

PELHAM

The Pelham group consists of those bits using two reins (a true Pelham) and those using only one rein. The Pelham brings together one or more features from the snaffle and curb groups, producing a single mouthpiece which combines the action of the two bits. In short, a Pelham is a curb with a built-in snaffle. Most features found in each group will be found in the Pelham.

The Pelham is often used with only one rein. A Pelham bit frequently used by Walking Horses is the Kimberwick. Instead of two rings for attachment of the reins there is only a large Dee with two slots in the rounded part of the D. When a rein is attached in the lower slot, the action is that of a curb. When a rein is attached in the upper slot, the action is that of a snaffle. A square slot rather than usual round eye-hole applies more poll pressure and consequently greater head lowering effect. The Kimberwick is a strong bit and should be treated with respect. Although Pelham bits suit horses with short, wide jaws, it is generally better to try either a snaffle or double bridle. A Pelham bit is fit the same way as a snaffle.

The End



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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.



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Photo above by Jo Kingsland, 1988.

Canadian Registry of the Tennessee Walking Horse

*Helen B. Williamson
Memorial
Horsemanship Series*



BITS: #3

CURB &

PELHAM BITS

CURB BITS by Dianne Little

When the rein is attached below the mouthpiece the bit is considered a curb or leverage bit. Because of this lever action, curb bits are generally acknowledged to be far stronger than snaffle bits. Just how that lever action works, how the additional power is applied and for what purpose leverage is required, is barely understood by most of us. The essence of curb bit theory lies in the mechanical advantage of multiplied power (force) resulting from lever action.

There are four parts to a curb bit: the length of the cheek piece (or metal) above the mouthpiece where the headstall is attached; the length of the cheek piece (or metal) below the mouthpiece where the rein is attached; the curb chain or strap; and the mouthpiece.

The junction of the leather headstall with the top of the metal cheek piece (above the mouthpiece) is the fulcrum of the lever. The length and relative proportions of the two sections of the cheek piece (above and below the mouthpiece) determine the lever action and the severity or strength of the leverage. The greater the difference between the length of the cheek piece above the mouthpiece and the length of the cheek piece below the mouthpiece, the greater the strength of the lever. The more equal the length of both cheek pieces, the more gentle the effect of the lever.

The cheek piece above the mouth

piece exerts pressure on the poll. The longer the cheek piece above the mouthpiece, the greater the degree of pressure which can be exerted on the poll. The cheek piece below the mouthpiece exerts pressure on the lower jaw. The longer the cheek piece below the mouthpiece, the greater the possible leverage which can be exerted on the lower jaw. To further complicate the situation, the cheek pieces below the mouthpiece may be straight or curved thus changing the leverage.

The curb chain behind the jaw supplies additional mechanical force. Every time the rein is taken up, the curb chain is tightened and this lever action comes into play. The curb chain or strap should be positioned so that it lies perfectly smoothly from end to end, neither too tight or too loose. When the curb chain is fitted too loosely the action on the chin groove and lower jaw is ineffective.

The shape and weight of the curb bit and its rein ensures that there is always a tiny element of lever pressure on the bars of the mouth even when the rider is exerting no significant pressure on the rein. To that extent, and even when riding with a loose curb rein, the bit will of its own accord be “whispering” the appropriate signals to the horse. As contact is taken, the whisper will become louder and clearer. This lever effect is a multiplying force. A light pull on the reins will inevitably be felt by the horse as a pressure on the bars, the tongue, the chin groove and the poll, or any combination of these. Consequently the mechanically boosted power of the curb bit

should never be exerted permanently and without relief.

The purpose of the curb bit is not easy to define or describe. It is however generally accepted that a curb bit encourages relaxation of the jaw. Curb bits can be used to maintain head carriage and induce flexion. Curb bits apply pressure to the tongue, bars, roof of the mouth (with a port), curb-groove and the poll. The weight and angle of the bit affects the horse. When using a curb bit with a port, the port moves higher and more forward the more you pull. This action has the potential to damage the palate of the horse.

The best known of the curb bits is the Weymouth with or without a port. A very short cheeked or “Tom-Thumb” curb is the gentlest of the Weymouths. The Walking Horse Bit is a curb bit of the Weymouth group.

In conclusion, a curb bit is a powerful bit. The leverage action decreases the force required by the rider but increases the force applied to the horse. It is a bit that is respected by the horse and should be respected by the rider for what it is – a potentially severe and damaging bit.

DOUBLE BRIDLE

A double bridle is just what the name implies – two sets of reins and two bits. With a double bridle, one pair of reins is attached to the bridoon or snaffle bit and another pair of reins is attached to the curb bit. The rider has two reins in each hand to enable each bit to be used individually.