on a healthy horse.

PRODUCTS

SoloComb Mane Comb #461754 \$30.
Replacement Blades #464888 \$13.
English Riding Supply, www.englishridingsupply.com, 866-569-1600

This is one of the best tools we've used to shorten a mane. It's made of plastic, but well built. It has a 1 3/4-inch opening for combing and cutting. When you press down on the lever, a replaceable cutting blade cuts the hair. You can comb the mane normally with the lever in the up position. We were able to trim our horse's mane in less than 15 minutes, without any objections from the horse. You use it in a very similar method to a simple pulling comb, but instead of ripping



At \$3, it's tough to fault the Mane Trimmer/Thinner.

out the hair, you cut it. The result was a very natural looking mane. It will thin, too, just like a pulling comb, but you need to get up closer to the roots.

Grooma ManeMaster \$30.
www.miraclecorp.com 800-635-2044

This is similar in design to the SoloComb, except that it has

a smaller cutting area. The plastic tool has a 2 1/2-inch opening with two sets of comb teeth and the steel cutting portion between them. The blades cut a 1-inch area. The hair is cut as the blades move to the side when you squeeze on the handle. We ended up with a professional-looking mane that didn't look "chopped." Blade is not replaceable, but ManeMaster is said to be long-lasting.

Lincoln Mane Comb #X1-10173 \$20.
Dover Saddlery, www.doversaddlery.com, 800-406-8204

This plastic comb uses a replaceable utility blade to cut the horse's mane wherever you need it. It's sturdy and well-built. It has a two-inch opening to comb or trim/trim the mane. The blade can be inserted on either side, making it adjustable for both left- and right-handed people. Overall, this did a good job shortening our horse's mane, but we find it's pricey compared to what you get in other products in this trial.

Mane Trimmer/Thinner #401637 \$3. English Riding Supply, www.englishridingsupply.com, 866-569-1600

An all-in-one mane trimmer and thinner. This wasn't a bad little comb. It has a replaceable razor blade on one side and a mane comb on the other. For a quick, simple job like evening up a forelock or mane, this will get the job done. We wouldn't want to tackle

a greatly overgrown mane with it, but it's simple to use and inexpensive enough to toss in your tote and not worry if you lose it.

Folding Stripping Comb with Wood Handle #455861 \$9. English Riding Supply, www.englishridingsupply.com, 866-569-1600



The Stripping Comb was disappointing.

This looks a lot like a standard pocketknife, with a wooden handle and a fold-out blade. However, the "blade" is a sharp comb. The tool is well made. So

well made that it initially required a bit more strength than we anticipated to open and close it. The comb stays well locked into place when you use it. However, it looks better than it performs, and we found other tools did a much better job thinning or cutting the mane. We'll pass.




The Lincoln Mane Comb is useful but we find it overpriced for its design.

BOTTOM LINE

Without question, these tools are less tiring for the person doing the mane and less painful for the horse. They also make the job go much faster.

Our top picks are the SoloComb and the ManeMaster, with the overall choice going to the SoloComb. It was more comfortable to hold, due to its slightly thinner build and texture. We like pressing down on the lever (rather than up) to cut the mane, and its operation was quiet. The ManeMaster made a clicking sound as we activated it. Plus, the cutting area of the SoloComb is twice that of the ManeMaster, and its blade is replaceable.

For Best Buy, it's tough to beat the \$3 Mane Trimmer/Thinner. It's handy if you need to quickly remove a whisker or make a small fix. 

Here's Journal staff article.