

Bit Information (Curb and Western type bits and hackamores)

Western bit information.

Curb and leverage bits and [hackamores](#).

For more information on snaffle bits and English type bits, see this thread: [Bit Information \(Snaffle and English-Type Bits\)](#)

Western trained horses are generally started in either a simple snaffle (loose ring, D-ring, full cheek, etc) or a bosal type hackamore. It isn't until later in their training that bits with shanks and leverage are introduced. It is never a good idea to start a [younghorse](#) in a bit with any type of leverage not only because of the amplified power they offer, but because they can be incredibly confusing and overwhelming to a [younghorse](#). Not only do they act on the mouth of the horse, but they also put pressure on the poll and chin which can encourage breaking at the poll and a more vertical headset in the prepared horse but can cause head tossing and evading in the unprepared horse.

Any bit with shanks that uses leverage on the horse is a fairly advanced piece of equipment and should never be used on a [green horse](#) until they have at least the basics of neck reining, leg cues, and are solid with stopping and turning at all gaits. Upping the power with a curb bit **will not** correct any training gaps; actually, it will likely make them worse.

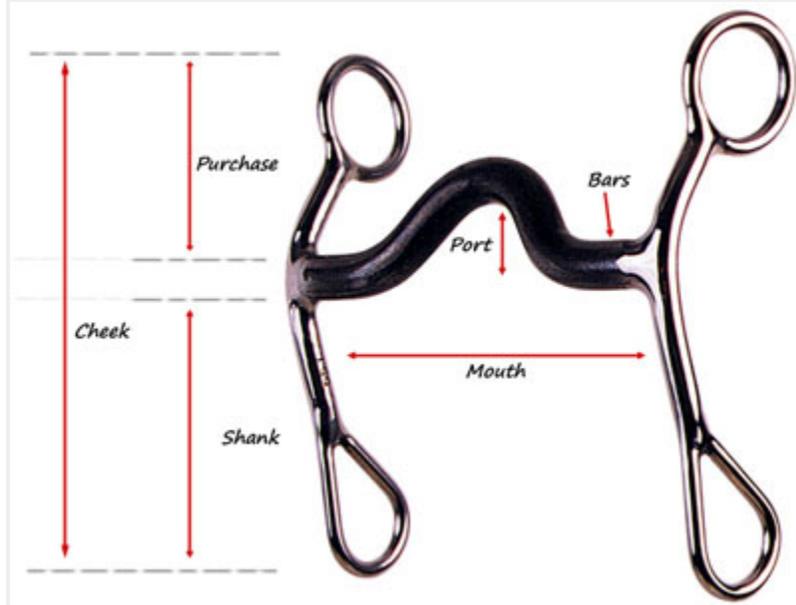
Also, let me dispel the rumor right now about the American Tom Thumb bit. THIS IS NOT A SNAFFLE BIT AND IS **NOT** APPROPRIATE FOR STARTING A [GREENHORSE](#) IN.



The basics of leverage and the pressure ratio:

A true snaffle bit has a 1:1 pressure ratio, meaning that for each ounce of pressure you exert on the [reins](#), the horse feels one ounce in his mouth. A true snaffle bit does not have shanks of any length. Shanks and a curb strap changes that ratio to create more pressure in the mouth with less on the [reins](#). The ratio of a normal curb bit can be

determined by measuring the length of the shank and the length of the purchase. Not to get all mathematical on you but if you measure the length of the shank and get, let's say, 4; then measure the purchase and get 1, then that particular bit has a pressure ratio of 1:4, meaning that for every 1 ounce you exert on the reins, the horse feels 4 ounces in his mouth.



A change in the ratio of purchase to shank also varies how the bit works and where it puts the most pressure. A bit with a short purchase and a long shank will put the majority of the pressure on the horse's bars with only a little bit on the poll. A bit with a longer purchase to a shorter shank will put more pressure on the poll and less on the bars. Bits with long purchases are generally called "lifter" bits as they encourage a horse to break at the poll, round their neck, and lift their shoulders.

Shanks: Length

Short shanks: On a curb bit, the shorter the shanks are, generally speaking, the milder the bit will be. Shorter shanks means that the rein cue is magnified less than with long shanks but more than with a snaffle bit. If you are just stepping up into the curb bit world from a snaffle, a short shanked bit with a nice amount of sweep (will be discussed in a minute) is the best option to start with.

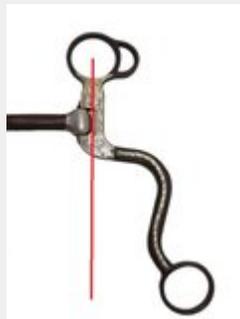
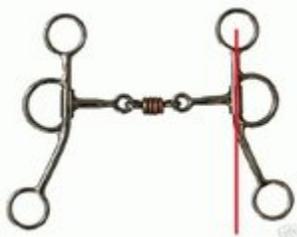


Long Shanks: Generally speaking, the longer the shanks on a curb bit, the more severe it is because it takes less rein pressure to put a large amount of pressure on the mouth. These bits are for the more advanced horse/rider pair. They are most commonly seen in the Western Pleasure and Reining arenas because they require a much smaller motion than a bit with short shanks to relay the same cue.

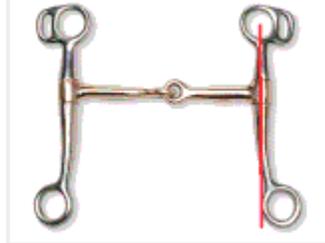


Shanks: Angle

The angle of the shank can be determined by looking at the bit from the side, or in the case of a swivel shanked bit, with the shank turned out flat. If you draw a line from the middle of the bridle ring, straight down through the middle of the mouthpiece, and continue it straight down level with the end of the shank, that will show you how straight your shanks are. The farther away your rein rings are from the line, the more swept back your shanks are. The actual shape of the shanks has no bearing on this either. There are simple shanks like the one pictured below/left and then there are others like the cavalry shanks that are very curvy and ornate like the one pictured below/right. The only thing that changes the angle of the sweep is the distance of the rein rings from the purchase line.



Straight Shanks: The straighter the shanks on a bit, the less warning the horse gets before the action of the bit is engaged because it takes less rein movement to move the shanks. This, in turn, usually makes for a slightly harsher bit because there is no build to full pressure, it just happens almost instantly.



Swept back shank: On a bit with a more swept back shank, there is more warning to the horse before the action of the bit is engaged because you have to pick up more rein to contact the bit. On a well trained horse, they will feel the weight of the reins being moved and respond before the bit ever has a chance to move in the mouth. These are also commonly called a “grazing bit” because the swept back shanks allow the horse to graze while still wearing the bit.



Swivel Shanks: Swivel shanked bits are bits that have a joint where the mouthpiece meets the cheek that allows the entire cheek piece to swivel independently from the rest of the bit. Bits like this often will allow a more sensitive feel for both horse and rider due to the mobility of the shanks. Bits like this also allow for a one rein stop in case of emergency.



Solid shank bits: Bits with a solid or immobile shank are one of the most common types of western bits sold. They are a relatively simple bit that is designed for the horse that neck reins well. They do not allow for one rein correction because the solid shanks will

change the position of the entire bit on the horse's head if one rein is used. There is not quite as much feel in a solid shank as there is in a loose shank.

