

● GEAR GUIDELINES

Fitting the Hackamore

Don Murphy explains how he properly fits a hackamore.

Illustration by RON BONGE

I set my hackamores halfway between the eyes and the nostrils; that is my starting point. Then I adjust a half-inch up or down from there. Some people set them too low on the nose, and it is just like a halter, like leading a horse around. A hackamore will get low, cut a horse's air off and make him stick his nose out, not come back.

If the hackamore doesn't hang against the chin, it is too tight. The hackamore should move on the chin [in response to your hands]. With a hackamore you are looking for release. It needs to drop off and release their chin quick.

When you pull on a hackamore, it pulls on a horse's poll, too. I like a little, narrow headstall because it puts pressure points on his head. If you have a problem, you want that headstall to break loose.

There's really no standard-size hackamore. I have 10, 10½, and a couple that are 11 inches. Some people will use a 12-inch, but you put so many wraps underneath there and the horse gives his head and pokes himself in the chest. Also, when a hackamore is longer, you get less balance.



OUR EXPERT:

Don Murphy has trained and shown reining and cow horses since the early 1960s. A few of his winning mounts include Sparking Train, RS Lily Starlight and Bald N Shiney. Murphy has lifetime earnings exceeding \$179,000, and today continues to share his knowledge with young trainers at clinics and shows.

I want to be able to stick a couple of fingers under a horse's chin, but I don't want the hackamore moving up and down his jaw line when I pull on the reins. I want it to move no more than two inches up the jaw.

