

TACK

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Most conventional tack is made of:

- **Leather:** basic material of most saddle, bridles, breastplates and martingales, halters, etc.
 - 90% is made of cowhide (Aberdeen Angus is considered best)
 - Pig/deer skin may be used for the seat, or to cover a saddle
 - Sheep skin may be used for panels
 - Buffalo hide is sometimes used for stirrup leathers
 - **Substance** = *thickness of leather*
 - Thicker leather = more fat = longer lasting
 - Two sides to leather:
 - **Flesh** – *underside*; should be smooth
 - **Grain** – *top side*; treated and sealed
 - There is also a fibrous layer between that binds these two together
 - Good quality leather in good repair should
 - Feel slightly greasy/not dry
 - Firm, not soft/pappy
 - When bent, no bubbles should form
 - The enemies of leather are:
 - Heat
 - Water/sweat: hot water removes fat
 - neglect
- **Metal:** used for most bits, stirrup irons, buckles on tack, in some saddle trees (partially) and to help keep saddles together (rivets, etc.)
 - Steel
 - Used in the old days, not so common today
 - rusts
 - Stainless steel is the most common today; most popular
 - Strongest; most durable
 - Does not rust
 - Copper
 - Encourages salivation; 'sweet' taste
 - Soft; can be chewed and get sharp points
 - Sweet iron – aka cold rolled steel

- Dense; softer than steel
 - Prone to rust
 - Tastes like copper
 - Aluminum
 - Light
 - Soft
 - Not very strong
 - No longer common; may still be used with some racing tack
 - Least expensive
 - Bitter; drying to the mouth
 - Nickel
 - Breaks easily and often without warning; considered **unsafe**
 - No longer common
 - Not shiny
 - Nickel alloy
 - Stronger than pure nickel
 - Shinier than pure nickel
 - German silver
 - Not fully silver; an alloy (60% copper; 20% nickel; 20% zinc)
 - Expensive
 - 'sweet' – encourages salivation
 - Needs a lot of cleaning
 - Aurigan
 - 85% copper; 4 % silicon; 11% zinc (no nickel)
 - Some horses/people are allergic to nickel
 - Has all the benefits of copper but is stronger
- **Other materials:**
- Rubber coated bits will have metal or wire inside them
 - Encourages a horse to 'go forward' to the contact; not good for a horse that likes to lean
 - Can be chewed through to expose the metal; least durable
 - Neutral taste
 - flexible
 - Vulcanite bits (not a metal, but a variation on rubber bits)
 - Harder than rubber, harder to chew
 - Still softer than metal
 - Happy mouth
 - Engineered plastic with apple flavour
 - Ripple texture encourages chewing
 - Synthetics
 - Used in some tack (bridles, saddles) – inexpensive, easy to clean

- Used in between layers of stirrup leathers to strengthen/prevent stretching
- Used on girths and numnahs commonly
- Wood:
 - Rarely, bits in the past were made of wood; **not safe**
 - Saddle trees are typically made of beech wood: strong, light, somewhat flexible
 - Saddle trees can also be made of adjustable metal, or fibreglass

Trees: are the support structure that the saddle is built on; they help to distribute the rider's weight more evenly over the back

- **Beech wood** is the most commonly used wood for trees
- A spring tree is a tree made of laminated wood over a riveted gullet plate of spring steel; this allows minimum flexibility
- Synthetic molded saddles can be made of
 - Polyurethane
 - Fibreglass: limited durability
- Some saddles can be treeless
 - For more on saddle trees and construction, go to bettersaddles.co.uk

Fitting saddles:

1. Of **primary importance** - *make sure it fits the horse*
2. **Second** most important thing is that it *fits the rider*
3. Also ensure that it is **correct for the type of riding** you are doing

Safety of tack:

- Check the **stitching**: leathers, pommel, saddle flap, etc.
- Check **girth billets**: watch which ones are attached
 - The girth should always be attached to straps that have different points of attachment on the saddle
 - In your typical saddle, use billet strap #1, and either #2 OR #3
 - Never use straps #2 and #3 together
- Check the **condition of leather**:
 - Obviously worn or broken leather should be replaced
 - watch for checking
 - **Checking** = *horizontal cracks* especially seen on thinner pieces of leather like in the bridle
- Check the **condition of metal**
 - Metal fatigue can occur
 - Stirrups have the highest percentage of wear-related breakage

- Peacock (safety stirrups) are only safety rated for 90 lbs, and should not be used by riders heavier than that; there are other safety stirrup options available
- Check the condition of other materials
 - Web/webbing (cotton), as seen in web reins, can rot
 - Nylon, as seen in some halters, bridles and longe lines, can fray
 - Rubber, as seen as a coating on rubber reins, can dissolve if old or crack if exposed to a hard environment (too wet/cold/much cleaning product)
 - Felt (as seen in saddles or some old numnahs or boots) can get lumpy

Bits and Bitting

Bits: help to control horse's speed, direction and improve balance

How to check for the correct size:

1. take a piece of binder twine
2. put it in the horse's mouth where the bit usually sits
3. put your fingers on either side of the binder twine
4. remove binder twine from mouth, keeping fingers where they are
5. measure distance between fingers
6. add ¼" on either side for size of bit to be used
 - a. if using a loose ring snaffle, bit may need to be bigger to prevent pinching

Families of bits:

- Snaffle
- Weymouth (double bridle)
- Pelham
- Gag
- Bitless

Principles of bitting: Bits (and bridles) operate on one or more of the 7 parts of the horse's head where pressure is applied

- bars
- lips and corners of the mouth
- roof of mouth
- tongue
- curb/chin groove
- poll
- nose

What makes a bit more/less severe:

- # of pressure points acted upon
- Size of mouthpiece in relation to horse's mouth size
 - Previously it was believed that a thick mouthpiece was softest
 - This is still true in most cases
 - Exception: the horse with the small mouth, low roof of mouth or large tongue will be more comfortable in a smaller/narrower bit
- Length of shank
 - The longer the shank, the more leverage you have = stronger bit
 - How the curb chain is done up will affect this
 - None used/loose chain = decreases leverage capabilities
 - Overly tight will increase the leverage
 - **45 degree angle is considered correct**
- # of joints
 - Mullen mouth (straight bar) = least severe
 - Single jointed = nutcracker action
 - Double jointed may be:
 - Less severe is the central link lies flat on the tongue (e.g., French Link)
 - More severe if the central link cuts into the tongue (e.g., Dr. Bristol)
 - An unjointed bit with a high port can be considered very severe
- Treatment of mouthpiece (smooth, serrated, rollers, etc.)
- Materials used for mouthpiece (steel, rubber, etc.)
- Technique/skill of rider
- If used in conjunction with other articles of tack (e.g., crank nosebands, etc.)
- Size of the rings (the further away the reins attach from the centre of the bit, the more severe)
- Length of the cannons (the further away the reins attach from the centre of the bit, the more severe)

Main types of bits:

Snaffle: *direct pressure bit with upward head raising action; does not use leverage*

- Has one mouthpiece, jointed or mullen mouth/unjointed
- Simplest form of bit
- Operates on the corners of the mouth
- A jointed snaffle adds **nutcracker action** to the lower jaw
 - Bars
 - Tongue
 - Possibly the roof of the mouth
- Jointed is more severe than a mullen mouth
- *straightbar/mullen mouth:* simplest bit – works on direct pressure

- *single jointed snaffle*: works on direct pressure and adds nutcracker action to the lower jaw
 - comes in many different ring types, including:
 - *eggbutt*
 - *loose ring*
 - *D ring*
 - *Full cheek*
 - *Fulmer/Australian loose rein*
 - *Half cheek*
 - Comes in many different mouthpiece types, including:
 - Smooth mouth
 - Slow twist
 - Fast twist
 - Wire/twisted wire
 - Rollers
 - May have attachments that change the action or try to prevent an evasion
 - Mouthing pieces
 - Spoons
 - Double twisted wire (and a few others) introduces a second bit into the mouth
 - Comes in many different materials:
 - Stainless
 - Copper/partially copper
 - Rubber
 - Happy mouth
- Double jointed (*French Link*): decreases the nutcracker action; a softer bit
 - Has a spatula shaped centre link that lies flat against the tongue
- Double jointed (*Dr. Bristol*); severe bit
 - Had a rectangular /oblong shaped centre piece that is at an angle to the tongue

Weymouth: aka Double bridle

- There are two bits in the horse's mouth at the same time – any curb used with a bridoon
 - Curb, which **uses leverage to cause the horse to flex at the poll**
 - Typically used in conjunction with a curb chain to increase leverage
 - Bridoon (small snaffle) that has an **upward head raising action**
 - Bridoon acts on the corners/lips
 - Curb acts on bars; mullen mouth acts on tongue
 - Poll pressure
 - Curb chain acts on chin groove
 - The tighter the chain, the more severe the bit is
 - 45 degrees is considered ideal
 - A curb with a high port may act on the roof of the mouth

- *The double bridle is only for the most advanced rider and well trained horse*
 - o **NOTE: at B2, the candidate will be asked to fit a double bridle**

Pelham: another leverage bit

- Uses pressure on the mouth, poll and chin groove
- The longer the shank, the more the leverage
- ½ way between a snaffle and double bridle
- Only one mouthpiece
- Action:
 - o Pressure on the corners of the mouth
 - o Mullen mouth puts pressure on the tongue
 - o Poll pressure
 - o Curb chain acts on chin groove
- Kimberwicke is also in this family

Gag:

- **Head raising action** through pulley pressure
- An exaggerated snaffle
- *Extremely severe*
- Encourages horse to hollow its back if used long-term
- Illegal in racing and many types of competition

Bitless:

- Suitable for horses who are unable to work with a bit in their mouth or who have had a mouth injury
- Works on nose, poll, and or curb/chin groove pressure
 - o Three main types
 - Hackamore – Bosal (western) ; or English Jumping hackamore, operates *primarily on nose pressure*
 - Related to the longeing cavesson
 - Mechanical/Blair pattern hackamore: English and western; has shanks and a curb chain; operates on the *three pressure points (nose, chin groove and poll)*
 - Cross under bridle (aka Spirit, Dr. Cook, etc.) – *adds more points of pressure including side of face but has a slow rein release*