

Real Benefits of Synthetic Tack

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We had all finished bathing and spiffing up our horses for the show the next day. It was the time to make our saddles and bridles match our mounts. I watched wistfully as my friends carted off their luxurious leather saddles to go through the ritual of cleaning and conditioning tack. I then turned to my own saddle, plunked it on the ground by the washrack and began to hose it down, full blast. I was finished in minutes, and as I put my faux-leather saddle to dry in the shade, my riding pals were now envious of me.

Yes, synthetic saddles and bridles have certain advantages. Available in a wide array of styles, with as many accessories as colors, synthetic tack is long-lasting, low-maintenance and inexpensive.

True ValuesWestern riders will appreciate the lightweight properties of synthetic saddlery. For young riders who struggle to heft a 45-pound saddle over their horses' backs without nailing the horse in the kidneys or withers, synthetic saddles can be ideal, as they weigh up to two-thirds less than traditional saddles. Endurance riders also prefer the lightweight saddlery. With horses covering long distances and riders logging in many hours in the saddle, any way to ease the weight burden is appreciated by both.

The saddles are comfortable and usually lack a break-in period. Some synthetic saddles incorporate wool-stuffed panels that conform to the horse's back, and gel seats to make the rider comfortable, too.

Synthetics are correctly styled after traditional leather saddles. Dressage riders often feel quite at home in a synthetic, since many are black, which is the color of choice for the dressage ring. There is no stigma associated with synthetic tack in the realm of dressage, eventing, endurance or other demanding sports.

Synthetic saddles clean up easily. Eventers like the fact that they can splash into a water jump without this action taking its toll, as it might with leather. Synthetic saddles can look sharp again by just using plain soap and water, and no oil or dressing is required to make the saddle look great.

BiothaneBiothane bridle tack is used mainly by trail and endurance riders for a variety of reasons. Biothane, a plastic strapping which is a polyurethane-coated nylon strap, is durable and made to resist fading. Biothane does not tear, fray or soak up moisture the way woven material or leather can. It cleans up easily and is almost maintenance-free. It just needs to be swished around in a bucket of sudsy water to get it clean again.

Headstalls are available in a variety of convertible styles so trail riders can detach their horses' bits, yet keep a halter on them for security. Endurance riders also appreciate the design of convertible biothane tack, as it makes vet stops quicker.

Nylon TackFor riders who want something supple and versatile, nylon tack also has plenty of benefits. Nylon is strong and resists breakage. Halters can even be purchased with a replaceable leather crown so that the horse can break away in the event of an emergency. Nylon is durable and cleans up easily, and is also weather and mildew resistant. And you can't beat the beautiful color combinations that nylon bridles, halters, breastplates and martingales come in.

Another type of woven halter is the polypropylene halter. Softer and more supple than nylon tack, this material is usually sewn together in two plies, and reinforced at stress points for added durability. Some halters are further padded at the crown and noseband with foam rubber to increase the horse's comfort.

The Real DealOne of the best aspects of synthetic tack is that it is affordable. For the novice who is just starting out, a synthetic saddle is ideal. Additionally, if a rider is thinking about adding a new riding style to their normal routine, such as jumping a career dressage horse, buying a synthetic saddle is a great way to invest in a saddle that can do the job right, but won't cost an arm and a leg. Whatever the reason, we can all afford to have some synthetic in our lives.