

## HorseChannel's Online Bit Guide

### **Snaffles and Curbs Bit by Bit**

*By Cindy Hale*

Selecting the right bit for your horse can be overwhelming, especially when you consider all the varieties that are dazzlingly displayed in catalogs and at tack stores. To help you differentiate between D-rings and eggbutts, Waterfords and Weymouths, we've prepared an online bit guide that reveals information about the most common styles of bits as well as some of the more creative ones. Before you begin browsing, here are a few tips to keep in mind.

Within the vast world of bits there are two categories: snaffles and curbs, and both can be used for English or western riding. A snaffle is recognizable by the rings attached to either side of the mouthpiece. The reins attach to the rings and guide the horse through direct contact. For example, when you pull on the right rein the horse turns right in response to pressure on the corners of its mouth. This teaches the horse to bend laterally. When working on downward transitions and halts, snaffles exert pressure on the bars of the horse's mouth, causing the horse to flex at the poll and bend vertically.

In contrast, curb bits work on leverage. Reins are attached to shanks, the vertical bars attached to the bit rings. When you pull back on the reins, the shanks create a lever action and pressure is exerted on the horse's lower jaw, the bars of the mouth and the poll via the crownpiece of the bridle. In general, a longer shank translates into more leverage and hence a more severe bit. Pressure is also felt on the horse's chin, thanks to the curb strap or curb chain. Curb bits encourage the horse to lower their head and flex at the poll. Though curb bits can be ridden with two hands, in western riding the curb permits the rider to guide their horse through neck reining.

Snaffles and curbs are available in a wide range of mouthpieces, and each style—from smooth to twisted and low or high ports—provides a certain degree of severity. That's why it's important to choose a bit wisely, because once a horse's mouth has become dull or sore due to a strong bit in rough hands, it's difficult to re-school the horse to become light and responsive once again.

#### Snaffle Bits

Loose Ring or O-Ring Snaffle  
Full-Cheek Snaffle

#### Leverage Bits

Pelham  
Kimberwick  
Low-Port Correction Bit  
Grazing Bit