



FEIF Equipment Manual

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1. Introduction

The activities of FEIF include a very wide range of demands on an even wider range of horses and riders. The combination of our demands and the relative training levels of our horses and riders can lead to a number of questions around the topic of the equipment we use on our horses.

This document provides a guide to the equipment most commonly used with Icelandic horses. The manual is developed by FEIF to provide a basis for common understanding and educational purpose. The contents of this document are not rules. Should any information in this document conflict with the published FEIF Rules and Regulations, FEIF Rules and Regulations will prevail.

This document will be reviewed and updated by the Board of FEIF, with the assistance of a number of experts from the Icelandic horse world. These individuals bring a wide range of experience as trainers, riders, breeders, and judges. Exploiting their combined knowledge, they have provided descriptions and information regarding the correct usage of the most common equipment, used successfully across various Icelandic horse disciplines.

The development of equine equipment is constantly changing. It is impossible to provide a complete list of all equipment that is appropriate for use in riding the Icelandic horse.¹ Rather than trying to be exhaustive, this document offers guidance for the most common equipment. There may be situations where other equipment can be effectively and safely used. Riders should consult the prohibited equipment lists maintained on the FEIF website (www.feif.org) for the current list of prohibited equipment, and use caution when experimenting with new equipment.

Riders

It is the ultimate responsibility of the rider to be knowledgeable and properly trained in the use of any equipment. Furthermore, the rider should make certain the horse has been correctly trained as well. FEIF considers the first duty of all horsemen to care for the welfare of our horses. Proper selection of equipment and an awareness of training levels of horse and rider is an essential part of this consideration.

Riders should also use caution not to rely too much on the equipment to solve problems. There are times when a change of equipment seems to solve an issue, but only hides the symptoms of the true problem. Care should be taken to consider other reasons for “problem behavior” (such as stiffness, head tossing, and teeth clenching) and riders and trainers must not immediately assume that a simple change of equipment will solve the problem.

In the end, the equipment is part of the training, and not a substitute for training.

Officials

FEIF demands that appointed officials and judges are knowledgeable in the correct use of equipment. All officials and judges must be able to recognize inappropriate or prohibited equipment, as well as equipment, which is not fitted correctly.

¹ This document only addresses the equipment used in riding. Other activities such as driving Icelandic horses are beyond the scope of this document.



2. Bits & bridles

Introduction

All horses and riders must be treated as individuals with different levels of training and different preferences for equipment. When deciding which bit and bridle to use for a given horse, the rider must take into account the entire picture of the horse's and the rider's experience and the aims that are to be achieved by using any particular combination.

By using the same equipment and the same settings ride after ride, the horse can experience pressure in the same places in the mouth. This pressure can cause accidental damage to sensitive tissues in the horse's mouth, therefore riders should consider changing the bit and bridle from time to time to provide relief on the same pressure points in the horse's mouth.

It is the rider's responsibility to present a horse in equipment that fits the horse (physically and is suitable for the level of training) and the demands of the test.

Mouth & head anatomy

Any discussion of bits requires a common understanding of the basic anatomy of the horse's mouth. The areas of specific interest are the bars, corners of the mouth (buccal mucosa), tongue, and the roof of the mouth (palatum durum).

Bars

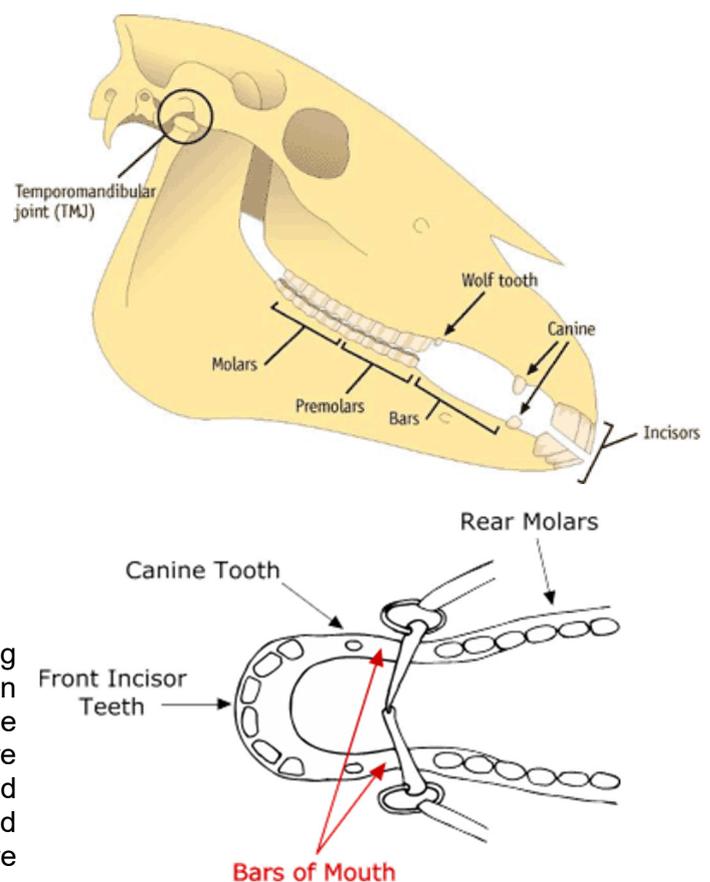
The "bars" refer to the area of both sides of both the upper and lower jaw between the 3rd incisor and the 2nd premolar. Wolf teeth and canines, if present, are in this area. This is the area where a properly fitted bit should sit.

There is an extremely thin layer of soft tissue covering the underlying bony structures of the jaw in this portion of the mouth. This thin layer contains a large number of nerves and helps the horse to sift out stones and other non-food as it grazes. The thinness of the tissue and the large number of nerves makes this area extremely sensitive to bit pressure.

Mouth corners (buccal mucosa)

The "buccal mucosa" is, specifically, the inner lining of the cheeks and lips, which is an anatomic region that includes all the mucous membrane lining of the inner surface of the cheeks and lips. To be more correct, these areas should be addressed separately but their involvement in the fitting and mechanics of bits is quite similar so they are considered together.

These areas contain no hard, bony structures. However, it is possible for bits and bridles (and halters) to cause squeezing in these areas. The squeezing can be between the equipment and the teeth or between different parts of the equipment.



Tongue

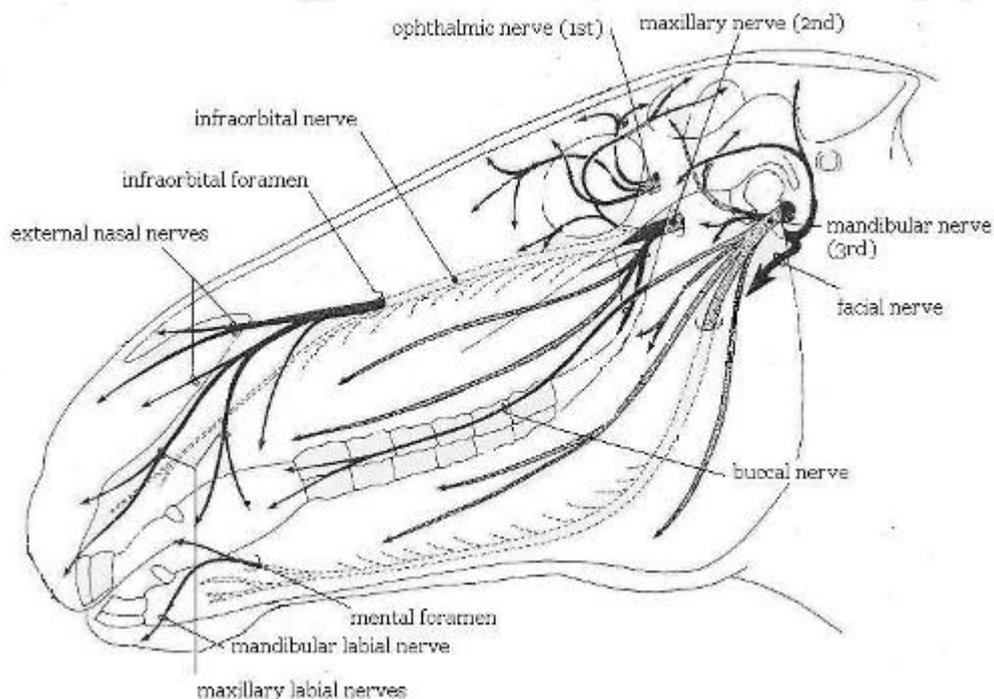
The tongue is a strong muscle in the mouth of the horse. This muscle naturally fills most of the oral cavity (mouth space) when the horse has its mouth closed. As soon as any bit is placed in the mouth, the tongue begins to take the pressure.

Roof of the mouth (palatum durum)

This area of the mouth, much like the bars, has a very thin layer of soft enervated tissue covering the bony structure of the hard palate. Pressure placed on the roof of the mouth squeezes the thin layer of tissue against the underlying bone.

Composition & differences

Horses are all individuals and each has differences in the basic mouth anatomy that must be considered when selecting equipment. Some individuals have fleshier mouths while others are more bony in structure. There can be a wide variety in the widths of the jaws, which must be considered when selecting the correct width of a bit. The tongue can be either thick or small, which is important in deciding how thick a mouthpiece to use. The palate can also be high or low which, combined with the shape of the tongue, limits the space available for the bit.



Nerves

The image above shows the primary facial nerves and where they pass through the horse's skull. It is important to keep in mind that once the nerves such as the external nasal nerves pass through the infra-orbital foramen they are in a relatively thin bit of soft tissue over large bony structures of the head. Any pressure on these nerves can cause discomfort or injury.

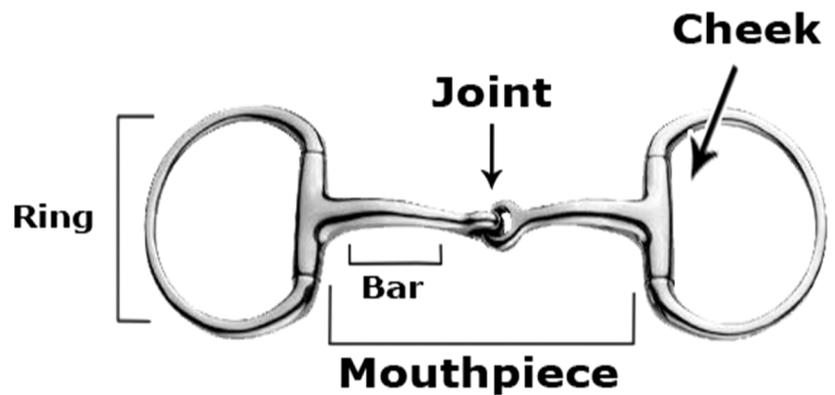
It is especially important for the rider to consider these nerve pathways when selecting and fitting a noseband and halter. It is possible for either to put strong pressure on the nerves if not fitted correctly.



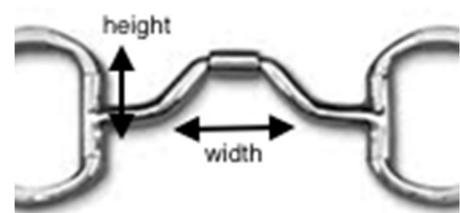
Bit terminology

As with the terms for the anatomy of the horse's mouth, it is useful to establish common terms for the various parts of the different bits. These terms are the same regardless of the type of bit.

The **mouthpiece** (or mouth) describes the design of the portion of the bit that sits in the horse's mouth. Mouthpieces can be solid, **jointed** (also known as "broken"), **double jointed** ("double broken") or **multi jointed**. The **bar** of the bit is the part of the bit's mouth that contacts the bar in the horse's mouth.



The mouthpiece can also be straight or **ported**. A ported mouthpiece has a significant raised section in the center, which transfers pressure from the tongue to the bars. The degree to which this pressure is transferred is a factor of the height of the port (the relative difference between the highest part of the mouth and the connection to the rings) and the width of the raised portion.



The **cheek** refers to any fixed portion of the bit outside the horse's mouth. A loose-ring snaffle, technically, has no cheek as the mouthpiece connects directly to the ring. Again, considering snaffle bits, the **ring** is the portion of the bit, which connects the reins to the mouthpiece. There are several variations on rings. Refer to the section on snaffle bits for more information.

Curb bits (as pictured to the right) add the concepts of **purchase** and **shank** (sometimes referred to as *leverage*). The purchase and shank combine to form the cheek with the purchase being the portion acting above the mouthpiece and the shank acting below. It is not strictly the case that all curb bits have both purchase and shank.



Signal versus contact designs

There are two broad functional categories into which most bits fall: contact bits and signal bits.

A **contact bit** is designed to be used with a light, constant connection applied via the reins. Both snaffle type and curb bit type can be used as contact bits.

A **signal bit** is designed to be ridden with little or no rein connection until a short signal is given to the horse. Signal bits are often seen in Western disciplines, where the horses are asked to perform tasks on very loose reins. The suitable riding style is one-handed without constant contact.

The traditional Icelandic bit is a combination of both types. This bit can be used as either type of bit depending on where the bit is placed in the mouth and how tight the chain is set. Refer to chapter 'Icelandic Bit'.

Sizing & fitting

Some of the most common injuries identified during mouth inspections are caused by incorrectly sized or fitting bits. The risk of this type of injury exists with all types of bits & bridles.

It is absolutely essential that the bit be the correct width for the horse's mouth.

A bit that is too narrow can cause pinch injuries in the corners of the mouth. These injuries can be especially severe in the cases where the connection between the mouth and the cheek of the bit is loose.

A bit that is too wide can easily ride up too high in the mouth of the horse and come into contact with the premolars. This causes a pinch injury by trapping soft tissue between the bit and the teeth.

The fit of the bit is essential to its correct function. When a bit is slightly loose in the mouth the horse has the opportunity to place and move the bit to suit his comfort. An overly tight bit will constrict the horse's ability to find a comfortable place to carry the bit. It might also put too much constant pressure on the molars behind the bit seat. When a bit is too low in the mouth there is a risk that the horse lifts the tongue over the bit.

The overall shape of the bit determines where the forces from the reins are felt in the mouth. There is more detailed discussion of this principle in the section on **mouthpieces**. In broad terms, the more straight the bit the more evenly the pressure is shared on the tongue, bars, and lips. As the bit becomes more curved the forces are more isolated on the different parts of the mouth. The most extreme example of this is a ported mouthpiece, which transfers force from the muscle of the tongue to the thin layer of soft tissue on the bars.

Materials

Bits are available in a wide variety of metals, rubber, plastics and leather. The choice of materials is up to the preference of horse and rider.

It should be noted, however, that some of the metal bits rely on different types of metal in the same bit. This can lead to a chemical reaction in the mouth of the horse, which can cause injury or aggravate an existing wound.



Care should also be taken to note whether the dissimilar metals are wearing unevenly at the joints in the bit. Softer metals like copper, for instance, can be worn down by harder metals. This wearing can cause larger openings in the joints or sharp edges to form. The larger openings increase the risk of a pinch injury and sharp edges can cause cuts or abrasions.

Some materials including specific metals like “sweet iron” or coatings on bits can wear over time causing the bit surface to become rough. A rough surface may cause abrasions.

As soon as a bit is showing signs of wear, the rider should check the condition of the mouth tissues more frequently to protect against accidental injury.

As a general rule, the smoother the surface of the bit the smaller the chance of accidental injury. This concept extends to the connections between the moving pieces.

Stainless Steel	Most popular metal for bits. Easy to clean. Does not rust. Considered to be a “neutral” metal with regard to salivation.
Copper	Softer than stainless steel. Easily and quickly worn by horses. Some believe copper encourages chewing and salivation. Often used in combination with other metals, which can cause uncomfortable chemical reactions in the mouth. Allergic reactions are possible with copper.
Copper Alloy	Copper is often mixed with other metals to make a longer lasting product. Most commonly found copper alloys are brass (copper + zinc) and Aurigan (copper + zinc + silicon). Subject to many of the same issues as copper but less likely to wear dangerously.
Sweet Iron	This is normally cold-rolled carbon steel, which rusts easily. This material is thought to encourage salivation. Care should be taken because the rusty surface can cause abrasion injuries.
Nickel Alloy	This is a variant of steel that is less expensive than stainless steel, yet remains durable. Nickel tends to have a drying effect in the mouth.
Aluminum	An extremely poor choice because the metal is toxic and has a known drying effect in the mouth – worse than nickel.
Rubber	Often used as a coating in mouthpieces. The softness of the material is attractive to some horses, but it wears out easily. Frequent inspections are necessary to make sure the bit is safe for horse and rider.
Synthetics	A variety of plastics are used to make and/or coat bits. These combine the softness of rubber with the durability of metals. The best synthetics are not easily damaged by chewing.
Leather	Leather bits become soft due to saliva production and encourage salivation. Depending on type, thickness and core type, a leather bit gets a sharper or softer effect. Inspections are necessary to make sure the bit is safe for horse and rider. Old, dry bits can cause abrasion injuries.



Bit guards

Rubber rings can be added to bits to provide extra protection between the rings or cheeks and the mouthpiece of the bit. These rings offer additional protection against pinch injuries in the corners of the mouth. It is important to keep in mind that rubber rings make the bit narrower.

When using curb bits, some riders choose to make their own bit guards from a thin sheet of rubber. This allows the guard to have a custom fit to the shape of the shanks without running the risk of interfering with the function of the curb chain.



There is another common type of bit guard used to soften the curb chain.

Less common is a similar wrapping of the mouthpiece of the bit. Care must be taken to be sure the wrapping material is not harmful to the horse or likely to come off the mouthpiece during use.

Specific bits

The following outlines the common bits used when riding the Icelandic horse. This list is not exhaustive. The bits listed are representative of the most commonly used bits in the Icelandic horse world. The rider is encouraged to seek professional advice from a source familiar with the Icelandic horse when selecting bits – either on this list or of another design.

Before using any bit it is the duty of the rider to:

- make sure the bit is in proper repair;
- make sure the bit is the correct size for the horse;
- make sure the bit is placed correctly in the horse's mouth;
- make sure horse and rider are properly trained to understand the function and use of the bit.



Snaffle bits

This broad category of bits refers to any bit consisting of a mouthpiece with ring attachments to connect the bridle. There can be a wide variety of mouthpieces and an equally wide variety of rings and/or cheeks. The defining characteristic of the snaffle bit is a lack of shanks.

A true snaffle is never used with any type of curb chain or strap. There is no function for a curb device with a true snaffle as there is no aspect of the bit to cause leverage on which the curb can act. If there is a leverage function to the bit it is not a true snaffle.

It is also important to note that in all snaffle bits there is no sliding effect of the mouthpiece. While the mouthpiece can move around some of the rings it cannot slide up and down on the cheek pieces or rings. A bit with this type of sliding action is a **gag** bit and not part of the family of snaffle bits.

The remainder of this section will address the common rings and mouthpieces separately. It is possible to find nearly any combination in a snaffle bit somewhere on the market. By describing each component, riders have the opportunity to make the best decision regarding the proper combination for their level of training and that of the horse, as well.

Rings

This section describes the typical ring and cheek configurations found on snaffle bits designed for riding.

This diameter of the ring can have an impact on the function.

Loose ring

Construction: There is no fixed connection between the mouthpiece and the rings. The rings are completely round and able to move freely through the ends of the mouthpiece.



Cautions: There is a pinch danger between the ring and the hole in the mouthpiece. This danger is minimized if the holes are fairly small relative to the diameter of the ring material. The use of bit guards can minimize the pinch risk if the holes are too large. There is also a variant of the mouthpiece that incorporates a sleeve on the end of the mouthpiece. This variation (pictured) can act in a similar way to the rubber bit guards.



Dee-ring

Construction: The ring is shaped like the letter "D". The mouthpiece attaches to the straight part of the "D" in a fixed manner preventing the bit from rotating. The straight part of the "D" provides a guiding effect to the reins.



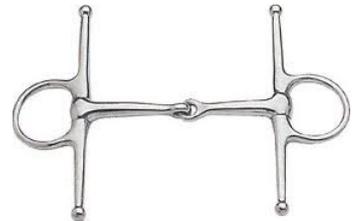
Egg butt

Construction: The ring is oval in shape with a fixed connection between the mouthpiece and the rings. This bit is similar to the Dee-ring but does not provide as much of a guiding effect because the bridle attachment point is slightly more flexible than with the sharp stop in the Dee-ring but still it lies a little steadier in the horse's mouth.



Full cheek

Construction: The full cheek snaffle has long, straight arms that stabilize the bit outside the mouth. There is no mechanical connection between these arms and the bridle or reins, so there is no leverage. The cheek pieces provide a lateral guiding effect and prevent the bit from being pulled into the mouth.



Caution: There is a risk of the arms of the cheek pieces becoming entangled. For this reason, most full cheek snaffles are used with a **bit keeper**. This is a piece of leather that connects the top of the upper cheek piece with the bridle preventing anything from catching the top of the bit. The bit keeper also serves to stabilize the bit in the horse's mouth.

Baucher (hanging cheek)

Construction: This bit has a ring where the mouthpiece attaches and a smaller ring in above where the cheek piece of the bridle is attached. The purchase stabilizes the position of the mouthpiece.



Mouthpieces

This section describes the most common constructions for snaffle mouthpieces used in riding horses.

The following designs are available in a wide variety of thicknesses. The thickness of the mouthpiece is an extremely important factor in the severity of the bit. In general terms, a thinner mouthpiece is a more severe one, since the forces are concentrated on a smaller section of the tongue and bars. However, it is important to remember that the Icelandic horse has a small mouth, so an overly thick mouthpiece may be uncomfortable and may lead to injury.

Jointed bit (also single-broken)

Construction: This is likely the most common mouthpiece found on a snaffle bit. There is a single joint in the center of the mouthpiece where the two sides meet in interlocking rings.



Caution: This mouthpiece applies pressure to the tongue, lips and bars as force is taken on the reins. If the bit is too wide, the often described nut-cracker effect might happen.



Double Jointed

Construction: This mouthpiece has three pieces inside the mouth of the horse. The outer pieces that rest on the bars and a center-piece that rests on the tongue. The center-piece takes several forms.



The center-piece is recommended to be small and to be carried comfortably on the tongue. The correct width of the bit is essential.



In general, there is risk of injury in the buccal mucosa. The risk increases if the bit has a large center-piece and/or the rider keeps uneven rein pressure, or if the horse is stiffer on one side.

Unbroken (Mullen)²

Construction: This is a straight or slightly curved mouthpiece² that has no joints. The pressure applied when force is taken on the reins is evenly distributed across the tongue, lips and bars. This bit can be found in a variety of materials. Since the position is very still, some horses accept it and stop excessive chewing. As the bit is unbroken, one-sided rein aids are difficult for the horse to understand.



Roller

Construction: This mouthpiece variant includes free moving rollers on a jointed (single- or double-) mouthpiece. The design is to encourage the horse to relax the mouth and activate the tongue.



Caution: This type of mouthpiece can be a distraction for tense or nervous horses. The construction of the rollers is often from a dissimilar metal to the main mouthpiece. This can lead to a chemical reaction. With wear and tear the rollers can pinch.



Ported

Construction: This mouthpiece is a variant of the unbroken, single-jointed, and double-jointed mouthpieces where there is a curve to the mouthpiece. The curved portion of the mouthpiece is the "port". The port is a bend over the full width of the bit or a bend in the center of the bit, irrelevant of the direction of the port. Depending on the height of the port and the angle at which the port sits in the mouth, there can also be force applied to the roof of the mouth.



² The Mullen is always slightly curved as pictured.



Caution: The port transfers rein forces more directly to the bars of the mouth. These tissues are more sensitive to pressure and more easily damaged than the fleshier parts of the tongue and lips. The wider and higher the port the more of the force transferred to the bars.

Extreme caution should be taken when using ported bits. Riders must be vigilant in their mouth inspections, paying particular attention to the bars.

Curb bits (Kandare)

The curb bit consists of a mouthpiece, cheeks that have a leverage component, and a curb chain (or strap) that acts under the horse's jaw. Some variants of the curb bit have both purchase and leverage. The leverage comes from the connection of the reins below the mouthpiece. The purchase, when present, comes from the connection of the bridle cheek piece above the mouthpiece.

Criteria to ride with curb bits:

- The horse must be established in its contact and acceptance of the bit.
- The horse must be supple enough to 'let the aids through'.
- All movements and exercises should be practiced in a snaffle before they are ridden in a curb bit.
- The rider needs more technical experience and sensitive control to learn to use the reins of a curb bit.
- Elasticity of hand is even more important since the lever action of the bit increases the intensity of its action in the mouth.
- The rider has to be constantly on guard too avoid too much pressure on the curb reins.
- Attention is needed on the (outside) curb rein, misuse will cause the horse to tilt its head from the poll.
- **Very important: a correct, balanced seat of the rider who can use his hands independently is needed.**

Cheeks

The design of the cheeks on a curb bit determines the basic style and, more importantly, the amount of leverage applied to the horse's mouth and curb groove from when force is applied to the reins.

A typical cheek design has a 1:3 ratio between the length of the **purchase** portion of the cheek to the length of the **shank** portion. Assuming this basic design ratio, the leverage applied to the horse is 4 times the force applied to the reins by the rider. This multiplier effect increases directly with the length of the shanks.

Without consideration to the design of the mouthpiece, a shorter shanked curb bit is generally milder than a longer shanked bit. The shorter shanks provide a quicker reaction from the time reins are taken to the time the curb chain comes into contact.

The rider should keep in mind the length of the shank also determines how quickly the horse will feel the force of the reins. A shorter shank will communicate the force faster than a longer shank.

Some curb bit variants have longer purchase relative to the size of the shank. This will reduce the leverage effect of the shank and at the same time apply more pressure at the poll when force is applied to the reins. The pressure at the poll encourages the horse to lower the head without pressure to flex the nose in towards the body.



Cheek connections

The connection between the mouthpiece and the cheeks of a curb bit has an impact on the severity of the bit and the subtleness of the communication. Any loose connections between the reins, cheeks, and mouthpiece offer a small moment of “warning” to the horse when force is applied to the reins. This signal makes it possible for the horse to respond to lighter pressure, which is beneficial to a horse being trained to a curb bit or for more subtle communication in an experienced horse.

Conversely, a curb bit with rigid connections especially between the cheeks and mouthpiece is a significantly more severe bit.

Cheek shape

The overall shape of the cheek controls when the bit engages in response to rein force.

The cheek shape can vary from straight to curved.

The effectiveness is influenced as well by the tightness of the curb chain.



Mouthpieces

Curb bits offer the same variety of mouthpieces as snaffle bits.

When the rider is selecting a mouthpiece, it is essential to consider the multiplier effect of the purchase to shank ratio.

Specific curb bits

Pelham bit

Construction: The Pelham bit is technically a curb bit but it shares many traits of a snaffle as well. This effectively makes the Pelham a “double bridle” in a single bit. A rider has to use this bit with two sets of reins – one attached on the bit rings and one on the end of the shanks. The reins attached to the bit rings control the snaffle direct-contact function of the bit, and the other reins control the curb signal function of the bit.



When the chain is correctly tightened there should be a 45-degree angle between the line of the mouth and the shank when there is rein contact.

Caution: The rider must be trained in the proper use of double reins before considering this bit.

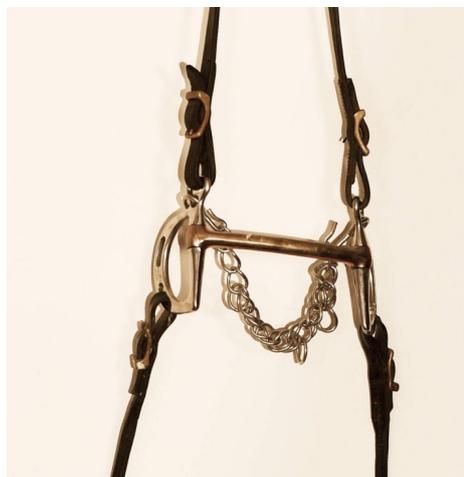
Kimblewick bit

Construction: This bit is a curb bit that very closely resembles a snaffle. The cheeks are modified “D” rings, which provide the purchase portion of a curb bit without the leverage arm created by the shank. The leverage is controlled by the location of the reins in the slots on the perimeter of the “D”.



When the chain is correctly tightened there should be a 45-degree angle between the line of the mouth and the shank when there is rein contact.

Caution: While this is the mildest of the curb family of bits, the rider does still need to remember there is a force multiplier effect happening and take care not to use too much rein force.



Icelandic bit

Construction: This bit is an excellent example of a curb bit design with loose connections between the various components. In a true Icelandic bit all of the connection points are loose and there is no purchase component as the bridle attaches to the cheek rings directly.

When used correctly, the curb chain will make little or no contact with the horse when the head is in the desired, vertical position. As the head comes more nose-forward, the curb chain will make contact without any additional force from the rein. A well-trained horse will take this as an indication to flex at the poll and return to a more vertical head carriage.

The loose connections offer more of a warning effect to the horse when the rider applies force to the reins.

Caution: The correct setting of the chain is extremely important in the Icelandic bit. An overly tight chain defeats the designed purpose of this bit. When set correctly, the chain should form an angle of approximately 110° between the shank and the line of the mouth.

The shank length (lever arm) in the Icelandic bit is among the longest found in the entire family of curb bits. This makes it extremely important for the rider to consider the force multiplication on the mouthpiece. While it is true that this bit falls somewhere between a snaffle and curb when used correctly, it is an extremely harsh curb when used incorrectly – with too much chain tension or too much rein force.

The Icelandic bit has long shanks that are connected to the mouthpiece in a way that the shanks can move in many directions independently. The shanks have a shallow curve. Many curbs used in riding styles where the horse is usually ridden with the nose in front of the vertical have this curve. The loose connection and the fact that it is used with a quite loose chain make the long shanks less harsh if used correctly. Because of the loose connection, care must be taken that this construction does not pinch the corners of the mouth. This can happen if the horse and rider are not properly trained and prepared for the bit, and are crooked. A bit guard can decrease the risk of pinching. Care must be taken that the bit guard does not affect the way the chain works.

The placement in the horse's mouth is somewhat lower than a snaffle, giving it place to lift a little when the rein is used, and the shank is lifted.

The chain should be set so it touches the chin groove when the shanks make a 110° angle to the horse's mouth, (see picture). This will make the chain completely loose when the horse has a flexed poll but is still in somewhat front of the vertical, but will put pressure if the horse stiffens the poll and/or raises its neck too much. If the angle is narrower than 110° the horse cannot find its way away from the chain without going in an unnatural form.

A well-trained horse will respond to the chain by relaxing the poll, stretching his forehead forward, arching the neck and lifting his withers. This puts the horse in a better position to respond to the bit piece, which will work as a snaffle, asking the horse to slow down and preferably collect/flex its hindquarters.



A small excursion: 'How to use the Icelandic bit' (defined by the teachers at Hólar)

By lifting their hands a little and move them forward, good riders can affect the chain without increasing bit pressure and encourage the horse to stretch the neck forward. For example, this can be seen when riding the horse long and low, fast tempo tölt, pace, trot and canter/gallop. By lowering the hands you decrease the effect of the chain and can increase the effect of the bit, so the pressure will increase on the horses tongue, bars and corner of the mouth. The looseness of the chain will make the bit turn in the horse's mouth, lift a little, and gives the horse warning to respond in the desired way, before the chain will put pressure on the horses chin groove. It is a good sign if the shanks drop down during that process. That tells you that the horse is not „held“ in a certain position, and it also allows the chain to drop down to the chin groove if it has been displaced.

Traditionally, the Icelandic bit was used with a very loose contact, often with „dropping“ / long reins, and more time spent without contact than with contact. The idea is that the horse keeps its shape in self-carriage and is only reminded and helped by the rein when needed. This can be comfortable for both horse and rider. Rein contact acts as a friendly, smooth reminder and then the reins are loosened again, instead of constant pressure to the horse's mouth. Typically you see this style with the reins in one hand.

The more “modern“ way of riding keeps a more steady contact. If the chain is correctly fitted, the line from the horse's mouth, through the shanks, to the rider's hand will then be almost straight. This is very important so the horse finds its way away from the chain; otherwise it is jammed between the bit and the chain.

Wrong use of the Icelandic bit:

- The chain is too tight when the angle between the lower jaw and the shank is less than 110°;
- See-sawing with the rein causes wounds from the chain;
- Uneven use of the reins. Seen when one shank hangs straight down, and the other points backwards for more than a very short moment.
- A tense horse must not held by the bit;
- A stiff horse must not be held in a false form;
- Jerking the reins



The mouth and the shank has at least 110°angle when the chain takes action.



The more „modern“ way of riding is that it is ridden in a more steady contact. The line from the horse's mouth through the shanks to the rider's hand will then be almost straight.



The idea is that the horse stays in self-carriage and the rein is only used to remind and help the horse when needed.

Various examples of the Icelandic Bit



Double bridles: Bradoon, Weymouth (Kandare)

Construction: A double bridle construction uses two bits and two sets of reins together. The bradoon (bridoon) is a modified snaffle bit generally having a smaller diameter mouth and smaller rings than a standard snaffle. The second bit is a curb bit. The bradoon is adjusted to sit above and behind the curb bit in the mouth. In literature, this construction is often referred to as a “bit and bradoon” where “bit” refers to the curb bit.

Normally the bradoon rein is thicker/wider than the curb rein.

Caution: Both rider and horse need to be properly trained in the use of this bit as it demands skills related to both the use of a snaffle (contact) bit and curb (signal) bit. It is essential the rider have a balanced seat and independent hands to correctly and safely use this combination.

When using double reins/bridle the rider should check length of the reins frequently and carefully.

The curb rein should never be shorter than the bradoon rein.

Most common methods of holding the double-reins:

Most common is to hold two reins in each hand and with the bradoon rein underneath the ring finger (like the snaffle rein) and the curb rein between ring and middle finger. Both reins go through the fist and pass over the top of the index finger where they are fixed by the thumb.



The reins cross so the bradoon rein is outside of the curb rein. (In classical riding the excess loops of both reins hang over the right shoulder of the horse. In Icelandic horses it is more sensible to use the side with less mane, to make sure the reins are not twisted in the long hair).

This way of rein use makes sure that the rider puts more emphasis on the bradoon and only as a second step, the curb bit takes the pressure, depending on the position of fingers and hand.

Another option is to hold the bradoon rein underneath the little finger and the curb rein between little finger and the ring finger. The function is almost the same as that of the previous mentioned method.



A further common method is to hold the bradoon rein below the ring finger and the curb rein under the little finger. This method has a stronger influence on the curb rein when the hand is turned inwards or inward-thumb forward and little finger backward. The curb rein predominates very quickly, and this should only be used by experienced riders.

Other methods of double rein use are possible, but they are only recommended for very advanced riders in special cases.

Bitless bridles

There are several options of training, riding and showing horses without a bit.

Some bitless bridles act with a leverage effect and chain, pressure being applied mainly to the horses' very sensitive nasal bone. They can be used in either contact or signal riding style, depending on the construction.

All need to be used in a correct way.



3. Nosebands

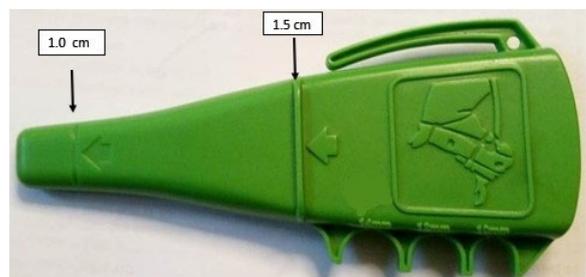
The noseband might be part of the headstall or an additional piece of equipment.

A noseband can be useful for helping the horse to stabilize its mouth. It can help also to relax the jaws. Especially for less experienced riders or horses, the noseband can prevent problems caused by the transmission of rein aids.

Care must be taken that every noseband allows the horse to keep its natural use of the mouth and nostrils, for breathing, chewing, moving the tongue around and swallowing. The correct tightness and position are very important.

Tightness of the noseband

The noseband should be carefully selected for purpose, function, and anatomy of the horse and must be suitable for the bit used. The noseband must not be too tight. A space of at least 1.5 cm for Hanoverian/ drop nosebands/leveler noseband/ Micklem and at least 1 cm for English/ combined/ anatomical nosebands must be kept between the noseband and the front of the horse's nose (nasal midline). The tightness of the noseband is measured in the equipment check using a Noseband Taper Gauge or similar. In competitions/breeding shows the measurement is done with this taper gauge to standardize the measurements at all events.



Plain cavesson (English Noseband)

Construction:

The most basic noseband used in riding Icelandic horses is the plain cavesson. This design comes in a variety of leather styles and circles the horse's nose approx. 2 cm below the cheekbones. The tightness should be at least 1cm (1-2 adult fingers) between leather and nasal bone.

Caution:

If not fitted correctly, the skin of the buccal mucosa is pressed to/between the teeth.

If there is not enough space above the corner of the mouth, the bit comes too close to the noseband and the skin will be squeezed.



Flash noseband (combined)

Construction: The flash noseband is a cavesson, which includes a second band. The second band passes below the bit and tightens under the chin groove. The two-band design stabilizes the bit in the mouth and prevents the horse from crossing his jaws or opening his mouth.

The cavesson should be fastened 2cm under the cheekbone before the lower strap is fastened. A correctly fastened upper band will leave room for at least 1cm (1-2 adult fingers) between the leather and the nasal bone. The lower band will have room for at least 1cm (1-2 adult fingers) to fit under the leather. **Note:** it is important for the upper band to be a little tighter and fixed first, so it is not pulled downward when the lower band is fastened.



Caution: The flash noseband should not interfere with the horse's ability to breathe or chew. Furthermore, an overly tight lower band can put constant pressure on a bundle of nerves, which pass through the skull where the lower band is normally tightened.

Drop (Hanoverian) noseband

Construction: The drop noseband circles the nose in the chin groove. The top of the strap should rest on the nasal bone, approximately 4 fingers above the nostrils. The correct tightness allows at least 1,5 cm (Approx. 2 adult fingers) between the leather and the nasal bone.

The design goal of this noseband is to keep the mouth stabilized and the jaws from crossing.

Some versions have more padding on the upper band.

Caution: Over-tightening this noseband runs a high risk of obstructing the nostrils and damaging the facial nerves.



Micklem

Construction: Anatomically formed, padded headpiece and noseband combination according to the shape of the skull. It is supposed to avoid pressure on the facial nerves, the protruding cheek bones and/or at the upper jaw molar teeth. Besides it avoids pressure on the fragile bone at the end of the nose. The top of the strap should rest on the nasal bone, approximately 6 fingers above the nostrils. The correct tightness allows at least 1,5 cm (Approx. 2 adult fingers) between the leather and the nasal bone.

Caution: Correct fitting and position is important



Anatomical noseband



Construction: Anatomical noseband with extra soft padding which is comfortable for the horse.

The construction is comparable with the flash noseband with more focus on anatomical issues to reduce and avoid pressure on facial nerves, fragile nose bone, cheeks and mouth. The tightness should be at least 1cm (1-2 adult fingers) between leather and nasal bone.

Swedish cavesson (also “crank”)

Construction: This noseband is very similar to a plain cavesson or flash nose band but it normally has a larger, padded band and a buckling system.

This design offers the horse some protection in cases where the buckles of a normal cavesson or flash would hit the bony structure of the head by placing some padding under the buckles. When adjusted correctly, it should be



possible to comfortably fit at least 1 cm (1 - 2 adult fingers) between the noseband and nasal bone just as with a plain cavesson.

Caution: This can be an extremely severe noseband. By over-using the buckling system the noseband exerts so much pressure the horse cannot relax the jaw. Furthermore, the combination of tension and thickness of the padding can push the horse's cheeks against his teeth.

Leveler noseband

Construction: This noseband uses a half-moon shaped piece of metal on either side of the horse's head with straps wrapping around the nose above and below the bit. The two metal pieces are connected across the top of the horse's nose by a third strap at the center of the curved metal pieces. Those metal "cheeks" stabilize the position of the jaws. The leveler noseband does not interfere with the bit. Between all leather straps and the horses' head must be space for 1,5 cm (Approx. 2 adult fingers).



Caution: The metal pieces tend to push the cheeks against the horse's teeth and can rub against the cheekbone.

Figure 8 Noseband

(also "crossed", "Grackle", or "Mexican")

Construction: This noseband is a variation on the flash noseband. Instead of two distinct bands encircling the nose, there is a single band which forms the "figure 8" which half of the figure above the bit and half below. This design has the effect of closing the upper and lower jaw equally since there is only one point of closure. This noseband is often used for horses that cross their jaws.



Caution: This noseband shares many design features of the flash noseband and, therefore, also shares many of the cautions. It is essential to make sure the two loops are positioned so that they do not restrict breathing and not so tight as to cause nerve damage.

4. Saddles & girths

There is a wide range of saddles available for riding the Icelandic horse. The rider should choose a saddle that is comfortable for both horse and rider, keeping in mind that the Icelandic horse is small and can, in some cases, have a shorter back. The saddle should fit the horse so there is no pressure on the spine or excessive pressure in the lumbar region.

The saddle should be placed on the horse so that a major part of the girth is placed on the sternum. The saddle should neither cover the shoulder blades nor be weight bearing on the lumbar region in the standing horse.

Furthermore, it is important that the saddle is well balanced on the back of the horse i.e. back and front of the saddle aligns vertically while the lowest point of the seat is at the midpoint seat area.

Importantly, the width of the saddle tree should fit the horse allowing for a stable positioning and contact between the entire weight carrying surface and the back of the horse. The girthing system of the saddle should secure the saddle on the breastbone of the horse to avoid interference with breathing.



The rider should keep an eye on the back of the horse. If the saddle is ill fitted or unbalanced, sheer marks on the fur, sensitive spots, or white hair etc. can occur. Changes in the behaviour of the horse during saddling may be an indication that the saddle inflicts discomfort or pain to the horse.

Historically, a saddle is built on a wooden saddletree. The purpose of the saddletree is to distribute the rider's body weight on a larger surface in order to minimise the strain on the back of the horse. Besides the traditional wooden saddletree, saddletrees today come in a variety of different plastic and nylon materials with more flexible properties.

Placed between the saddle tree and the back of the horse are the saddle panels. Traditionally, the saddle panels have been stuffed with wool. But today latex and air fillings exist as well. Pros and cons can be assigned to all of them. For instance, latex is very dimensionally stable and does not change much during the lifetime of the saddle. Hence, it is very important that the saddle fits the horse well from the beginning. With wool stuffing, it is possible to adjust the saddle to the horse as well as it is possible to make ongoing adjustments. However, wool stuffing demands more maintenance.

It is very important that the channel (gullet) between the saddle panels is wide enough, so that direct pressure on the spine of the horse is avoided at all times. Those panels should be broad enough to distribute the weight and allow the muscles to work. On the other hand, a flat panel, and a gullet that is too wide, will press the saddletree towards the spine. Furthermore, it should be checked that the saddle panels in the rear of the saddle rise upwards and eventually lose contact with the back of the horse (see picture).

When placing the saddle on the back of the horse, it is important to verify the saddle lies in good balance. If for example, the saddle, is too high in the front the rider will consequently slide backwards in the saddle. This again causes too much pressure centred on a narrow area on the back of the horse.

Currently, treeless saddles (saddles without a saddle tree) are very popular. The advantage of a treeless saddle is that it is very flexible and allows the horse greater freedom of movement. The disadvantage is that the body weight of the rider is not distributed as evenly over the back of the horse as compared to a normal saddle. This can be uncomfortable for the horse and cause pressure injuries on its back.

In order to make a right decision when choosing a saddle, it is important to get advice from a knowledgeable person.



5. Protective material

The rider must take care to protect the horse from injury when riding. This duty may include the use of protective boots and wraps to shield the lower limbs against injury caused by over-reaching with the hind legs and striking the front legs. There are many options available to protect the forelimbs. Riders should consider their options but be mindful of adding too much extra weight to the limbs.

When considering boots, riders should keep in mind that traditional bell boots have been shown to offer better protection than the more popular heel boots. If bell boots are selected, the rider must monitor the area above the hoof to make sure the boots are not causing abrasion injuries.

