

Bits

Although there are hundreds of design variations, the basic families of bits are defined by the way in which they use or do not use leverage. They include:

- Direct pressure bits without leverage:

Snaffle bit: Uses a bit ring at the mouthpiece to apply direct pressure on the bars, tongue and corner of the mouth.

- Leverage bits:

Curb bit: A bit that uses a type of lever called a shank that puts pressure not only on the mouth, but also on the poll and chin groove.

Pelham bit: A single curb bit with two sets of reins attached to rings at the mouthpiece and end of the shank. Partly combines snaffle and curb pressure.

Kimblewick or Kimberwicke: A hybrid design that uses a slight amount of mild curb leverage on a bit ring by use of set rein placement on the ring.

- Bit combinations

A type of bridle that carries two bits, a bradoon and a curb, and is ridden with two sets of reins is called a Weymouth or double bridle, after the customary use of the Weymouth-style curb bit in a double bridle.

- Non-curb leverage designs:

Gag bit: A bit that, depending on design, may outwardly resemble a snaffle or a curb, but with added slots or rings that provide leverage by sliding the bit up in the horse's mouth, a very severe design.

Bits are further described by the style of mouthpiece that goes inside the horse's mouth as well as by the type of bit ring or bit shank that is outside the mouth, to which the reins are attached.

Types of headgear for horses that exert control with a noseband rather than a bit are usually called hackamores, though the term "bitless bridle" has become a popular colloquialism in recent years.

Mullen Mouthed Bits



Rubber Mullen Mouth



Loose Ring Mullen Mouth Snaffle

A bit with a mullen mouth is a plain mouthpiece, with a slight curvature so that it sits comfortably over the horse's tongue. This type of mouthpiece will be slightly more comfortable for a horse to carry than a straight bar mouthpiece. The mullen mouth is thought to be a gentler bit than one with a jointed mouthpiece, as there is no nutcracker effect when the reins are pulled. Mullen mouths are seen on both snaffle and curb bits such as mullen mouth grazing bits, or English and western-style pelhams. The photo depicts a mullen mouth half cheek snaffle.

Pelham Bit



The pelham bit can have a solid or jointed mouthpiece. There is a larger ring directly connected to the mouthpiece on to which the 'snaffle reins' attach, and shanks that extend down terminating in rings on which 'curb reins' attach. Because the pelham bit has leverage action, a curb chain or strap loops under the horse's chin to prevent the bit from rotating too far, and also provides another pressure point. A small 'lip strap' on the bit shown prevents the horse from trying to nibble at the shanks

The Eggbutt Snaffle



Eggbutt snaffles can have a straight or jointed mouthpiece. The rings are attached to the mouthpiece by wide cylindrical cheek pieces. The mouthpiece of the bit tapers inwards from the cheeks. These tapers may start out very wide or rather narrow depending on the bit. Wider tapers indicate a milder bit, but some horses with small mouths may have problems holding a wide bit. The bit pictured has a narrow taper to the jointed mouthpiece.

The Loose Ring Snaffle



Loose ring snaffles can have a simple curved mouth piece or jointed like this one. The rings are attached by a simple loop at the end of the mouth piece.

D-Ring Snaffle Bit



Named for the shape of the rings, this bit is another very common English riding horse bit. Some people prefer these for starting young horses. They are a little quieter in the horse's mouth because the rings are more fixed. Some horses are quite comfortable in them. Because of the way the rings are attached to the mouthpiece, there is less chance of the horse being pinched.

English Full Cheek Snaffle Bit



English Full Cheek Snaffle Bit is designed so it does not pull through the horse's mouth. The tops of the cheeks may or may not be affixed to the bridle. Doing so changes the action of the bit somewhat.

Kimberwick and Uxeter Kimberwick



A Uxeter Kimberwick has slots in the rings and the Kimberwick has plain D-shaped rings. They are also often seen on ponies, giving their young riders a little more 'brakes' than a plain snaffle on a pony who tends to be strong.

Dr. Bristol Mouthpiece



Also called a Doc Bristol, this bit has a flat link in the middle, and looks slightly like a French link. The difference is that the link is longer and set at a slight angle, so the edge of the link has more bearing on the tongue when the reins are pulled. Like the French link, the Dr. Bristol has a slight nutcracker action. A Dr. Bristol mouthpiece is more severe than a French mouth or mullen mouth.

Keys



Keys are small elongated beads of metal and are most often seen on bits intended for introducing young horses to the bit. There are usually three keys attached to a center ring in the mouthpiece. You might see this bit called a mouthing bit. Many trainers no longer favor these bits as it is felt the bit encourages the horse to play with the bit too much