

Overview of English Bridles

Bridle types vary in function and design within the English riding disciplines. The three main types of English bridles include the snaffle bridle, double bridle and bitless bridle.

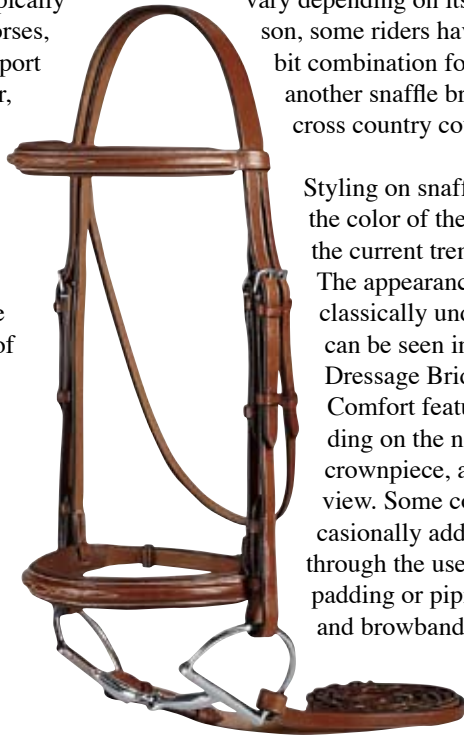
Snaffle Bridle

The snaffle bridle is the most commonly used bridle because of its versatility and functionality. It is typically used in starting young horses, trail riding, in all of the sport horse disciplines—hunter, jumper, dressage and eventing—and in fox hunting. A snaffle bridle consists of any of the many types of single snaffle bit, such as an eggbutt, loose ring or dee ring snaffle, a single set of reins attached to that bit, and any of a number of types of noseband or cavesson. These include:

- the standard cavesson
- flash noseband
- crank noseband
- drop noseband
- Figure-8 or grackle

A snaffle bridle works through pressure—pressure from the bit as it applies to the bars and corners of the horse’s mouth, lips, tongue and palate, and pressure from the bridle as it applies to the horse’s poll and nasal bone.

In an English snaffle bridle, the noseband keeps the horse’s jaws aligned and prevents the horse from opening its mouth wide enough to avoid the bit and rein aids. When adjusted properly—not too tightly or too loosely—the noseband also transfers some of the bit pressure from the bars of the horse’s mouth to the nasal bone. A noseband also provides a place for a standing martingale, if used, to attach. The type of noseband or cavesson that is allowed and designed to be used as part of a snaffle bridle varies slightly according to the English riding discipline. For example, a simple cavesson is the only type allowed in the hunter equitation ring, while a dressage rider commonly chooses a flash noseband. Jumpers and cross country riders may choose to use a Figure-8 noseband rather than a flash, as the design allows extra room for the horse’s nostrils to expand while working.



Both the type of bit and the type of noseband used impact the functionality of the bridle. In addition, a horse’s particular needs may vary depending on its activity. For this reason, some riders have a snaffle bridle and bit combination for ring work, and then another snaffle bridle and bit for riding a cross country course.

Styling on snaffle bridles begins with the color of the leather. Black remains the current trend for dressage riders. The appearance of a dressage bridle is classically understated and simple, as can be seen in the Warendorf Deluxe Dressage Bridle (photo next page). Comfort features, such as soft padding on the noseband, browband and crownpiece, are usually hidden from view. Some color or sparkle is occasionally added to a dressage bridle through the use of subtle, contrasting padding or piping on the noseband and browband, or through the use of a browband embellished with crystals, simple metal insets or beads.

Circuit Grand Prix Bridle with hunter dee ring snaffle bit

Traditional shades of brown leather appeal to those riding in the hunter or jumper rings, cross country and fox hunting. These bridles are classically styled and understated as well, and innovations designed for the ultimate comfort of the horse are usually tastefully discreet, as illustrated in the Showmark Deluxe Jumper Bridle. Hunter, jumper and cross country riders are generally free to choose styling of their bridle based on how to best flatter his or her horse’s appearance. However, browbands that are embellished with crystals are not allowed for use in the hunters or hunt seat equitation division. Although not specifically required, snaffle bridles for fox hunting are typically very plain and feature wide, flat nosebands, as can be seen on the Showmark Traditional Hunt Bridle (photo next page).

Snaffle bridles are available in rich brown colors to coordinate with the many colors of brown saddles, and in plain leather, with raised panels or fancy stitching. For information on coordinating shades of brown leather tack, refer to the “Understanding Leather Colors” topic.

A Note About Reins

Most bridles come with reins that are appropriately styled to match the look and purpose of the bridle. For example, an Amigo Event Bridle includes rubber reins that are designed to provide durable grip in all weathers for cross country riders. Laced reins, which provide both grip and attractive, traditional styling, generally accompany hunter bridles. Reins with leather hand stops most often accompany dressage bridles, and they may be made out of webbing or leather. Some reins have leather rein stops that are intended to be used with a running martingale. Therefore, they typically accompany some Figure 8 or flash bridles that may be used by jumpers and eventers. (Rubber rein stops can also be purchased separately.) However, reins are available in all sorts of styles and widths to suit your individual preferences.

Tip: Inspect your reins during regular cleaning. Reins should always be replaced if the stitching begins to fray, if any lacing begins to loosen or if the closures become compromised.



Related Topics

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[How to Measure for a Bit](#)

[How to Adjust a Snaffle Bridle](#)

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Overview of English Bridles



Warendorf Deluxe Weymouth Bridle with curb bit and bradoon



Dr. Cook's Bitless Bridle



Warendorf Deluxe Dressage Bridle with double-jointed loose ring snaffle bit

Weymouth Bridle

Also called a double bridle or a full bridle, the Weymouth bridle can be spotted on horses training in the upper levels of dressage. The double bridle has two bits – a Weymouth or curb bit and a bradoon – and two sets of reins. A curb bit has a non-jointed mouth piece, usually with a port that allows room for the horse's tongue, a curb chain that exerts pressure under the chin, and shanks that allow a leverage action. A narrow curb rein is connected to a ring at the lower end of the shank. When a rein aid is used, the leverage on the shank of the bit travels up to the horse's poll.

A bradoon is a type of snaffle bit that is thinner in diameter than a standard snaffle bit and has smaller rings to prevent interference with the shanks of the curb bit. To assist the rider in identifying the reins by feel, the snaffle rein, which attaches to the rings of the bradoon, is usually wider or of a different style than the curb rein.

Styling of the Weymouth bridle for the dressage ring typically includes black leather to coordinate with black dressage saddles. The noseband of a full bridle, to allow room for the curb bit to function, does not have a flash. However, a crank closure is often used today. As with the snaffle bridle for dressage, this type of bridle is understated and classic in appearance, with any subtle embellishment included

only on the browband and occasionally the noseband through subtle piping or padding. Comfort features are discreet.

Bitless Bridles

Bitless bridles rely on pressure on key areas of the horse's head without the use of a bit in the horse's mouth. A rider or trainer may choose to use a bitless bridle on a horse for many reasons. It might be used temporarily for the retraining of a horse that has been ridden by a heavy-handed rider or suffered a mouth injury. It might be used because a horse has dental issues or difficulties tolerating a bit to such an extent that behavioral issues developed. Other riders choose to use a bitless bridle for the overall comfort of the horse.

Bitless bridles are developed and offered as a complete unit, such as Dr. Cook's Bitless-Bridle and the Tory Leather English Side Pull. Some hackamores, such as the Herm Sprenger Short Shank Hackamore and the Hackamore Noseband, can be attached to the cheek pieces of a snaffle bridle to replace both the noseband and bit to create a bitless bridle. Additionally, the Rambo Micklem Original Multibridle may be used without a bit.

Tip: If you plan to show with a bitless bridle, check the competition's governing rule book. Bitless bridles are not always permitted for use.



Showmark Deluxe Jumper Bridle with double-jointed loose ring snaffle

Tip: Check the Rules

Riders planning to compete are urged to consult the United States Equestrian Federation Rule Book for guidelines on tack usage. Riders participating in a fox hunt are encouraged to consult the governing rules of etiquette for the specific hunt club to learn of any required tack appointments.