

A Jointed Mouthpiece Is Not Always a Snaffle

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Recently I judged an impromptu equine speaking contest at which one of the participants said "all curb bits have a port". Likewise I've heard a respected trainer say, "let's put this horse in a snaffle" as he selects a bridle with a tom thumb bit (which is a curb bit regardless of the broken mouth piece).

The distinction between a snaffle and curb bit is really quite simple: **a snaffle bit works on direct pressure while a curb bit works on indirect pressure**. Unfortunately this distinction is commonly misunderstood among even some experienced horse owners and trainers. This confusion is evidenced further by an advertisement in a current issue of an equine retail magazine for a curb bit with a "snaffle" mouthpiece - there is no such thing; a broken mouthpiece does not a snaffle make.

Snaffle



A snaffle bit applies direct pressure from the rider's hands through the reins to the horse's mouth, tongue, and bars. A snaffle bit consists of two rings, on either end, joined by a mouthpiece which can be either straight or jointed. The mouthpiece can be made of several materials but is most commonly available in stainless steel, copper, and rubber. Common styles of snaffle bits include mullen, jointed, rubber, and twisted. The bit rings can be round, D shaped, egg shaped, have extensions called "cheeks," and come in a variety of styles.

Snaffle bits are usually both mild and simple to use and are often the bit of choice for green or inexperienced horses and beginning riders. Remember however, rough hands significantly increase the severity of any bit.

In general, the circumference of the mouthpiece determines the relative severity of the snaffle bit: the thicker the mouthpiece, the milder the bit. Twisted and wire snaffle bits can be severe and should only be used by experienced riders.

Click for more information on:

- [Types of snaffle bits](#)
- [Types of snaffle bit mouthpieces](#)

Curb

Curb bits have shanks attached to the mouthpiece which cause an increase in leverage, multiplying the pressure the rider applies to the reins. These bits act not only on the mouth, tongue, and bars, but also exert pressure on the horse's poll and chin groove. In general, the longer the shank, the more severe the effect of the bit.

Curb bits can be more severe and should only be used on horses that are accustomed to them and by experience riders with sensitive hands.

Curb bits should be used with a curb strap or chain which attaches to both sides of the bit and rests in the horse's chin groove. The curb strap squeezes the horse's chin when the rider uses the reins.



Curb bits may have a port (or bump) in the center of the mouthpiece which can be either low, medium, or high. A very high port with spoon shaped molding is called a spade and can be very severe. Spade bits should only be used by experts. Curb bits are also available with a broken or jointed mouthpiece.

English riders often use an English curb bit in combination with a snaffle bit (in a full bridle) for upper level dressage or saddle seat. The Pelham is an English style bit which combines both the curb and snaffle actions in one bit with a snaffle ring for direct pressure and a rein ring (at the bottom of the shank) for indirect pressure. The Kimberwicke also combines both actions in one English bit.

Click for more information on:

- [Parts of a Curb Bit](#)
- [Types of curb bit mouthpieces](#)
- [Types of English curb bits](#)
- [Types of Western curb bits](#)

Bit Selection

Deciding which type of bit to use and purchase for your horse can be a challenging and confusing task. **It is best to work with a professional to determine the best bit for both your horse's training and performance level along with your experience, riding style, and discipline.** It's important to note, as with all other tack, some bits are considered appropriate for certain disciplines while the use of others may not be allowed in certain competitions.

When choosing a bit for your horse, take into consideration the equipment that has been used on him or her in the past and how he or she worked using that equipment. A common mistake is to try to compensate for lack of training or ability of either the rider or the horse by using a more severe bit than the horse should require. Seeking the advice of a qualified equine professional is highly advisable.

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