

HACKAMORE BASICS

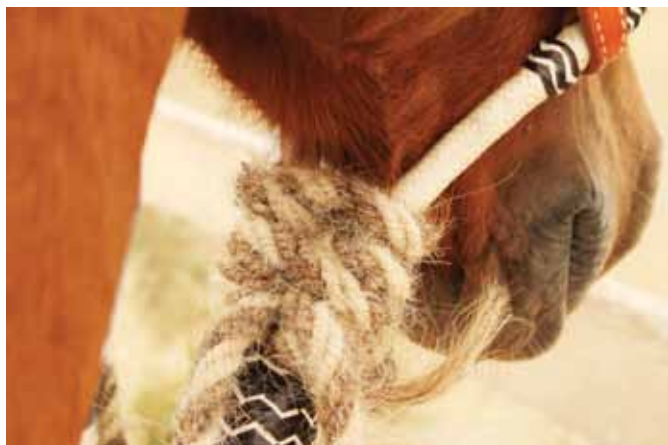
Disclaimer: HorseWyse Magazine and Carlos Tabernaberry recommend that our readers always wear the correct safety equipment – including approved safety helmets – when heading out on the trail. Don't forget to seek professional advice if you need assistance with your horse's training and always put your safety first.

I often say that just because something is 'traditional' it isn't necessarily good. I believe that so much, that I opened my book with a quote about it. Here's a part of it:

...Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it. (Buddha)

The hackamore, is a very traditional horsemanship 'tool' and can be gentle or harsh, depending on the hands of the person using it. Some people like the look of a hackamore, but it is a myth that the hackamore is 'soft'.

Because the horse's nose is very delicate, with easily damaged bones and cartilage over the nasal passages, and the fact that the horse's



face is highly sensitive because it is covered in nerve endings, I treat even the softest of rope hackamores as if it were a bit. You may come across a 'mechanical hackamore' that is a noseband attached to shanks and a curb chain, which can be very harsh. It is not a true hackamore.

The hackamore is Spanish in origin, and features a noseband (or bosal), a 'hanger' or headstall, which traditionally has no throatlatch and a 22-foot long rein (or mecate). A long rope rein and loop rein are formed by the way in which the mecate is tied to the bosal (left).

The mecate pictured on my Quarter Horse mare (above and right) is not traditional, as it is made of standard yachting rope. Pictured on the left is a traditional horsehair mecate.

The bosal is an important part of the Argentinean gaucho tradition of my ancestors. It was an essential tool when working cattle, as the rider could attach the long rein of the mecate to his belt, letting him stay attached to the horse, or to tie up (or ground tie) the horse. When not used, it is usually tied to the saddle horn using a half hitch knot. The hackamore is still used to train young horses because it protects the mouth while the horse is schooled to work off seat and leg cues and doesn't interfere



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with the development of his jaw and the shedding of baby teeth. Horses are worked on just the bosal for two years before adding a snaffle. This is called 'two reins', as the horse is worked on both the bosal and snaffle. This takes another two years. The horse is then ridden with just the snaffle for another two years before being moved onto an Argentinean curb, which is a snaffle bit with shanks. The aim of the process, which is called 'refinement', is to make the horse light on the bit.

But when I thought about this, it all seemed back to front. Why would you move a horse who understood leg and seat cues in a hackamore to a bit? It was one of those moments where I found myself questioning the traditional way of doing things that I saw growing up and set me down the path of working bitless.

If you're thinking you would like to work with your horse in a hackamore, there are some things you need to pay attention to, such as whether your horse has a good understanding of groundwork, particularly lateral flexion, and that the hackamore is properly fitted and adjusted to your horse. There is no 'one size fits all'!

The bosal should be placed just above where the nostril begins on the nose, to be sure you don't damage the delicate cartilage and bones (photo, above right).

You should also be able to put your finger between the top of the rein at the heel knot and the horse's jaw (right).

If you are introducing the hackamore to your horse for the first time, be sure to check that the horse flexes softly to the vertical, without going behind, and flexes willingly laterally, with no twisting at the poll.

Check your forequarter and hindquarter yield (bottom, left). Maybe challenge yourself and your horse - try putting the long rein of the mecate into your pocket to see whether your horse is really following your feel! The long rein of the mecate makes it easy to do your ground work anywhere, any time. In the picture below, right, I'm asking my mare to change direction on the circle (or change eye). Horses spook easily when they see things move quickly from one eye to the other. I use this exercise to help my horse become more comfortable seeing me on either side. The horse must engage the hindquarters, which makes her very light on the forehand.

Even if you have been riding your horse in a halter, the hackamore will feel very different.



I always ride my Quarterhorse mare in a halter because she is so sensitive to my leg and seat aids, so she wasn't too sure about the hackamore in the beginning. Remember what I said about it not being soft? For my mare, 'soft' is the halter and, to her, the hackamore was unnecessary.

She was also unsure about the mote, or horsehair tassel under the chin. If you haven't done your work to desensitize your horse to new



and scary things, or you haven't established the foundation of trust, obedience and respect with your horse that we've talked about before, it may become obvious when you introduce the hackamore.

When you have established that relationship, the introduction of something new, no matter how scary for your horse, will be much easier and go much more smoothly for you.



Once your horse has become accustomed to the hackamore, and is calm and forward in it, you can start to introduce work at the walk and trot, making sure to look for all the things that you normally would, whether on a halter or bitless bridle. You can achieve the same softness and self-carriage on a hackamore.

Until next time – safe riding and God Bless!

Carlos

Photos by Marty Schiel. © Whispering Acres Horse Starting and Training 2012

Where to catch Carlos

No matter what type of horse you own and love, Carlos has a gift to help you understand the horse and achieve the results you want. Clinic numbers are purposely kept small, to make sure every person has an opportunity to work directly with Carlos on everything from spookiness on the ground to problem solving on the ground and under saddle. If you have an issue, bring it to a clinic or lesson!

2013 Clinics

February

2-3 (Clinic) Clunes Show Ground, Clunes VIC
Contact: Bettina Kappen, bettina.kappen@bigpond.com, 0425 557 565

March

2-5 (Clinic) Glenworth Valley Agistment, 69 Cooks Road, Peats Ridge, Glenworth Valley, NSW
Contact: Fiona Goldsworthy, fionagolds@hotmail.com, 0410 327 957

7-10 (Clinic/Private lessons) KalEquine Services, Cooranbong, NSW
Contact: Deb, kalequine@yahoo.com, 0417 268 884

22-24 (2 Day Clinic/Private lessons) Oaks Sport Horses, The Oaks, NSW
Contact: Pim Grogan, pimgrogan@gmail.com or Elizabeth, budz1305@tpg.com.au, 0411 390 432

28-31 (Clinic/Private Lessons) Dunback, South Island NZ
Contact: Contact: Anne, info@clubned.co.nz, 021 88 23 40

April

5 (Half-day Kids Clinic) Sunninghill Equestrian Centre, Stoneville, WA (Perth area)
Contact: Lisa Rowe, nrlmr@iprimus.com.au, 08 9295 5293 or 0419 967 827

6-7 (Adult Clinic) Sunninghill Equestrian Centre, Stoneville, WA (Perth area)
Contact: Lisa Rowe, nrlmr@iprimus.com.au, 08 9295 5293 or 0419 967 827

12-14 (Clinic) Hervey Bay, QLD
Contact: Karen, kazza56@hotmail.com

27-29 (Clinic) Brisbane area, QLD
Contact: Contact: Nicole, help@nobitbridles.com.au, 0414 320 974

May

2-18 (Clinics/Lesson/Demo) Northern Ireland, including Balmoral Show 2013
(Please check our Facebook pages for more information)

24-26 (Clinic/Lessons) Mansfield, VIC
Contact: Kylie, booties75@bigpond.com, 0407 021 135

June

28-30 (Clinic) Sunninghill Equestrian Centre, Stoneville, WA (Perth area)
Contact: Lisa Rowe, nrlmr@iprimus.com.au, 08 9295 5293 or 0419 967 827

August

23-25 (Clinic) Sunninghill Equestrian Centre, Stoneville, WA (Perth area)
Contact: Lisa Rowe, nrlmr@iprimus.com.au, 08 9295 5293 or 0419 967 827



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