

BITS – The Mystery Solved

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I receive a lot of calls each month about bits for mules. The question always asked is, “What type of bit do you start your mules with and what bit do you ride your finished mules in?”

The answer is always the same; a full cheek snaffle bit. A full cheek, D ring or O ring snaffle bit is the mildest bit there is; one that allows you to have direct contact with your mule’s entire mouth in a gentle manner. A full cheek snaffle puts pressure on both sides of your mule’s mouth, not just on side. This bit also does not inflict pain when you are using it, unless you, the rider, jerks or yanks inappropriately one your mule.

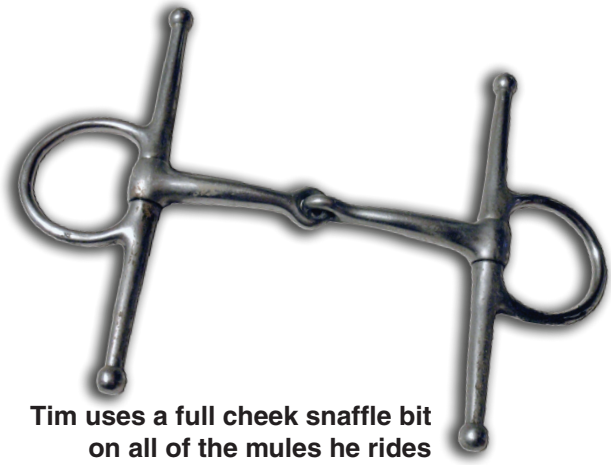
Any bit with shanks will add pain to your mule’s mouth. Mules are a lot more sensitive and think about what you are asking much more than horses. When a mule feels pain or excess pressure he will push against that pressure. This is why so many people think a more severe bit is the answer. In reality, the person needs to back off and be softer with the pressure and teach the mule to give the desired response. Then and only then will you have a trained mule. The alternative is having a run-away mule. I prefer the first choice.

Here is an example: walk up to your mule and start pushing his or her hind quarter to the side with your hand. As you add pressure you will feel your mule adding pressure to counter your pressure, essentially your mule will push back. If you take your hand and tap your mule’s hind quarter with light pressure, your mule will move his hind quarter away from the pressure.

The same thing happens with a bit, if you add too much



It is the hand on the rein, not the bit, that trains the mule



Tim uses a full cheek snaffle bit on all of the mules he rides

pressure or cause the mule pain, he will brace his neck muscles from the pain and his performance will drop.

A snaffle bit will not cause the mule pain. You will be asking the mule for a movement or stop of movement from a body part. A lot of people will tell me about a stopping problem they have with their mule. They will then purchase a more severe bit with shanks or twisted wire or some other harsh bit. These bits cause pain. For a short time your mule will stop his feet to stop the pain, but once your mule realizes the pain will not go away, he will then no longer stop his feet; you have now created a run-away mule!


The owner will then purchase an even harsher bit and the cycle starts all over again.

We live in a quick fix society. We want to buy this product or that product to fix our problems. No piece of equipment can replace good training. It is very important to have a good snaffle bit that is the correct size for your mule.

Another thing to consider when buying bits is not all mules have the same size mouth. I usually ride one of two mules when on my pack trips or clinics. Diamond Creek Angel has a 5-inch full cheek snaffle bit and Diamond Creek Grover has a 6-inch full cheek snaffle bit. If I would ride Grover with Angel’s 5-inch snaffle bit, he would feel pain. The same if I use Grover’s 6-inch bit on Angel.

Another thing to consider when buying bits is the type of metal the bit is made of. I typically buy stainless steel full-cheek snaffle bits. Other types of finishes are copper, sweet iron and so on. The coating of your bit is a personal preference. Some mules like the sweet iron because it is just that, sweet. Other mules do not like that. You as the owner can determine what you and your mule like best.

Another question I often get is: what bit do I ride my finished mules in? I still use a full cheek snaffle. I can get my mules to do everything I want with a snaffle bit so why change. The old saying is, “If it is not broke, don’t fix it”

I have never seen a bit or other piece of equipment train a mule, so I use the most gentle equipment and I train all my mules! It is the hand on the rein, not the bit, that trains the mule. 

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