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Horsemanship Judging

Training document for Horsemanship Judges.

It is imperative that all judges approach all judging objectively and without prejudice.

1. Introduction

This judging is **NOT** based on high level Dressage or Equitation Judging, but is purely to score the rider and horse with the aim of improving: horse manners, handling, grooming, training and riding. The main focus is the safe and comfortable completion of the distance – with the welfare of the horse being the most important aspect. The emphasis is on marking down the score when issues are encountered but explaining in a friendly & helpful way why marks are being deducted. The Horsemanship Judge must therefore be adept at identifying issues and correcting them (adjusting tack etc.) in such a way that the rider does not take offence. The role of the Horsemanship judge can therefore be summarized as assisting the horse and rider combo in such a manner that the outcome benefits both parties of the team.

Comments on the card regarding why the score was judged as such must be brief but explanatory for riders to fully understand what they need to work on. This is also necessary for judges to discuss with riders if query the scores.

Cards are held by Ride management for 6 months and riders may take photos of their cards before leaving the event for their interest and enlightenment

Ridden tests and obstacles must be discussed with Ride Management and approved for any safety concerns as well as discussed with Riders at the Ride briefing. The Horsemanship judge must brief riders on the process of judging – pre ride, on course and final judging with the time frames in order to make sure Riders understand the flow and what they need to do and when. Obstacles can be the same for each leg or may be different (then 2 judges will need to be on course). If an obstacle is only judged once for each rider for some reason then the Horsemanship score for that ride /division must be adjusted. For example: All riders only do the obstacle on leg 1 of each division due to weather or time constraints etc – the trail judge score is then out of a total of 5 , not 10 and the total Horsemanship scoring is out of 45 not 50. It is preferable that all riders get scored on obstacles for each leg.

All Riders MUST do all horsemanship tests- Pre ride, Obstacle, containment and post ride. Not doing the test at all will be considered a disqualification

Post ride Horsemanship judging is compulsory within an hour of finishing the ride on the last leg.

All horsemanship cards once completed must be handed to timekeeper to be captured for scoring.

Please remember for any observations on trail that may be rule infractions or safety issues , the formal complaint system should be used in order to have a full investigation by the Ride Committee.

2. Judging at an event

2.1. Pre Ride Judging (30 points in total)

The rider must present the horse and themselves to you in full tack and dress as if they are leaving on the ride shortly afterwards

- Rider Wear: Either wearing shoes with a heel or if in takkies etc. they must have safety stirrups/caged stirrups fitted.
- An approved riding helmet
- Rider bib with number/ Shirt with visible number.

2.1.1. Tack and Equipment:

The rules state that a saddle must be used and the horse must be under control. This gives the riders a lot of latitude and a variety of gear, with mixtures of Western, English and Endurance tack will be used. However proper fit and adjustment of tack, particularly of the saddle is very important to not cause galls and soreness through pressure and abrasion. Girth galls can easily be caused by a girth done up too tightly or too far forward. A Breast collar should be well adjusted and can interfere with breathing and drinking if too tight.

- Saddle must be clean and appropriate (must fit with a good clean girth and stirrups and leathers) Check that the numnah is not badly fitted and girth is appropriately done up
- Bridle is to be correctly fitted (check adjustments with nothing that can hurt or rub the horse). Not too large or too tight/small

- Bit must be correctly fitted and no rubs etc. Check if bit guards fitted, chains, nose bands etc. are correct tightness and fit (2 finger tests)
- Martingales and breastplates must be correctly adjusted and not too tight or too loose. Check that horse can get head down when wearing breastplate and martingale does not get in way of legs etc.
- A rider may ride bridle-less at the discretion of the horsemanship judges and the ride manager with the following provisos: the Rider demonstrates excellent control of the horse in the pre ride judging and the horse is fitted with some form of restraint out on the Trail (neck strap and/or halter) for dismounted control.
- Score is out of 10 for both rider and horse tack.
- 10 is excellent, 9 is good and all faults minus 1 point
- List of approved Horsemanship tests :
 1. Figure of 8 at walk and then trot to a halt in front of judge, 6 second immobility before dismount. Tests riders knowledge of correct diagonals and changes thereof and obedience of horse, correct bend and softness- all important skills to be used in long distance riding.
 2. Trot in straight line over trotting poles set up in middle of arena. This tests the skill and seat of rider and balance of horse – proprioception.
 3. Rope gate. Open and close. Tests problem solving and seat and aids of rider and obedience of horse including balance and ability to back up and move slowly (small movements, lateral movements and one step at a time)
 4. In/Out – ride into a narrow box out of cones/poles, then back out. Tests obedience, balance, skill of rider, ability to problem solve and to get out of difficult situations on the trail.

2.1.2. Mounting and Dismounting:

- **Mount:** The rider is to present the horse to mount. It is encouraged that a mounting block be used: a sand heap, log etc. or a portable mounting block at base. Check the horse stands appropriately still for mounting and if not how the rider handles this: empathy and calmness and if necessary a helper can be used. Score taken off for horse moving off, swinging hindquarters or throwing head. More score deducted for rider shouting, getting angry, hitting horse or handler holding horse too tightly etc. No abuse of the horse will be tolerated and a rider or handler will be marked with zero if

this occurs. Rider to land lightly in saddle and wait to queue horse to move off in controlled manner.

- **Dismount:** Rider to dismount neatly and quietly and run up stirrups (if possible), loosen girth and lead horse off when asked to do so.
- Score out of 5 4 is good, 5 is excellent, minus 1 if horse moves or groom assistance
- For a walking horse being lead in hand (Koppie & Foothill Division): Horse in hand must stand quietly and must move back and sideways when asked obediently.
- 4 is good, 5 is excellent, minus 1 if horse does move or resists cues

2.1.3. Ridden test:

Example:

- Ask the rider to walk off in a circle around you. Aids must be light and horse must respond obediently. No pulling in mouth to turn or halt and no rough continued kicking
- After a few walk steps ask rider to trot the horse to ride a figure 8. Check aids once again, posting correctly and knowledge of diagonals. Score out of 10.
- 9 is good, 10 is excellent (balanced and obedient horse, correct diagonal) and minus 1 for each fault
- For horse being lead by walker: Walker and horse must walk off in circle and complete figure of 8. Check correct position of horse and walker, change of directions and also quality and obedience of halt.
- 9 is good, 10 is excellent (balanced and obedient horse, horse keeps position at walker shoulder) and minus 1 for each fault
- For Horse being lead by mounted rider: Both horses must walk off in circle obediently. Correct position and aids must be given to horse being lead. Complete the figure 8 with the horse following in correct position and diagonal.
- 9 is good, 10 is excellent (balanced and obedient horse, horse keeps position at mounted horse shoulder, correct cues, both horses follow cues and in control). Minus 1 for each fault

2.1.4. Grooming/Lesions:

- Note existing lesions in comments, Grooming: horse is clean and has no ticks/bot eggs etc. Feet are well trimmed and clean if barefoot and boots are

correctly fitted if used (hoof boots and protective boots), correctly shod and clean if in shoes. Horse and handler stand still for presentation and allow feet to be picked up and various body parts to be touched. Score out of 5

- 5 no lesions and horse well groomed, 4 existing lesions and not clean

2.2. Trail Equitation (5 points total for each leg of ride)

- You will position yourself on the trail where you can see the horse and rider negotiating the "obstacle" clearly and where you are visible so as to not spook the horse.
- An obstacle could be a decline or incline, a water crossing, mud patch, clear smooth path or water point, or twists and turns in trail. The primary concern of proper equitation is to make the horse's job of carrying a rider over long distances as efficient as possible. The key is to ride balanced and light in the saddle at the walk, trot and canter. A vertical line should pass through your centre of gravity and continue through your foot. Ideally, if the horse was too disappear from under you, you would land upright, on your feet. Leg contact with the horse should support you without tension or stiffness. If you are riding light, you will appear to be almost floating with the horse. Use your legs and ankles as shock absorbers. Don't sacrifice proper support from the lower legs by bracing them out to the side.
- Use common sense when it comes to trail safety and courtesy. When approaching a water stop, don't crowd in, wait your turn unless the other rider(s) say it's okay. On the other hand, if you're the one watering your horse, don't prolong your time and crowd others out. If you want your horse to drink more, move away and come back in a few minutes. Some horses will stop drinking if crowded by a strange horse or if a horse ahead leaves.
- Don't dip your sponge directly in a water trough. Carry a collapsible bucket or a container to fill with water then move your horse away from the trough to sponge.
- At any trail "obstacle," judged or not, wait for the horse behind you to complete it before you move off down the trail. Otherwise the second horse might get in a hurry to "catch up with the herd."
- Always let the person you're passing know that you are coming and on which side you will pass. Do not do an extended trot or canter past a horse that is walking or you might over excite it. Wait until you're well past to pick up your pace again. Always look back to check to be sure the horse you passed is not

throwing a fit because you're leaving. Finally, if you need to pass another horse because your horse is faster paced, do not just pass by one horse length. Pass the horse and rider and get going down the trail. Riders will appreciate it if you get out of sight after you pass.

- If your horse is particularly slow, find a place to pull off the trail and let others by. Sometimes this may take a while, but let people behind you know that you'll pullover as soon as you can.
- When going through a gate, the first rider usually opens it and holds it for the others. After they have all passed through, they should wait until the gate is closed and the rider who opened the gate resumes his place in front. Occasionally, one rider will open the gate and ask the last rider in the group to close it. This is fine as long as you know the message was heard and the gate will be closed.
- Above all, be safe. If you are asked to do something that you don't think you or your horse are ready for, just tell the judge that you'll pass on that observation.
- 5 is excellent with a good seat and aids and horse obedient. 4 is good and you completed the obstacle as expected. Minus 1 for horse disobedience or rider having to dismount etc.
- If you are in satisfactory health, you should consider some type of exercise other than riding to improve your own fitness, because when you become fatigued you will not ride as well. Someone who is off balance or tense from pain will adversely affect the performance of the horse, causing him to tighten or twist his back, or compensate in other ways. This added effort accelerates fatigue and increases the likelihood of injury. Aside from developing your overall fitness, cross-training can also acquaint you with how it feels to work hard physically. It gives you a much better empathy with your horse when you are both undergoing the same remodelling. Lack of time is no excuse because you can walk or run alongside your horse as you warm him up every day. However, just as with the horse, your exercise program should be carefully constructed and implemented. Consult a knowledgeable person to help you get started with a schedule appropriate to your present state of fitness.

2.2.1. Going Up and Down Hills

- Sometime during every ride, you will be faced with doing a judged climb or descent. Regardless of whether it is a mountain side or a creek bank, the judges will be

looking for the same things. The horse's job is fairly simple. He should do the slope with calm deliberation at a slow pace, carefully placing his feet and going straight up or down the trail when asked. The judge will usually fault the horse for "crabbing" sideways going down, rushing, crowding another horse, excessive nervousness, and head tossing.

- For the rider, the ascents and descents present a multitude of ways to shine. Going up hills, there is a "window" of good upper body position. If you lean too far back or are too far forward over the neck, you will make the horse's job more difficult. If you are too far out of the saddle, you sacrifice stability and safety. You should fold slightly forward from the hips in an amount appropriate for the slope of the hill and the speed of the horse. Support yourself by rolling up onto your inner thighs so you can have your seat lightly off the saddle to make it easier for the horse to get its rear legs under him for upward push. It is all right to take a handful of mane to steady yourself as long as it doesn't interfere with the rein control. The reins should be short enough to guide your horse easily, but long enough that he can get his head down for balance on the climb. Maintain your form and control to the top of the hill. It takes muscles and coordination that come only with practice. The judge will interpret how well you're moving with your horse.
- Maintain your balance going down hills. Don't lean back; this makes it harder for the horse to use his hindquarters to brake himself. Don't grab the back of the saddle to stabilize yourself. Doing so puts you off balance and twists you in the saddle. One of the most common faults is "body sway" which is the rolling of your upper body from side to side as the horse descends. This not only makes it very difficult for the horse to stay in balance, it can cause saddle rubs.
- Whenever you have an uphill/downhill combination obstacle, the judge is probably watching your transition. If you are balanced and moving as one with you horse, you should not get thrown off-balance or put behind the action of the horse as he makes the transition. If possible, take a moment in the middle to collect yourself and gather up your horse. Make sure you allow the horse ahead of you enough time to clear the obstacle before proceeding. Don't expect instant perfection; this requires excellent muscle control for both horse and rider. As with any other obstacle, you will be penalized for crowding another rider.
- Marks are deducted for obvious faults like incorrect seat position, rough hard hands, out of control and fighting horse in faster work, rough handling (kicking , shouting or rough hands while trying to cross water or mud), rushing up to a water point unsafely, not allowing horse to drink, tail gating other riders, any dangerous or unsafe

behaviour etc. 1 mark will be deducted for dismounting and leading horse quietly through or around an obstacle if it refuses.

- Default score is 4 on each leg of the ride and lower score will be marked if any of the above obvious faults are observed. Always comment on scoring sheet what caused the deduction of marks in order to discuss with rider after prize giving if necessary. Make comments clear, concise and educational and not judgemental.

2.3. Stabling/Containment: (5 points total)

- This score is done during the evening before or after the ride (preferable), or during the day between legs of the ride (rest periods)
- Check the size and cleanliness and position of paddock etc. Does the horse have a comfortable space to eat and sleep lying down if necessary? Is there shade? Is there water and forage available in safe spots? Is the paddock clean? Examples: water bucket not knocked over, full and enough water available, good quality forage available where the horse can safely access it? Is the horse blanketed if clipped or cold? Score out of 5. Make concise comments if scored down. If situation is unsafe or no food or water etc. discuss with rider or grooms if available or call Ride organisers to trace responsible person to immediately handle the situation.
- 4 is good, 5 is for any extra care taken (gazebo, bedding etc.) Minus 1 for each fault observed

2.4. Horsemanship Judging – Final In Hand (5 points total)

- This judging will take place after the final vetting at the end of the ride, within an hour of being passed by the Vets.
- Scoring will be based on the following criteria: Horse should stand quietly and willingly accept examination of feet and body, horse should be clean (no sweat marks etc.) and well groomed with clean feet, no rubs or lesions from boots etc., Horse should lead easily on a free rein, handler should follow correct guidelines for safety while leading and handling horse, handler should be courteous to all officials, volunteers and peers, no new lesions from tack, bit etc.

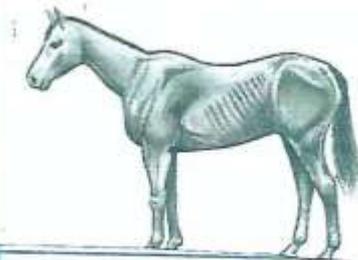
Check body condition on vet card – if vet has marked the body condition scoring low they will refer the rider to yourself. Please assist rider to understand the body condition scoring and how to influence it: Feed (24h access to good quality forage like teff, eragrostis or good grazing), balancer and minerals, the concentrate used with minimum sugar and good fat content (slow heating and slow release energy), salt, advantages of oils and flax seed. Good quality work to build muscles slowly and correctly, rest periods etc.) Condition should not

have declined by a full score after a ride. Score of 4 is good and horse stands quietly and is clean, has not lost condition and rider handles horse safely. Score of 5 is excellent and horse looks like it has no worked at all. Body condition scoring is based on Breed and body type.

Poor

Disqualified - not allowed to start

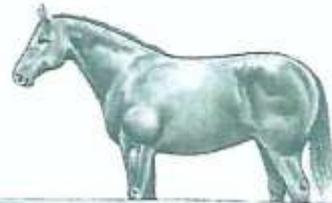
Animal extremely emaciated; spine, ribs, tailhead, points of hip and buttock projecting prominently; bone structure of withers, shoulders, and neck easily noticeable; no fatty tissue can be felt.



Fat

1 point

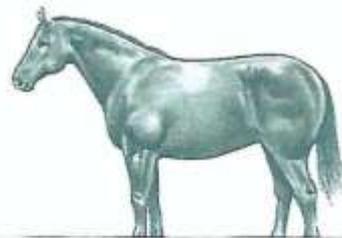
Crease down back; difficult to feel ribs; fat around tailhead very soft; area along withers filled with fat; area behind shoulders filled with fat; noticeable thickening of neck; fat deposited along inner thighs.



Fleshy

2 points

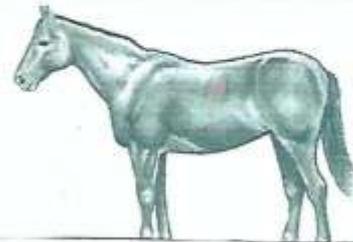
May have crease down back; individual ribs can be felt, but noticeable filling between ribs with fat; fat around tailhead soft; fat deposited along withers, behind shoulders, and along neck.



3 points

Moderately Thin

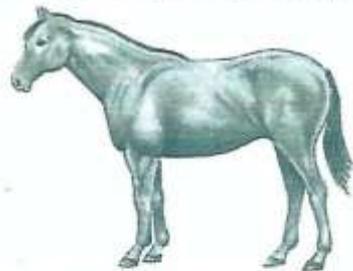
Slight ridge along back; faint outline of ribs discernable; tailhead prominence depends on conformation, fat can be felt around it; points of hip not discernable; withers, shoulders, and neck not obviously thin.



Moderately Fleshy

4 points

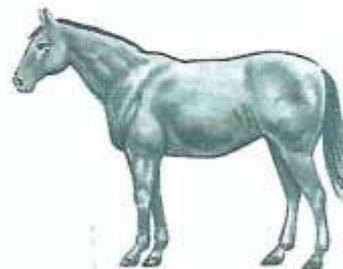
May have slight crease down back; fat over ribs fleshy/spongy; fat around tailhead soft; fat beginning to be deposited along sides of withers, behind shoulders, and along sides of neck.



Moderate

5 points

Back is flat (no crease or ridge); ribs not visually distinguishable but easily felt; fat around tailhead beginning to feel spongy; withers appear rounded over spine; shoulders and neck blend smoothly into body.



3. Tack fitment and general guidelines

The following will serve as a general guide to tack and fitment judges may encounter at DRASA events.

4. English Tack

4.1. English Saddlery.

English bridles are based on the same type although there are a great variety of bridles providing poll relief etc. These all consist of the following, Poll piece, Brow band, Throat latch and Cheek straps and reins. An additional noseband would complete the English bridle.

4.2. Bridle Fit Information

If your bridle is correctly sized for your horse, adjusted properly, and kept clean and conditioned, it will function properly as an aid to your riding. It will also be comfortable for your horse to wear next to the sensitive areas of his head.

1. Adjust the cheek pieces and bit height.

With the bridle on your horse's head and the reins looped over his neck, as shown in the photo, adjust the cheek pieces to achieve the proper bit height. In general, with the cheek pieces appropriately buckled and the bit correctly sized, you should see one to two soft wrinkles appearing at the corners of your horse's lips as a starting point for adjusting the bit height. (For a Pelham or Kimblewicke bit, you will only want to see one soft wrinkle at the corner of the lips.)

2. Check the browband.

The browband should rest lightly across your horse's forehead, just about 1/2 to 1 inch below the front of his ears. Be sure the browband is long enough so that it does not pull the crownpiece into the back of your horse's ears. Conversely, if it sticks out, forms a gap in front of the horse's forehead or wiggles when the horse moves, then the browband is too long.

Tip: Many styles of browbands are available separately. You can swap out your browband any time you'd like a new look for your bridle, or if your horse's bridle fits but you'd like another size browband.

3. Adjust the noseband.

Please be aware that Flash or any type of noseband that constrains a horse's breathing or drinking and eating during distance riding is NOT appropriate. Please discuss with rider. It is best not to use these types of nosebands over long distances as it interferes with the horse's ability to breath & drink water.

The placement and fit of the noseband varies very slightly depending on the type used.

- Bits to be discussed in Section 9.

4.3. Types of Nosebands.

The Cavesson noseband is the most common.

The placement and fit of the noseband varies very slightly depending on the type used. A standard noseband or Cavesson should sit level at a point about 1/2 to 1 inch below the horse's cheekbone. As a general guideline, you can use **two** finger's width to measure the space from the bottom of the cheekbone to the top of the noseband.



One finger's width between the end of the horse's cheekbone and the noseband.

Some nosebands come with integrated hangers that adjust on both sides of the horse's face. Buckle the hangers by the horse's cheeks on this type of noseband in the same hole on each side.

If positioned correctly, the noseband will not interfere with the movement of the bit rings, pinch the lips or press on the soft tissue of the horse's nose in such a way as to hamper the horse's breathing. You should be able to place a finger inside the noseband underneath the jaw, and yet it should be fastened snugly enough to prevent flapping during riding.

Flash Noseband: The Cavesson part of the noseband should sit just under the cheekbones without pressing on them. The flash attachment will then rest on the nasal bone and

will not press on the soft tissue of the horse's nose. The flash should stretch comfortably down over the horse's jaws in front of the bit. Many people position the flash so that the buckle rests near the loop attachment for the flash rather than on the soft tissue near the lips. The keeper for the flash can be positioned so that it does not cause discomfort on the soft tissue as well.

Flash attachment sits on nasal bone. Flash not too tight and placed in front of bit but not where it can compress the nostrils. Flash keepers positioned so as not to pinch horse's lips



Flash Noseband



Crank or Jawband Noseband

Crank or Jawband Noseband: The Cavesson part of the noseband should sit just under the cheekbones without pressing on them. The buckle of this type of noseband is padded and designed to be tightened as needed by the requirements of the horse. The buckling system allows tightening with even pressure on both sides of the noseband. If the jawband has a flash attached, then it should be fastened as described for a flash noseband. Care should be taken when tightening this noseband as it is very easy to make it too tight.

Grackle or Figure eight Noseband: The straps of this type of noseband need to be adjusted properly to be effective and to avoid hampering the horse's breathing. The padded disk should rest on the nasal bone so that the straps cross over this bone. The lower strap stretches down over the horse's jaw in front of the bit. The upper strap may be positioned just under the cheekbones or on top of the cheekbones, depending on both the type of Figure 8 used and rider preference. Generally, if the straps of the Figure 8 attach to metal rings, many riders position the rings on top of the cheekbones so that this hardware does not press against the end of the horse's cheekbone.



Grackle Noseband



Figure Eight Noseband

Metal rings are positioned on top of the cheekbones. If positioned at the end of the cheekbone, the metal ring might press uncomfortably against it. If the Figure 8 does not use metal rings, but rather has adjustable leather slides, many riders position the upper strap just under the horse's cheekbone. A Figure 8 noseband that does not have metal rings can be adjusted below the cheekbones.

Drop Noseband: The nosepiece of this type of noseband should sit on the bony part of the nose, about four finger's width above the nostrils. The rings attached to the chin strap portions of the noseband should not come in contact with the bit. The chin strap should stretch down in front of the bit and be buckled under the jaw only snug enough that you can slip two fingers between it and the jaw bones. Take special care to be sure this type of noseband won't affect the horse's breathing after it is buckled into place.



Drop Noseband

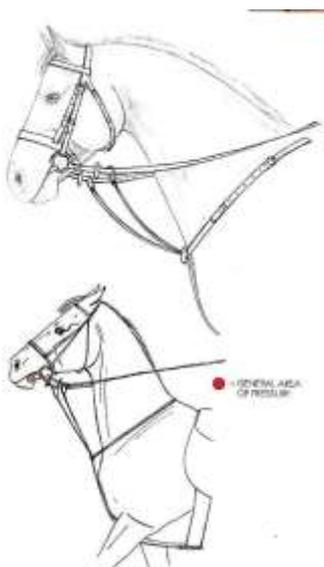
5. Martingales

Martingales consist of mainly two types, with some variations. The running Martingale and the Standing Martingale.

5.1. Running Martingale fit

To fit a running martingale correctly, place the **neck strap** around the horse's neck so that you can fit a hand's width comfortably between the strap and the horse. Put the saddle on the horse, pass the girth through the loop in the martingale and do up the girth.

With the girth tightened up adjust the length of the martingale - the rings should reach the horse's withers. If this length is made too short the martingale will come into action when it is not needed. Pass the reins of the bridle through the rings of the martingale. Be sure to have rein stops on the reins and that martingale is not so long it could get caught in a horse's legs while moving or if head down



Running martingale fitted with rein stoppers



Action of Standing Martingale

6. Stirrup leathers

- **Stitching**, this needs to be in good order to prevent a rider's stirrup leather stitching snapping along the trail, with a rider falling and possibly injured.
- Stirrup leathers may be made of ordinary leather, raw-hide or buffalo-hide.
- **Ordinary leather**. When of top quality this is the smartest and most comfortable for normal riding, but it can break under extreme pressure.

- **Rawhide.** Virtually unbreakable and strongly recommended for cross country riding. Some types are rather thick and clumsy. Those made for racing are finer.
- **Buffalo hide.** Also virtually unbreakable, but being reddish in colour, least attractive, especially as it will never tone down. It stretches more than other leathers.
- **Synthetic** There are numerous synthetic makes and brands on the market. Though it does not stretch, not all are as durable and attractive as leather.

6.1. Standing Martingale fit

The Standing Martingale is a practically ubiquitous piece of equipment on the Polo and Polocrosse fields, yet all too often it is adjusted too short or too long.

The Standing Martingale is not meant to hold your horse's head down. It should be slack when your horse's head is carried in a relaxed position, and only come into play when the head is raised too high.

Using an overly short martingale will do nothing but restrict your horse's freedom while riding and make it more difficult for him to balance himself at other times.

A martingale that is too long is a far less serious fault, though not without consequences. It is less likely to come into play when you need it, and might even distract your horse by swinging around. If it is very long, one would also be worried about potentially catching a leg in it while jumping.

To determine whether your martingale is the correct length, attach it while your horse is standing relaxed. Lift the strap (the one that runs from the Cavesson to the chest) up as far as it will go. If it does not lift up at all, it's far too tight.



Too tight

Correctly fitted

Correctly fitted

If it lifts up to the throatlatch, it should be just right. When you let go of the strap, there should be some slack in it with the horse standing comfortably.

If it lifts up further than the throatlatch, it's probably too long.

7. Breastplate/ Breast Collar Fit

Breastplates (also known as breast collars) are essential items of tack for a horse whose body shape encourages saddles to slip and slide. But an improperly fitted breastplate is not likely to help and may even make matters worse.



Correct fitting Breastplate

To check the fit of a breastplate, first see if it is sitting in the correct position across the horse's chest. Single-strap models cross above the point of the shoulder, but they do not rest so high that a horse had trouble lowering or stretching his neck. On a Y-shaped breastplate, the centre of the Y will sit slightly above the centre point of the chest. Next, slip your hand between the straps and the horse at various locations. Ideally, there will be enough room for your fist, but not much more. A properly fitted elastic breastplate will be a bit more snug but will not have any "stretch" when the horse is standing still. If the breastplate has a strap that crosses over the withers or neck, pull straight up on it. It should easily rise three or four inches above the horse. Finally, check any straps that lead to the girth. Ideally, these will hang two or three inches below the skin, but not much more.

8. Bitless Bridles and Hackamores

Bitless bridles are becoming more and more popular. They work by applying pressure to the nose, jaw and poll, but not the mouth. It is a great option for horses that are not comfortable with a bit in their mouths or have a mouth injury and for training young horses.

8.1. The Hackamore

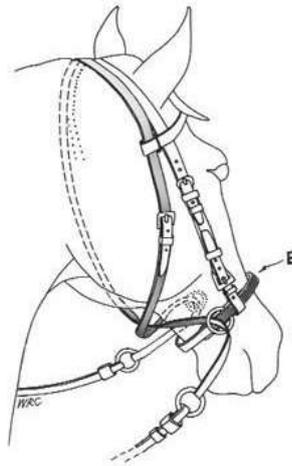
The hackamore is the first “bitless” bridle that comes to mind.



Hackamore and action thereof: Similar to a bit, the hackamore can be soft or harsh, depending on the rider's hands. It is untrue to say that a hackamore is gentler than a bit. The face of a horse is very sensitive and made of many nerve endings. Incorrect use of a hackamore can result in pain and swelling on the nose and jaw. If not fitted correctly and combined with hard hands, it can damage the cartilage of the nose and even break the fine bones protecting the nasal passages.

8.2. The Crossover

The crossover bridle or Dr Cook bitless bridle is another popular bitless bridle.



*Cross - under or Dr. Cook
bridle*

The bridle consists of two straps that cross under the horse's jaw and move independently of each other. Each strap falls naturally against the contours of the horse's jaw without tension. Because the straps move freely they are free to move along with the movement of the jaw. When steering, pressure from one rein encourages a change in direction by pushing on the opposite side of the head. Response is more positive from a "push" of the head than from a pull on the bit. The horse follows the direction of the head which remains upright and turns more naturally. When asking the horse to stop, a gentle squeeze of the rein creates a calming effect which initiates a balancing reflex at the poll and gently stimulates the sensitivity behind the ears along with pressure across the bridge of the nose. With the Dr Cook bitless bridle, the braking is more effective as often with a harsh pull of the bit the horse will generally run from the pain. The horse also does not have an opportunity to grab the bit and so prevent the rider from communicating to the horse.

8.3. The bitless noseband



Bitless Noseband

This type of bitless bridle works on a tightening of the jaw and nasal cartilage when pressure is applied. A strap of leather passed through two rings on either side of a padded nosepiece. The leather strap has two rings which the reins attach to.

8.4. The Side pull bitless bridle



Side-Pull Bridle

The side pull bitless bridle has the reins attached to rings on each side of the noseband. Often they have a rope of the nose to allow the rider some directional and stopping ability. Side pull bitless bridles are useful for young horses learning the basics of turning and stopping as well as horse who battles to turn and flex at the poll. They also help with horses who evade the bit by tucking their chins into their chests.

Changing over to bitless bridles takes time for you and your horse to get used to unless your horse has been trained from a youngster. It is a great way to enjoy your horse and will increase your understanding of and communication with your horse.