

Harness Selection and Fitting



Dairyland Driving Club

Sufficient Working Harness



- Well-made
- Good condition
- Fits properly
- Appropriate for horse and vehicle



Your First Harness



Research what you need for the discipline you want to do:

- Pleasure Shows
- Combined Driving Events
- Distance Driving
- Trail Driving
- All of the above?



Get Help for Your First Harness

Knowledgeable Retailer

- Knows how to fit
- Knows differences in quality

Knowledgeable Friend

- Join a carriage club
- Ask opinions of people you have seen drive well!
- Take someone with you to look at a used harness
- Have someone help you measure your horse



Harness Should Fit Well!

“Good harness should fit like a comfortable pair of shoes...”



Measuring a Harness

Easiest to use a harness that already fits from which to measure.

- Get help!
 - It's not as easy as the harness charts make it look
- RARELY have does an *off-the-rack* harness fit anything!
 - Pay the extra for custom/semi-custom harness
- Middle hole



Good Harness is an Investment!



It costs less
to buy it right
the first time!



“Buy the Best You Can Afford & Take Care of It”

You get what you pay for in harness qualities

- Quality of Leather
 - Origin/tanning process
- Quality of Synthetic
 - Dull vs. shiny finish
 - Origin of material
- Hardware
- Craftsmanship
 - Stitching
 - Features



Harness Construction Details

- Single strap leather vs. doubled leather
- Rolled or raised leather
- Shaped parts
- Double stitching
- Hand stitching



“Extra” Details



- Open keepers
- Double buckle cavesson
- Rolled throatlatch
- Extended skirts on saddle
- Gullet clearance
- “Forked” Neck and Hip Straps
 - More support



Leather Harness

FEATURES AND BENEFITS

- Lasts long time *if* you take care
- Good leather less likely to rub, creating soreness
- Traditional material
- Scratches can be buffed out (somewhat)

DISADVANTAGES

- Needs more care
 - Cleaning
 - Storage



Synthetic Harness

FEATURES & BENEFITS

- Easy care
 - Wash and wear
 - Hose on horse
- Can be less expensive
- New models can have traditional styling

DISADVANTAGES

- Damage is permanent
- Wears out faster than good leather
- Less traditional in show ring



Nylon Harness

- Notorious for causing rubs on horse
- Doesn't hold its shape
- If you want to be taken seriously as a driver, don't purchase this harness.



Cheap vs. Quality Leather



Cheap Leather

- “Papery” or “soggy”
- Smells bad/musty
- Does not hold shape
- Scary!!!

Good Leather

- Moist, but not “wet”
- Smells delightful
- Maintains shape



Harness Hardware



Buckles – easy to adjust/release



Conway buckles – difficult to adjust/release



Breeching snaps – *Dangerous! Can break!*



Jaw Lock Snaps – use on backstrap



Quick Release Snap Shackles – get good quality!



Metal Furniture - Furnishings



Brass

- Traditional
- Gleams when polished!
- Will tarnish in 12 hrs.

Stainless

- Less care required
- Not as traditional
- Polishing *will* shine it

Nickel

- Less expensive
- Will chip and wear out





Bridle Fit

- Browband below ears – not pinching
- Blinders in center of eye
- Blinder stays adjusted to keep blinders off eyes
- Cavesson not too low or high



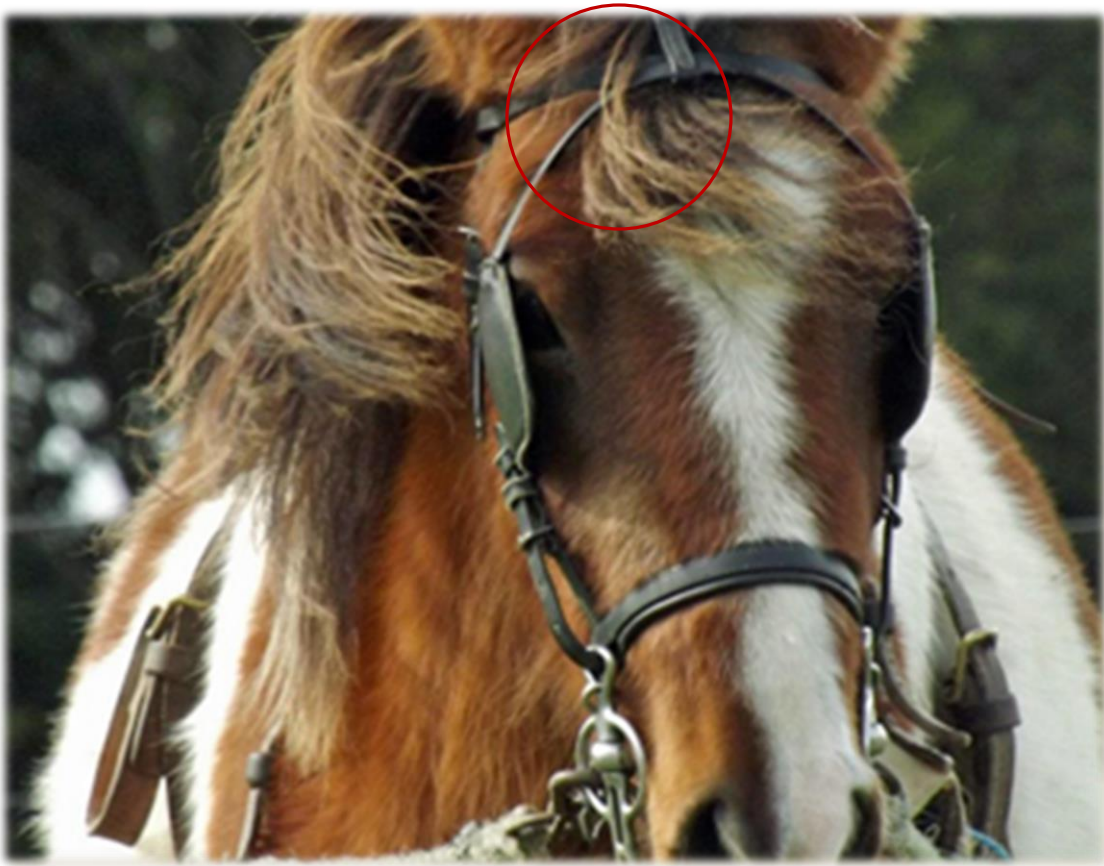
Bridle Fit - Problems



- Blinders *WAY* too close to the eyes
- Might* have some adjustment in the blinder stays.
- Width of blinkers depends on horse, but they shouldn't touch the eyelashes.



Blinder Adjustment?



- No stays in the material
- Could be adjusted too tightly at the blinder adjustment buckle at the poll.



Other Bridle Fit Issues

- Browband being pulled by the stays (right)
- Browband too small – pinching ears (below)





Caveson Too High

- Two fingers below cheekbone
- Horses
- One finger for ponies/minis





No Keepers on Caveson

- Blinders slide back on face without keepers to keep them close to the caveson.
- Also **keeps blinders from gaping** so the horse can't see behind himself.



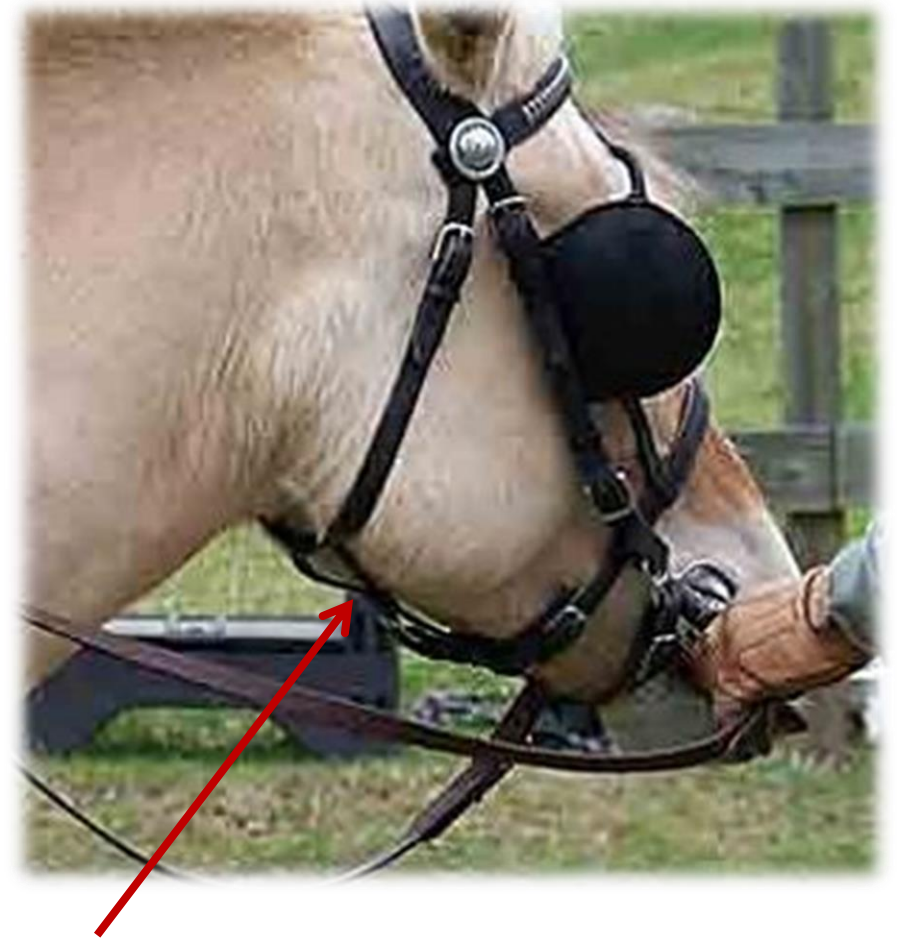
Need a Gullet Strap!

Additional
support to keep
bridles on heads!



What is a Gullet Strap?

- Attaches to throatlatch and caveson
- Can purchase as an aftermarket accessory



Check Rein?



Most people who use check reins do so because they don't understand their function.



Breastcollar

- Fine line of adjustment
- Shaped collars for low-set neck horses



Full Collar

- Needs to fit very well!
- Easier for horse to pull
- Use with heavier, lower draft vehicle



Saddle Fit – should not touch spine!

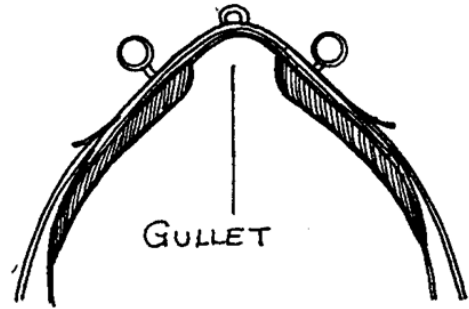


Figure 5A - Saddle with Gullet

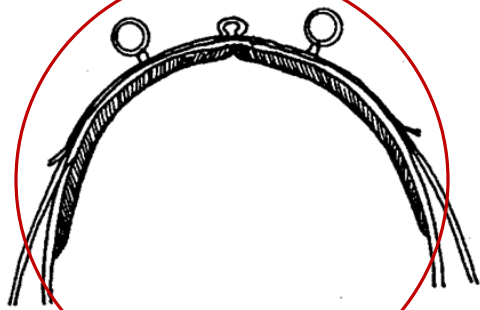


Figure 5B - Padded strap type saddle - no gullet

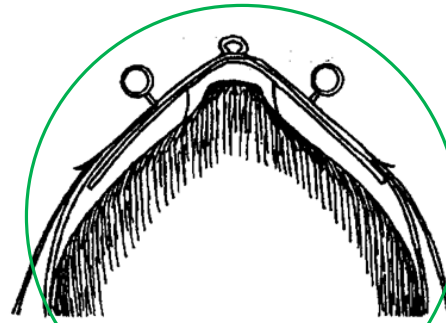


Figure 6A - Good Fit

Saddle Fit

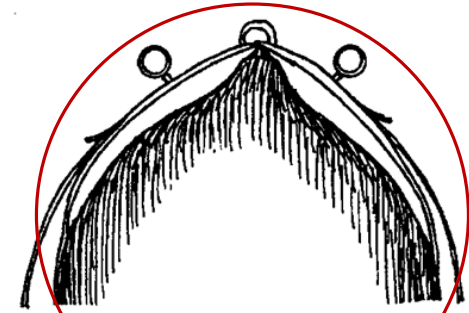


Figure 6B - No gullet - sits on spine

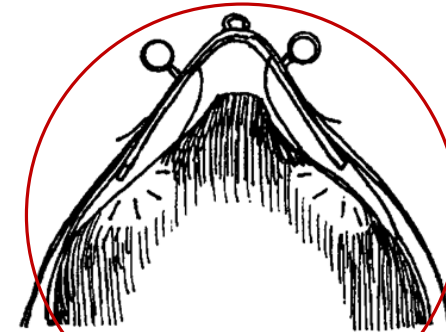


Figure 6C - Narrow tree pressure points

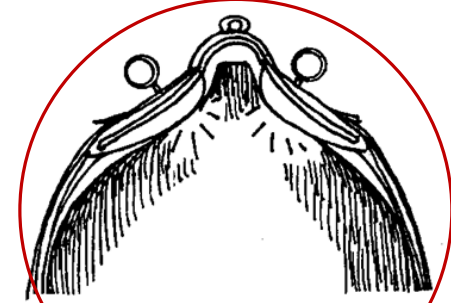


Figure 6D - Narrow gullet - pinches sides of back



Results of Lack of Breeching



In a slow or stop:

- Traces go slack
- Thimbles or wrap straps catch
- Saddle rotates into the horse's spine
 - especially if the saddle lacks gullet clearance.



Harness Fit

“Use what you have until you get what you want.”



...but recognize that it may not be the best for the horse and its performance.



What Should I Expect to Pay?

“You get what you pay for!”

Extremely cheap harnesses are usually not safe and are uncomfortable for the horse.

- New - \$600 - \$1200, closer to \$700 for decent synthetic harness.
- Used – varies, be very wary of anything less than \$400-500. Get the opinion of a knowledgeable driver before purchasing.
- Good harness will keep its value and last longer than cheap harness
- ***“Buy quality, cry once.”***
- ***“Buy the best you can afford and take care of it.”***



Used Harness



- Make sure it FITS or it is not a good deal!
- Purchase harness of better quality, and use the “lessor” stuff for practice.



NO eBay SPECIALS!

- Advertised as a mini harness with a 15'' collar!
- Saddle with no shape
- No structure to blinder stays
- Cheap imported leather



Cheap Harness Red Flags

“Light Marathon Harness made from Beta Biothane”
\$700



This harness is so “good”,
you even need pads with it! ☹️

“This is the Cadillac of our harnesses—high-quality,
comfortable, and classy for you and your horse.”



“Well adjusted” breeching. ☹️



Noseband does not encircle nose.
Illegal for CDEs and Pleasure Shows. ☹️



Cheap Harness Red Flags

Harness from a nation wide tack store:



“BLACK LEATHER HARNESS - \$350”



Very thin, single strap leather; not good for weight of a typical carriage.



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Cheap Harness Red Flags



Cheap Harness Red Flags

\$39.95



More “bling” does not make it better. ☹

“MADE IN INDIA, NEW WITH TAGS
(Whole Harness) \$125”



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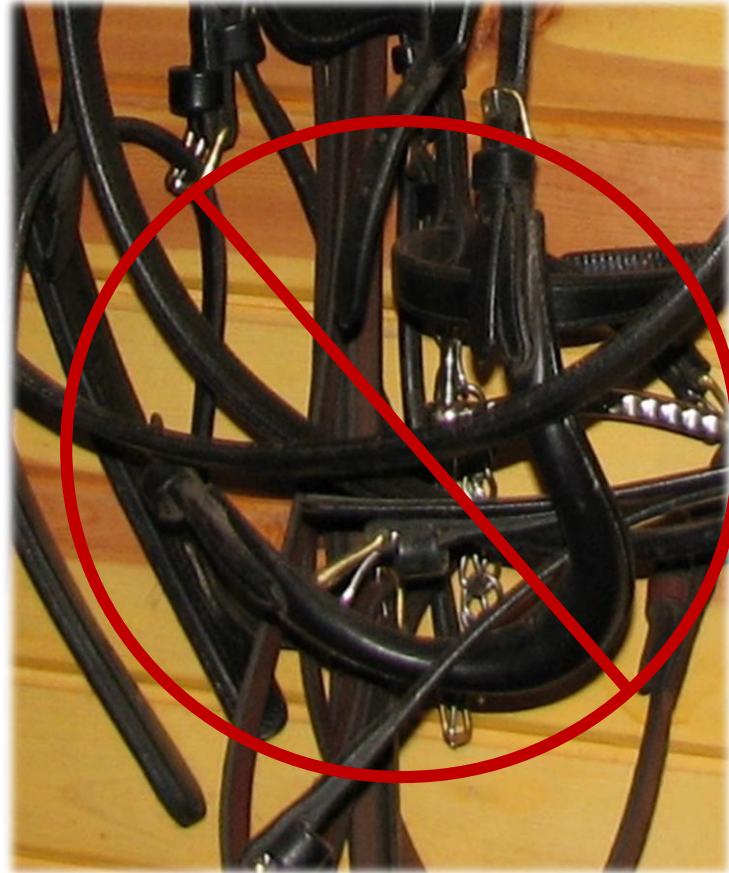
Maintaining Your Harness Investment

- Keep harness on a rack
- If storing for a length of time, take harness apart where it is “creased”.
- Avoid stuffing it in a suitcase/box.



Maintaining Your Harness Investment

Close the crupper
and caveson to
keep their shape!



How Do I Harness & Put To?

HARNESSING

- Collar
- Saddle, Crupper, Breeching
- Buckle Girth and Crupper
- Traces
- Reins
- Bridle
- Attach Reins to Bit
- Inspect

PUTTING TO

- Pick Up Reins
- Bring Carriage to Horse
- Raise Shafts
- Attach Traces
- Wrap & Buckle Holdback Straps
- Check Girth and Overgirth
- Final Check





Questions?
Ask us!



Dairyland Driving Club

www.dairylanddriving.com