

catch against the front teeth and encourage the horse to put his tongue over the bit. If too high, the horse will have its lips stretched and eventually they become sore and cracked. Care should be exercised to determine the correct width for the mouth. A common evasion occurs when the horse grabs the bit in the teeth. This does not mean necessarily that the horse has a hard mouth, but often denotes a soft mouth and a bit that is the wrong size.

THE GAG BIT is closely allied to the snaffle. Gags differs from the snaffle in that instead of the cheek piece on the headstall and reins being attached to the bit rings (beside the mouthpiece), the bridle head passes through small holes in each ring, and through the reins, to the rider's hands. The bit runs up and down on the cheek piece. As the bit rises up the rounded rein towards the cheek straps, it has the effect of raising the head as opposed to letting the horse pull its chin into its chest. Although a certain amount of pressure comes on to the poll, the upward force on the corners of the mouth outweighs that of the lowering effect of the poll pressure. Gags should only be used with great care, with the rider understanding that a pull and release action on the reins is necessary for the bit to work properly. Gags may have several different mouthpieces: thin, twisted and roller mouthpieces are extremely severe.

In conclusion the action of the snaffle bit depends upon the combination of material used in the mouthpiece, the diameter of the mouthpiece, the shape of sides of the bit, the curve of the mouthpiece, the looseness of the joint, the number of joints, the fit of the bit and ultimately, the hands and experience of the rider. The End

In Memory of Helen B. Williamson



This series of brochures on various aspects of good horsemanship is dedicated to the memory of Helen B. Williamson, to help inform and educate people on the humane handling and proper care of horses. Helen had a deep love and respect for horses. She once said, "I can't imagine life without horses!" Helen was a founding member of CRTWH, and served as its first president and then as secretary until her death in 2000.



Next in this series:

**BITS #3
Curb & Pelham Bits**

For further information please contact

CRTWH

P.O. Box 246, Postal Station 'M'
Calgary, Alberta T2P 2H9
or secretary@crtwh.ca

Web site: <http://www.crtwh.ca>

Canadian Registry of the Tennessee Walking Horse

*Helen B. Williamson
Memorial
Horsemanship Series*



**BITS #2
SNAFFLE BITS**

SNAFFLE BITS by Dianne Little

The snaffle category comprises the largest group of bits. Although the rider's hands must always be considered, the snaffle bit generally acts on the tongue, bars or sides of the bars, the lips and the corners of the mouth.

With all snaffle bits the reins and the headstall are attached to the bit in the same location – directly at the mouthpiece (bit rings). There is a misconception in many horse circles that a broken mouthpiece is always a snaffle bit. However, it does not matter whether the mouthpiece is solid (fixed) or broken (jointed), if the reins are not attached to the bit beside the mouthpiece, the bit is NOT technically considered a snaffle bit. If the rein is attached to the bit below the mouthpiece, the bit is a curb bit, NOT a snaffle bit. A curb bit produces leverage – a snaffle bit produces no leverage because the rein is attached at the mouthpiece giving a direct and straight connection from the bit to the rider's hand.

Snaffle bits can be divided into subgroups by describing or defining the side of the bit – the part of the bit directly beside the mouthpiece to which the headstall and reins are attached (bit rings).

1. Ring or O-ring snaffle - mouthpiece attached to a flat or round ring. The mouthpiece slides on the ring. Ring snaffles prevent rubbing and pinching of the lips and help keep the bit evenly placed in the mouth. The diameter of the ring determines how much pressure is placed on lips and corner of the horse's mouth. A loose leather chin strap should always be attached from one ring to the other ring with the leather passing under

the jaw so that the bit may not be pulled through the horse's mouth.

2. Eggbutt snaffle - mouthpiece attached to an egg shape. Eggbutt snaffles prevent rubbing and pinching of the lips, help keep the bit evenly placed in the mouth and prevent the bit from being pulled through the mouth.
 3. D- ring snaffle - mouthpiece attached to a D shape. D-ring snaffles prevent rubbing and pinching of the lips, help keep the bit evenly placed in the mouth and prevent the bit from being pulled through the mouth. D-ring snaffles are often used to lower the head.
 4. Half cheek snaffle (often called a driving bit) - mouthpiece attached to a circle with a bar coming out of one end. Some half cheek snaffles may be used with the bar facing up or the bar facing down with advantages to each position
 5. Full cheek snaffle - mouthpiece attached to a circle with a bar beside the mouthpiece extending above and below the mouthpiece. The full cheek snaffle helps the horse turn by applying gentle cheek pressure on the sides of the horse's face. The longer the length of the sides in a full cheek snaffle, the greater the amount of pressure put on the side of the horse's face.
- Snaffle bits can be further divided into those with a straight or fixed or mullen mouth; those with a jointed mouth; as well as the material used to construct the mouthpiece.

When choosing a snaffle bit,

thought should be given to the severity required. As a general rule the thicker the diameter of the mouthpiece, the gentler the action of the bit. The straight (fixed or solid bar) and mullen (solid, but slightly rounded) mouthpieces are the least severe. However, for a horse with a dry mouth, a fixed or solid-mouthpiece bit is not recommended: a jointed mouthpiece would be much kinder.

Jointed snaffles vary considerably in severity. The severity is dependant upon two factors (other than the diameter of the mouthpiece) – the shape of the arms and the looseness of the joint. The greater the curve of the arms and the tighter the joint, the less sharp the nutcracker action on the tongue. The straighter the arms and the looser the joint, the sharper the nutcracker action on the tongue. The ideal jointed snaffle is a bit with a loose joint that does not close too much. The more joints in a mouthpiece, the more severe the action. Twisted, jointed and very thin mouthpieces can cause great pain to the horse and potential damage to the horse's mouth.

The snaffle has no special purpose beyond that of a very practical and relatively humane all purpose bit with no special refinements or abilities. Simple and straightforward in action, the snaffle can do little more than indicate to the horse to slow down or turn. The best use of a smooth and thick-mouthed snaffle is to encourage the horse to go forward with confidence, stepping boldly without fear for its mouth. The snaffle is usually used for the early stages of a horse's training where the last thing desired is to raise the head by means of hands and reins.

The fitting of a snaffle is important. It must be neither too high, nor too low in the mouth, but fit snugly into the corners without undue wrinkling. If fitted too low it will only