Article Side

Elements of Western Tack

by Emily Heggan

Article published on July 10th 2012 | Pets

Riding Western style can be like stepping back in the Old Wild West. Western disciplines and styles of riding includes trail riding, rodeos, barrel racing, pole bending, reining and other show classes such as please and some hunter under saddle classes and more. Sometimes Western riding is thought of as a less formal style of riding than English, when in reality it isnâ€™t.

And, as you can imagine, Western tack differs from English tack. You wouldnâ€™t go into a barrel race in an English saddle and you wouldnâ€™t go into a show jumping competition in a Western Saddle. There are various types of Western tack and uses for all of them.

Saddles

You donâ€™t see workers on a ranch or farm riding around in small saddles now do you? Western saddles were designed with the rider in mind. These riders, whether itâ€™s working cattle or going for a trail ride, need to be comfortable and be able to stay better seated in the saddle. Western saddles were designed to be comfortable in for long periods of time, as well as the horn on the saddle was designed to hold the rope for the rider.

There are different types of Western saddles are made for specific purposes and are designed to meet certain needs. The general idea of a Western saddle is that they are much more comfortable than an English saddle. Of course, when you think about the origin of this riding type it's not hard to believe. These saddles were designed for cowboys who used them for working tools.

Headstalls

Western bridles, or headstalls, are very similar to the English bridles but do not have nosebands. Some Western bridles also lack brow bands, but sometimes are replaced by a "one ear" or "split ear" design where a small strap goes around one or both ears to provide extra security to keep the bridle on. Western bridles come on all kinds of designs and colors.

Bits and Reins

The biggest difference between an English and Western bridle is the bit. Most Western horses ride in a curb bit with a single pair of reins. A curb bit has longer and looser shanks than thatâ€™s of an English double bridle or a Pelham bit. Two styles of Western: split reins and closed-end reins. Split reins are completely separated and do no connect at all. Closed-end reins, (similar to English reins) but do not have a buckle, and have a long single attachment on the ends that hook to the bit. Young horses are usually started under saddle with a simple snaffle bit and any type of reins.

Cinch

The cinch, or the girth, attaches to the saddle by a latigo on both sides of the saddle. The latigo is a wide, flexible leather strap, usually made out of leather that hangs down on the sides towards the front of the saddle. The latigo on the right side is usually kept attached to both cinch and saddle at all times, except when you have to make an adjustment to maybe fit another horse. The latigo on the left side is attached to the saddle at all times and then buckled or knotted when tightening the cinch. This is the side that you loosen to remove the cinch to take off the saddle.

The Breast Plate

A breastplate is used to keep the saddle or harness from sliding back. It goes around the horseâ€™s chest attaching to the saddle and between the horseâ€™s front legs attaching to the girth. Breast plates can also be used as a safety feature, for example if a rider's girth or billets break they will have enough time to stop the horse and dismount before the saddle slipped off the horse's back or underneath his belly. The breastplate is used on both English and Western saddles. The western breastplate is used for horse shows or working horses in disciplines that involve cattle or barrel racing to help keep the saddle in place from the tight turns or quick movements.

As you can see, there are so many traditional elements to western tack. Though western tack differs from English tack, they are similar to each other and have much of the same uses. So saddle up and ride off into the Old West.

Article Source:
http://www.articleside.com/pets-articles/elements-of-western-tack.htm - Article Side

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Article Keywords:
western tack

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