They say that if you can get a product listed on the 'O' list you are already on the road to marketing success. The 'O' list refers to the favourite things of US talk-show host Oprah Winfrey as featured in her 'O' Magazine.

Orthopaedics takes the sports-glove market by storm



Bionic high-tech golf gloves, from Hillerich & Bradsby Co, have done better than that. Since the launch of the orthopaedically designed gloves in 2000, the Bionic brand has been favourably reviewed in more than 400 major media outlets, including this magazine, the New York Times, Golf Magazine, Golf Digest, the Los Angeles Times, the Wall Street Journal and Sports Illustrated. So what's so special about the fast-growing glove company based in Louisville, Kentucky, and what have they done for us lately?

The Bionic golf glove is the selected flagship of the brand representing a technology that Dr. Jim Kleinert, an orthopaedic hand and glove specialist, and Hillerich & Bradsby, the makers of Louisville Slugger baseball bats and gloves, developed between them. At a glance, the Bionic may appear to be just another leather glove, but closer inspection reveals the patented science and technology built into it. It is the only glove sanctioned by the USGA (United Sates Golf Association) for players with arthritis of the hand.

A pilot study for Bionic has shown that a standard glove helps increase golfer's hand-strength by 3%, while a Bionic golf glove increases relative hand-strength by nearly 8%, two-and-a-half times more than the standard glove. The brand has already received a commendation from the US Arthritis Foundation.



The Bionic Performance golf glove showing the built-in 'anatomical comfort zones'.

Bionic

Greater club control

Patented anatomical relief pads placed between the hand's bony prominences (high points of the bone next to the skin) give wearers more control over their golf clubs, making them feel "at one with the club". The friction of a tool, baseball bat or golf club against bony prominences in the palm of the hand, can cause blisters, calluses and hand fatigue. Scientifically positioned anatomical relief pads help even out the surface of the hand. This pad system, made from a layered leather, terry cloth and rubber combination, give golfers a light, yet snug grip to help prevent the clubface from twisting at impact.

Ergonomically designed motion zones over the knuckles and web zones between fingers enhance dexterity. They also promote breathability to keep hands cool and dry on hot days. Exclusive patented pre-rotated finger design promotes the natural closure of the hand, meaning the little finger and forefinger rotate inward toward the centre of the hand, allowing a more natural motion of the fingers. The Bionic claim is that these scientifically designed features enhance durability, helping the glove last up to three or four times longer than the conventional type. Made from top-grade cabretta leather, the Bionic glove is machine washable and should be air-dried.

Bionic launched a new Silver Series glove this year specifically to offer even more support and comfort to golfers who suffer from chronic hand discomfort. The Silver Series gloves expand on Bionic's established technology by adding a third row of pads in the fingers to assist golfers who have problems in gripping their clubs, while maintaining the light grip all golfers seek. With ThinSkin wrist supports, the Silver Series enables the golfer to develop more control and better distance without having to grip the club as hard.

Recently, Bionic has added a women's range with Lycra and colour schemes that include light blue, pink and champagne. Understanding the anatomical differences between women's and men's hands was crucial in the design of the new range. Rather than simply produce a smaller, brighter coloured version of the highly acclaimed men's range, Dr. Kleinert designed pads specifically to fit women's hands to help even out the surface and prevent the clubface from twisting at impact, as before, and to help dampen the vibrations associated with a mis-hit ball.

Word of Bionic's success on the golf course may have given the company added impetus and recent exposure. However, much of the testing of performance-enhanced glove technology has been conducted by Hillerich & Bradsby in other sports over the years, such as baseball, ice hockey, American football and various equestrian events. Bionic has even been named the 'official glove' of Churchill Downs racetrack and of the most famous race it hosts, the Kentucky Derby.

Horse play

Bionic markets two styles of gloves for equestrian use: the standard equestrian glove is for events such as show-jumping and trail-riding while the Equine Show glove is designed for competitive carriage driving (and similar events), with an open cuff and reinforced silicone material on the ring side to protect from the wear of the reins. Putting on a bridle, buckling a cinch, or gripping the reins can leave hands fatigued and calloused. There is extra padding where the hand needs it most and this limits hand-fatigue, while the supple leather allows half-halts and added control.



A special glove for equestrian sports, showing an open cuff.
Bionic

For the fitness buff, palm calluses have long been an undesirable outcome of lifting weights. Bionic has designed women's and men's half-finger gloves that help to reduce movement of the bar in the palms of the hand. This increases control and lessens discomfort. The ergonomically designed pads form a natural V, which help lock-in the bar holding the weight. This helps eliminate calluses forming on the metacarpal joints during dumbbell use, as well as a better position for the hands when gripping the long bar. Bionic's Fitness Gloves, crafted from Lycra and digitised sheepskin, have been designed for modern fitness machines.

Machine-washable

On the subject of wear and tear, they say you can tell what kind of work a person does by looking at their hands. This may be about to change with the introduction of Bionic's machine-washable Tough Pro glove, which includes the following list of features to prevent the hands of professionals and hobbyists from taking a beating from power tools, tractors and lawn mowers.

In the knuckle area on the dorsal side of the hand, ergonomically designed motion zones provide optimal flexibility for better fit, comfort and performance. In the web areas between the fingers, strategic web zones have been incorporated to enhance breathability, helping the hands stay cool and dry. On the fingertips of the gloves Bionic has added reinforced silicone tips to improve durability and reduce finger distress and add extra protection.

Anatomical relief pads, located on the plantar side of the phalanges, help to improve grip strength, reduce hand-fatigue and provide more control when handling tools. Extra padding in the palms, a common area for wear and tear, improves the glove's durability. Top-grade water-resistant goatskin leather helps keep hands dry and comfortable, and form-fitting wrist closure provides wrist support and keeps the interior of the glove free from dirt and debris.

Gloves have long been recognised as an essential piece of apparel by racing drivers, as well as a helpful driving aid for any of us taking a long car-trip. It's certainly no surprise that Bionic has entered this market, too, using their pre-rotated finger design, inspired by the hand's anatomy, to promote natural closure. The form-fitting, fine leather driving gloves are stylish enough to double as dress gloves and you won't have to bite off a glove to pay a toll or adjust your i-Pod.

Finally, we go into the garden where Bionic has introduced an extensive range of gardening gloves for every passionate gardener, landscaper or tender-handed green-thumb.

The Classic Bionic gardening glove has all the basic protection, form-fitting comfort, and breathability features of the Tough Pro, with a strategically placed pad system to prevent lawn equipment and tool handles from rubbing against the natural peak of the palm. The Garden Elite glove is an enhanced version of Bionic's standard garden glove made with long-lasting materials to provide even greater comfort and durability. The Elite features reinforced silicone material in the fingertips for added durability without sacrificing the flexibility and pinch-force required for tasks such as weeding and planting. There is even a special Rose glove, with enhanced grip and a special pad system for better comfort and extended gauntlets to give the forearm protection from thorns.

There is clearly more to gloves than just keeping the fingernails clean. Bionic's new ergonomic technology and anatomical design have combined to create the most innovative range of gloves since the Isotoner revolution several decades ago.