



THE 5-MINUTE BIT & BRIDLE COMFORT CHECK

Grab your horse. Grab the bridle. Let's have a look.

This isn't a test and there's no score at the end. You don't need to know the name of every strap or have strong opinions about French links.

We're simply looking for the little clues that can tell us whether your horse is comfortable.

1. Before you touch the bridle, look at your horse

This bit is easy to skip. Don't. When you appear with the bridle, does your horse:

- Stay where they are
- Lower or offer their head
- Happily let you handle their ears
- Stand quietly while you put it on

Or do you get the disappearing act? Head in the air? Back of the stable suddenly looking fascinating?

Worth noticing: A horse avoiding the bridle isn't necessarily being difficult. They may simply have learned that something about what comes next isn't very comfortable.

2. Have a look around the ears

Stand in front, then have a look from each side.

- Can both ears move freely?
- Is there a little breathing space behind them?
- Is the browband sitting comfortably rather than pulling everything forwards?
- Any hair being squashed, rubbed or caught?

Quick thought: Bigger, softer and more padded doesn't automatically mean more comfortable. Fit still wins.

3. Now the noseband

Forget how you've always done it for a moment. Look at what is actually happening.

- Is it sitting clear of the prominent cheek bones?
- Is it sitting evenly?
- Is it clear of the bit and the corners of the mouth?
- Is there enough room for your horse to move their jaw comfortably?

What job is this noseband actually doing? If the answer is *"I'm not entirely sure, but the bridle came with it"*, you're in very good company.

4. Take a look at the bit

You don't need to become a bit expert in the next 60 seconds. Look from the front and both sides:

- Does it look wide enough without miles of metal sticking out either side?
- Does it sit evenly?
- Are the cheekpieces holding it rather than hauling it upwards?
- Any pinching or rubbing around the corners of the mouth?
- Does your horse look reasonably settled with it in?

And ignore the old obsession with counting wrinkles for a moment. **Your horse's mouth is a better source of information than an arbitrary number of creases.**

5. Now think about what happens when you ride

This is where the clues start joining up. Does your horse regularly:

- Toss or shake their head?
- Open their mouth or cross their jaw?
- Put their tongue out or over the bit?
- Avoid taking a contact?
- Lean or become very strong?
- Feel noticeably different on one rein?

None of these automatically means **"the bridle doesn't fit."** Teeth, training, pain, rider influence and plenty of other things can produce similar behaviours.

But repeated behaviour is information, not something to automatically strap down, bit up or dismiss as "that's just what he does."

6. Finally, take it off

Yes, this counts too. What does your horse do immediately after the bridle comes off?

- Nothing much
- Rub their face or head
- Yawn repeatedly
- Work their jaw or tongue
- Shake their head
- Seem noticeably relieved

A quick rub doesn't prove anything. But if your horse performs a **full facial exfoliation against you every time the bridle comes off**, it's probably worth asking why.

Something not quite adding up?

If your horse is showing signs of discomfort, resistance or a change in behaviour, it may be worth taking a closer look at the fit of the bit and bridle.

Watch it. Look for a pattern. And before you immediately buy a new bit, tighten a strap or disappear down a **47-tab Google rabbit hole**, work out whether the next conversation needs to be with your bit and bridle fitter, dentist, vet, physio, saddle fitter or trainer.

Because sometimes the smallest clue is the useful one.

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