



a bit  
confused?



we can help!



# Korsteel®

Developed in conjunction with world-renowned trainer and jockey John Patterson, JP bits provide the utmost comfort for your horse.

The unique curved shape of the mouthpiece offers many advantages:

- Eliminates the “nutcracker” tongue-pinching action of conventional bits
- Keeps the bit from hitting the roof of the horse’s mouth
- No direct pressure on tongue and bars
- Replaces bit interference with humane comfort
- Encourages relaxation and salivation
- Allows for effective communication between horse and rider
- Fine hand-polished stainless steel
- Available in a variety of styles
- Excellent for all training and riding needs





**Korsteel®**

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# Introduction



**Korsteel**<sup>®</sup>

**T**here are hundreds, if not thousands, of different bits on the market. Korsteel sells more than 160 of them!

As fellow horsepeople, we know that deciding which bit is best for your horse and chosen discipline can be a confusing and frustrating process. To assist you, we have put together "A Bit Confused?" to explain how the different cheek types, mouthpieces and materials work so you can more quickly find the right combination to meet your horse's needs and preferences.

There is no one perfect bit for every horse, which is why there are so many different styles available. But the best choice for your individ-

ual horse provides maximum communication and comfort.

And there are other considerations, too: If you choose to compete, the bit you use must conform to various association rules for your discipline, and those rules can change.

We hope "A Bit Confused?" makes the process of sifting through the hundreds of bits in tack shops, catalogs, online and in your own tack room a little less daunting.

But our main goal is to find the bit that makes your horse most happy!



# Types of Bit Cheeks

## Dee-Ring

Named after the letter it resembles, the dee-ring has fixed cheek pieces to prevent the mouthpiece from pinching the horse's lips and sliding through his mouth. It is a good, basic cheek piece for gauging a new or green horse's biting needs. A hunter dee-ring typically has a thicker mouthpiece and rounder edges than a racing dee-ring.

## Full-Cheek

Full-cheeks have narrow "arms" that project above and below the rings to keep the mouthpiece from sliding in the horse's mouth and to help emphasize the turning aids. Keepers, or thin leather straps, attach the upper arms to the bridle to help stabilize the bit and prevent the bars from catching on anything. Full-cheeks are good for horses who need help turning.

## Eggbutt

Eggbutts are fixed rings similar to dee-rings but oval-shaped. They are slightly more likely to move sideways in the horse's mouth but overall are a great choice for a green horse.

## Loose Ring

Loose rings are not fixed like dee-rings and eggbutts but can move freely through holes in the mouthpiece. Try loose rings if your horse braces against the bit to evade the rider's rein aids.

## Gag

A gag bit employs rein attachments that thread through the cheek pieces and attach to the bridle's side pieces to exert pressure on the poll while lifting the mouthpiece, to encourage the horse to lift his head. A gag bit can be a good option for a strong horse, but only in the hands of an experienced horse person.

## Kimberwick

Like the Pelham, the Kimberwick (or Kimbelwick) combines the snaffle and curb bit into one mouthpiece to give the rider added control and to encourage the horse to lower his head. Unlike the Pelham, the Kimberwick's mouthpiece attaches toward the top of a "D"-shaped cheek instead of to a traditional shank. Because the "shank" of the Kimberwick's cheek is considerably shorter than that of a Pelham, the Kimberwick is considered milder in the right hands.

## Dutch Gag

A three- or four-ring, European elevator or Dutch gag bit has one ring above the main ring and either three or four rings below it. The bridle's cheek pieces attach to the upper ring, one pair of reins attaches to the main ring for a snaffle action and a second pair attaches to one of the lower rings, depending on how strong the rider needs the curb action to be. These are strong bits, typically used to encourage the horse to be lighter in front.



## Baucher

Because the Baucher has arms extending above the rings, it can be mistaken for a curb bit. But without arms extending below the rings, the Baucher has no pivot point and thus no leverage. The arms, which attach to the bridle's cheekpieces, act to stabilize the bit, but without leverage they cannot exert poll pressure. The Baucher is a good snaffle for horses that tolerate very little bit movement in their mouths.



## Fixed-Cheek v. Loose-Ring Bits

**Fixed-cheek bits**, such as deerings, eggbutts and full-cheeks, lie flat against the horse's cheeks and can't slide from side to side in the horse's mouth. This delivers the rider's rein aids directly to the mouthpiece, and for this reason fixed-cheekpieces are more stable and aid turning.

Fixed-cheek mouthpieces are

often a safe bet for starting green horses.

A **loose-ring bit** features cheek rings that slide through the ends of the mouthpiece, giving the bit some side-to-side and vertical movement. For this reason, this type of mouthpiece is a good choice for horses who lean on the bit to evade the rider's aids.



## Types of Mouthpieces

### Twisted

A twisted bit features a three-sided mouthpiece that has been twisted to apply more concentrated pressure throughout the mouth than a rounded mouthpiece. A slow twist, which has the fewest turns, is less severe than a fast twitch, which has more. Twisted bits are used with horses that have become immune to a rounded bit.



### Corkscrew

A corkscrew bit, with its tight twists with slightly rounded edges, is harsher than a slow twist but significantly milder than a twisted wire mouthpiece, which is much thinner and has less-rounded edges.



### Double Twisted Wire

The double twisted wire mouthpiece has twice the intensity of a twisted wire and should be used only by the most experienced riders as a bit of last choice.



### Single Joint

A single-joint bit applies pressure to the horse's tongue and bars. The single-joint action is not severe in the right hands, but the effect is not as mild as a multi-jointed bit such as a French link.



## French Link

A French link is a jointed mouthpiece with a small, flat plate between the two bars of the mouthpiece. The plate causes less of a nutcracker-like action on the tongue and is milder than a single-jointed bit.

## Dr. Bristol

Very similar to a French link, a Dr. Bristol also has a flat plate in the middle of the mouthpiece to reduce the nutcracker action on the horse's tongue. With a Dr. Bristol, however, the flat plate sits at an angle so that it applies more pressure to the tongue than a French link. A Dr. Bristol is a good choice for a horse that does not tolerate a single-jointed bit but who can get somewhat strong.

## Oval Link

An oval link in a mouthpiece relieves some of the pressure on the tongue when the rein aids are applied. Because the link is rounded, this mouthpiece is considered slightly milder than a French link.

## Mullen Mouth

A mullen mouth is an unjointed bit that is slightly curved to accommodate the horse's tongue. Without the nutcracker action of a jointed bit, the mullen mouth and straight-bar are considered milder and encourage the horse to raise his poll.

## Tongue Grooves and Ports

Tongue grooves and ports are raised areas in the center of a straight-bar or mullen mouth to prevent the tongue from softening the bit's action on the bars and, if the port is high enough, to put pressure on the horse's palate. Grooves are shallower and wider, while ports typically are the shape of an inverted "U". Ports typically must be 2–2.5 inches high to act on the palate when engaged.

## Jointed Port

A jointed port is a single- or double-jointed bit with a slight raised port to create the nutcracker action while preventing the tongue from softening some of the pressure delivered to the bars.

## Rollers

Rollers—bushings (loose sleeves) or "beans" on the mouthpiece that roll when manipulated—can be found on straight-bar, mullen and snaffle bits and are good for horses with "busy" mouths

## Waterford

The Waterford is, essentially, a mouthpiece made entirely of links, thus eliminating the nutcracker action of the traditional jointed bit. Not a legal dressage bit, a Waterford is a good choice for a heavy leaner, as the links cause the mouthpiece to mold around the mouth and apply equal pressure on everything it touches.

## Triangle

A triangle, fishback or knife-edge mouthpiece has three sides. When the horse is bent at the poll, a flat edge rests against his bars. A toss of the head causes an edge to press against the bars. While the edges aren't sharp, the force exerted on the bars is more concentrated than with a rounder mouthpiece.



## Cherry Roller

A cherry roller has large round rollers that spin, making it difficult for a horse to grab onto the bit and lean against the rider's hands.

## Hollow Mouth

A hollow-mouth bit is hollow in the middle, making it lighter than a solid mouthpiece. Hollow-mouths are typically bulkier than solid bits, which disperse the pressure over a larger area, making it milder than slimmer bits.



# Jointed v. Non-Jointed Mouthpieces

**A jointed mouthpiece** can have a single joint or multiple ones, most commonly in the form of a link, or plate. When a rider puts pressure on the reins, jointed bits bend down- and/or backward, putting pressure on the horse's tongue, his bars—the gums between a horse's front

teeth and molars—and his lips.

**A non-jointed mouthpiece** is a straight or slightly curved bar. Some non-jointed bits feature ports, or raised areas in the center of the mouthpiece, to also apply pressure to the roof of the mouth. Curb bits typically employ non-jointed mouthpieces.



# Snaffle, Curb, Both or Neither?

## Snaffle

With a snaffle (or direct-pressure) bit, the reins attach directly to the rings, so that the action of the reins works directly on the mouthpiece.

## Curb

With a curb (or leverage) bit, the reins attach to shanks extending below the bit to multiply the amount of pressure from the reins. The action of the reins on the shank tightens a chin strap or chain and the mouthpiece to press against the tongue and bars of the horse's mouth. The longer the shank, the greater the pressure exerted. Curb bits have little directional ability but are especially useful for encouraging the horse to bend at the poll.

## Pelham

A pelham bit combines elements of both a snaffle and a curb bit into one mouthpiece. "Snaffle reins" attach to rings on the side of the mouthpiece, while "curb reins" attach to shanks designed to apply pressure to the poll and under the chin via a strap or chain. A pelham encourages the horse to bend at the poll, without the bulk and difficulty of two separate mouthpieces.



## Weymouth

A Weymouth, or double bridle, includes both a curb and a snaffle (bradoon) bit. A bradoon features smaller rings than a stand-alone snaffle. The curb bit attaches to the bridle's headstall, while the bradoon has its own headstall. More often seen in the upper levels of showjumping and dressage when the rider must deliver more nuanced commands, the Weymouth is a powerful bit suited only for very experienced riders.



## Hackamore

A hackamore, or bridle without a bit, can employ all the tools of a curb bit, without the actual mouthpiece. Depending on its design, a hackamore can exert pressure on the jaw, the nose and the poll. While a good choice for horses that for one reason or another cannot tolerate a mouthpiece, hackamores and other bitless bridles are not allowed in dressage or English pleasure competition and are considered "unconventional tack" in hunter classes.



# Bit Materials

## Nickel-Plated

Nickel-plated bits are less expensive than the other options but are prone to flaking and rusting, which can leave rough patches that can irritate the horse's lips and tongue.

## Stainless Steel

The most common material for bits, stainless steel does not flake or rust and is extremely durable.

## Vulcanized Rubber

Vulcanized rubber, a hard rubber coating that is baked on to the mouthpiece, is stronger and less prone to flaking than non-vulcanized. Rubber mouthpieces do not conduct heat as metals do, making them more pleasant to handle on cold days, and some horses prefer the softer feel of rubber.

## Copper and Sweet Iron

Copper and sweet iron are believed to promote salivation and a more relaxed jaw. While copper is more heat conductive than steel and thus warms up faster in cold weather, it is softer and will wear more quickly. Sweet iron is a combination of iron and copper. The rust that forms over time is believed to encourage salivation and thus relaxation in the horse's jaw.

## Flexi-Mouth

Flexi-mouth bits are made of a soft and flexible but durable flavored plastic that is purported to encourage acceptance and softness.



# Legal Bits for English Disciplines

**T**he U.S. Equestrian Federation (USEF) and the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) have specific rules regarding bits and tack used in competition. These vary by discipline and can be found in the individual organization's rule book.

The following is a general overview of current rules, which may change each year. There are other specifics that are not covered here. Before competing or using a new bit, be sure to check the rules for your particular sport or division.

## Dressage

Training through Second Level: a snaffle bit is required. Third and Fourth Level: The rider may choose to ride in a double bridle with two pairs of reins.

FEI levels: Double bridles are required. Mouthpieces must be smooth: no twisted wire mouthpieces. A mouthpiece with more than one rolling part is prohibited, but bits made from rubber or synthetic materials are permitted. Ports and tongue grooves are allowed

if wider than 30mm and no higher than 30mm. Bit guards are forbidden in recognized dressage competitions and in dressage tests that are part of sanctioned and unsanctioned three-phase events.

## Hunters

Snaffles, pelhams and full bridles are required. Judges may penalize but may not eliminate a horse or pony who competes in an "unconventional" snaffle, pelham, or full bridle. Unconventional snaffles, pelhams or full bridles include, but are not limited to, hunter gags, kimberwicks, etc.

Judges must eliminate a horse or pony who competes wearing bits other than snaffles, pelhams or full bridles. Illegal bits include, but are not limited to, three rings, gags (other than the hunter gag), etc.

## Jumpers

USEF has no written rules regarding "legal" and "illegal" bits.

# How To Measure for a Bit

**T**he mouthpiece length is usually measured in inches. Dee-rings and eggbutts should rest comfortably against the outside of the horse's lips.

Loose-ring bits should have about one-eighth inch more room, to prevent pinching the horse's lips. A bit that is more than a half-inch wider than the horse's mouth will have too much sideways play to be comfortable.

Commercially available measuring devices can help you determine what bit length will fit your horse. Or stretch a piece of heavy

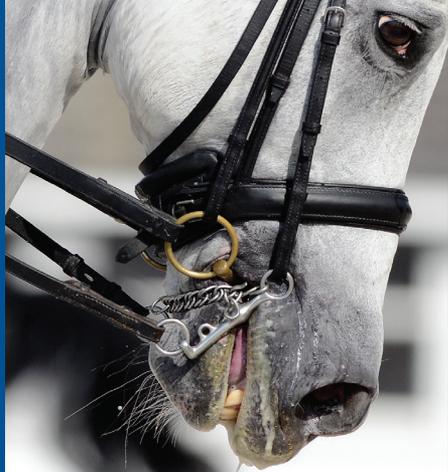
string across the inside of your horse's mouth, marking with your fingers where it meets the corners of your horse's mouth. Then measure that distance using a ruler.

The width of a bit is measured in millimeters and refers to the circumference of the widest part of the mouthpiece, usually next to the bit cheek.

Your veterinarian or dentist can tell you if your horse has an unusually thick tongue or low palate that would restrict your width and port height choices.

# Fitting a Double Bridle

The curb bit should be the same size as your everyday bit, while the bradoon (snaffle) should be sized  $\frac{1}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch larger so the rings do not pinch the lips or get caught on the curb. The curb hangs lower than the bradoon so that they do not interfere with each other in the horse's mouth.



## Bit Cleaning and Care

**W**hile a post-use rinse in fresh water usually is enough for a bit's everyday use, from time to time you'll want a deeper cleaning.

A variety of safe, nontoxic cleansers are designed specifically for use with horse bits. Be sure to use cleansers labeled for use with all the materials that make up your bits. A safe and effective alternative is toothpaste.

To prevent scratching the metals of the bit, use a non-abrasive toothpaste; avoid any

labeled as tartar-control or whitening. Or make your own "toothpaste" using equal parts baking powder and salt, with just enough hot water to make a thick paste. A child's toothbrush is great for getting in all the bit's nooks and crannies.

Always rinse the bit thoroughly after cleaning, or run it through a dishwashing cycle to make sure it has been properly rinsed and sterilized.

Dry with a soft cloth afterward to prevent water spots and buff it to a high shine.





**Korsteel®**

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