

Don't Make Me Take off My Belt

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We gotta get rid of air turbine handpieces. They're ruining dentistry. This is the opening prong of our campaign to return our profession to the more relaxed state we enjoyed before speed became our *raison d'être*. We need to get back to those belt-driven Doriot handpieces. *Anybody* can cut a full crown preparation in 10 minutes or less with a coarse diamond revolving at 400,000 rpm. Where's the challenge, the excitement in that? You touch a button on the floor with your foot, the handpiece whines in response, lights its own way, and sprays its own coolant. All you do is guide it for a few minutes.

Now you take the Doriot -- a true piece of machinery if there ever was one. It had an appeal similar to Monster Truck Bashes and Demolition Derbies. Wheels, belts, pulleys, articulated connections and an honest-to-God electric motor that put out a solid 4,000 rpm, it commanded your attention. It was activated by a 40-pound rheostat the size of a toaster oven that took at least a size 11 1/2 brogan to kick-start into position.

Nor was there that annoying wussy whine you have to put up with from an air turbine as it slowly destroys your auditory nerves. The Doriot had a satisfying whirr and clatter as the endless belt raced over its three or four sets of wheels. When you put that green stone or that stainless steel bur into that gear-driven contra-angle and got the whole thing going flat out against human enamel your mind was *engaged*. You were one concentrating dentist and your assistant was on full red alert, squirting water artfully on the tip of the bur or stone to allay the smoke and odor of burning feathers that ensued.

The Doriot wasn't so picky about lubrication. A can of Three-In-One oil bought at your local Piggly-Wiggly would last for months. An important aspect of the assistant's job was regularly applying generous amounts of the oil to the wheels to prevent them from seizing. Assistants got very adept at diplomatically explaining to patients why a black streak would suddenly appear on their clothing after a freshly lubricated Doriot laid down tracks that defied any known detergent to eradicate.

In contrast, the air turbine doesn't fully engage the dentist's mind because it doesn't threaten to fly apart at any moment. It's a useful tool, but not very exciting. With no sense of impending disaster to demand full attention to its operation, comes a complacency that engenders boredom. Connected to its power source by a length of black tubing, it lacks the one thing that made the Doriot an instrument of everlasting fascination to young and old alike. It lacks a belt.

Every operator of a Doriot handpiece recalls the endless enjoyment he experienced with the belt. It was a closed-circuit cord made out of some woven material that -- when carefully threaded over the wheels, under the pulleys and properly tensioned -- connected the powerful electric

motor with the end of the handpiece. A skilled practitioner could accomplish this handily in somewhat less than an hour.

The thrill of witnessing a fully functioning Doriot in full chat was shared by the patients who stared transfixed as the belt whirled around its circuit much like the 33 cars that start the Indy 500. And just like the Indy track does to the racer, after a certain number of laps, the wheels would take their toll on the cord. The cord would begin to fray. Slightly at first, then with gathering authority until a considerable wad of failing cord would refuse to pass between one of the wheels and its guard. This guaranteed a mandatory pit stop until a new cord was installed. It gave the patient time to get his eyes back into some kind of focus because he had been following the disintegration of his nemesis with horrified fascination.

Pedodontists of the era took advantage of this hypnotic effect of a belt decomposing. They would wrap a little absorbent cotton around the belt in two separate places. With a little moppet in the chair, the dentist would instruct him to "watch the rabbits race." And race they did! Two bits of cotton chasing each other at speeds approaching Mach 1 were enough to enthrall the most intractable kid.

Try *that* with your air turbine! And don't get me started on lasers.

Alas, at last count there were only 37 dentists still alive who recall clearly the Doriot handpiece. Should you ever encounter an old party without any hair on the back of his wrist, you've stumbled on a genuine artifact. Cherish him.



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