



THE PRODUCT, CARE AND SERVICE GUIDE FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE HORSES

# HORSE JOURNAL™

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Limit grazing painlessly.

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## Muzzle Your Best Friend

*And help prevent obesity and laminitis.*

**W**e have a love/hate relationship with grazing muzzles. We hate looking for them when they become lost, and we hate the seemingly endless repairs they need. We also hate the inevitable rubs and hair loss. And, OK, we'll admit it: We hate how they look on our horses.

But we love what they do for our horses—and that's what counts. We no longer have to condemn horses on restricted diets to mind-numbing boredom in stalls and dry-lots. With grazing muzzles, they can mingle with their friends and get a little exercise while ambling around in search of grass.

If you've ever had even a flicker of a thought that your horse might need a muzzle, he probably does. If you ever hear a tiny voice whispering that a grazing muzzle might be a good idea, keep reading. Will we make you love using them? Probably not, but you'll be happy you did.

We know what we want in a grazing muzzle: It should be lightweight, but durable enough to withstand at least one full season of use. It should be airy and comfortable for the horse. It needs to come in many sizes and/or have multiple adjustments to fit every equine head and, once fitted, it should stay on that head. It must be safe. In the rare event of entrapment, its safety mechanism should release long before the muzzle sustains damage. Are we asking a lot? Apparently so.

We gathered six muzzles and assigned them to six horses, based on best apparent fit. All the horses were veteran muzzle-wearers and each had its own arsenal of removal tricks.



*Grazing muzzles must be safe, comfortable and allow access to water.*

*continued on page 3*

### Consider This . . .

- The horse usually accepts the muzzle better than the owner.
- Muzzles are no more dangerous than fly masks, provided they have a breakaway safety release.
- Many myths surround the use of muzzles, such as weird muscle development and odd tooth wear.



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**BEST FRIEND.** The Best Friend muzzle was our No. 1 pick in prior muzzles trials. Its Standard model attaches to the halter. The Deluxe muzzle includes a safety halter.

This basket-type muzzle is made with a soft open-web design with a cushioned, proprietary PVC lining. The bottom is a smooth thick rubber compound with a 3 cm diameter opening. It's believed that a muzzle with an opening this size limits the horse to about 25% of the amount of grass that would be consumed without the muzzle. Whether this figure is exact or not, we can't tell you, but we do know that it effectively stops your horse from gorging.

Pre-2008, Best Friend muzzles had a reinforced opening that eventually showed wear and hole enlargement. The newer models have the entire bottom reinforced. There is a breakable safety buckle on the poll strap, and the manufacturer supplies one set of replacement connections with each muzzle. Repairs are an easy DIY project.

We started with two horses in Best Friend Deluxe muzzles and ended up with four. Over the trial, two Best Friend muzzles were destroyed when they became caught on objects in the field. The safety snaps did break as designed, but by then the muzzles were ruined.

Best Friend muzzles came off our horses three times, but each time we noticed that the fit was overdue for an adjustment.

**LOOK-A-LIKES.** Two of our other muzzles looked similar to the Best Friend Deluxe. Both were well-constructed. The Shires model had a reinforced hole opening and a double hook-and-loop (aka Velcro) crown connection, rather than the safety buckle on the Best Friend. Unfortunately, it met its fate with our "gorilla" test horse (see page 4).

The Centaur muzzle from English Riding Supply also performed well. After about four months of use, we noticed thinning of the base, a bit of hole enlargement and a tiny tear. However, it made it through the entire season and, except for the

## The Ultimate Overpackaging?

Environmentalists frequently complain about "overpackaged" items, usually due to techniques manufacturers use to both deter thieves and to protect the product. They ought to see how these horse muzzles arrived—many in elaborate packaging. One even arrived in a plastic container with web handles.

It's the pinnacle of ridiculous. After all, grazing muzzles are rubbed, stomped, bitten, chewed and subjected to dirt, mud and water. These are horse muzzles, not designer purses. We'd rather see the price lowered a buck or two and buy it with just a price tag hanging on it.

## Results By Horse

We expected a little weight gain, since these horses were turned out on grass after a long winter. The idea was to minimize grass intake and a large summer weight gain. We saw no noticeable difference in the weight of our 12-hour grazers, both of whom wore muzzles with generous openings (see chart). When our 24/7 grazers began to visibly put on weight—crests hardening, fat deposited over the withers, filling above the eyes—we looked closely at the muzzles they wore and noted that the holes were enlarging on the grazing surface. Lesson learned: Muzzles must be watched for wear.

Remember, the horse must wear the muzzle at ALL times when on grass. Even a brief period without it resulted in bingeing on grass, rapidly negating all the hours the horse spent muzzled. It's comparable to you dieting all day and then downing a pizza and ice cream in the evening. You're not going to lose weight.



*The Best Friend muzzle set the bar high with its small hole and totally reinforced grazing surface.*

Horse	Weight 5/1	Weight 10/25	Difference	Muzzle(s)	Notes
F	1064	1126	+5.8%	Centaur	24/7 grass turnout, muzzled at all times; Cushing's, on medication
J	959	1064	+11%	Easy Breathe, Best Friend Deluxe	24/7 grass turnout, muzzled at all times
L	1064	1033	-3%	Tough 1 Easy Breathe	12 hours muzzled turnout; stalled at night and fed low NSC hay, tested and mineral-balanced
T	1018	959	-5.3%	Green Guard	24/7 grass turnout, muzzled at all times; Cushing's, on medication, dose increased to counter the fall rise in ACTH
W	1174	1223	+4.2%	Best Friend Deluxe	24/7 grass turnout, muzzled at all times; developed a hard crest on 24/7 turnout and was put on the same routine as L and Z starting 9/10.
Z	1142	1111	-2.9%	Shires, Best Friend, Greenguard	12 hours of muzzled turnout; stalled at night and fed low NSC hay, tested and mineral-balanced. This was our "gorilla" test horse.



logo differences, it's tough to distinguish from the older Best Friends.

**TOUGH-1 EASY BREATHE.**

We love when someone tries to build a better mouse trap. The Easy Breathe sports a much more shallow basket, cut-out nostril holes, and a 15 sq. cm rectangular grazing opening. It has a double-Velcro crown strap as a safety feature. The horse-sized basket isn't huge, but it should fit most horses.

Our first test horse loved it, but that was probably because it took her less than 30 seconds to get it off. Despite repeated attempts and re-adjustments, she easily hooked the muzzle basket on a fence board and popped it off like a bottle cap.

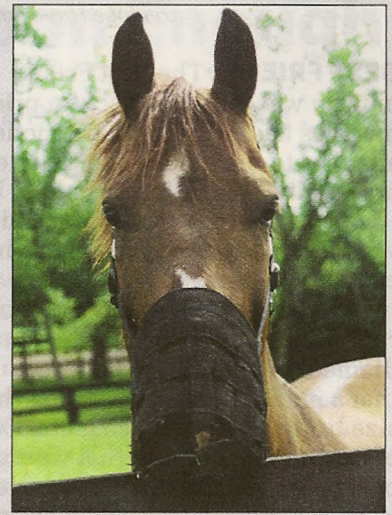
The second test horse was a recreational cribber who finished the season in it. He was able to enlarge



*The Greenguard muzzle is a good choice, but we'd like different straps and a smaller price.*

**Equine Gorilla?**

Remember the Samsonite gorilla baggage-handler commercials? Well, we found a horse who'd like to apply for his job. Several muzzles met premature deaths after being assigned to him. Why? Because once he cleverly entrapped the muzzles, he figured out how to destroy them before the safety mechanisms released. Of those he wore, only the Greenguard, left, survived.



the rectangular opening slightly, and the muzzle sustained a small corner tear. We were pleased.

However, the plastic keepers that adjust the length of the cheek pieces and poll strap both broke, one causing an abrasion before it was noticed. The manufacturer said she was unaware of any similar complaints but said that the 2010 models would have metal keepers.

We also had some problem with

the Velcro not releasing as quickly as we thought it should when it was caught, as was the case on most of the muzzles, and we had to repair some torn stitching where the basket connects to the base.

**GREENGUARD.** This muzzle is different. It's square and must be attached to the halter. Made of a highly-durable slightly-flexible plastic, it has multiple rectangular

**Muzzles**

✓ **Horse Journal Editor's Choice**    \$ **Horse Journal Best Buy**

Muzzle	Price	Sizes	Weight "horse size"	Comments
✓ \$ Best Friend Equine Supply 800-681-2495 www.bestfriendequine.com	Deluxe: \$42.25 Standard: \$37.75	Large horse, horse, cob, pony and mini	Deluxe 1.75 lbs. Standard 1.2 lbs.	The Deluxe model's hole size and totally reinforced grazing surface make this worth the extra money, but we'd like to see a quicker release system. The Standard has double-Velcro attachments topped with keepers. These held well, even when wet and muddy, never losing their grip. Use this only with a quick-release safety halter. Also available: sheepskin padding, muzzle hole "plug," and a neon finder pad that makes finding a lost muzzle easier to do.
Centaur 866-569-1600 www.englishriding supply.com	\$29.95	Pony, cob, horse	1.5 lbs.	Well-made, comfortable basket. Similar safety buckle as Best Friend. However, we noted a markedly enlarged hole and bottom wear-through by season's end. For a tight budget, not a bad choice.
Greenguard 800-350-3023 www.Harmany equine.com or 603-929-3880 www.shires equestrian.com	\$124	Small, large	.75 lbs	Not your classic bucket-style muzzle. Durable. Even our most destructive horse couldn't damage the base. However, we'd like to see improvements in the attachment straps and more available sizes. Greenguard also makes its own halter, which has a strap running from poll to noseband, helping to keep the muzzle in place, but it lacks a safety release. An impressive muzzle, but the price gives us pause.
Tough-1 Easy Breathe 317-862-6842 www.jtidist.com	\$24.99	Large horse, horse, yearling, pony, mini	1.25 lbs.	If the keepers are replaced as promised, this would be a deal. Otherwise, it may be worth a try with a muzzle-tolerant horse. We believe a determined horse is likely to remove this muzzle.
Shires 603-929-3880 www.shiresequestrian.com	\$29.95	Full, cob, pony	1.7 lbs.	Appears durable and well-made, and its design is similar to the Best Friend and Centaur products. However, it was out of the trial early because it got caught on a gate and destroyed. Note: We cannot criticize this muzzle for that incident, as the horse would have done the same thing to any muzzle he was wearing at the time.

The weights listed in our chart, above, are for the muzzle only. If the muzzle includes a halter in its design, the weight listed includes that halter. If you're wondering how much weight a halter adds, our single-ply leather turnout halter weighs 1.4 lbs. So, you would add that to the listed weight. For comparison, our hunter bridle with a hollow-mouth snaffle and reins weighs 1.6 lbs.




openings on all sides with a generous 61.2 sq. cm on the grazing surface. Only two holes actually showed signs of wear by the end of the trial, and we suspect grass was only obtained through those two.

Overall, this muzzle was pretty easy to use, although we'd like to see some changes in the straps. For now, we suggest you pad the connections with sheepskin halter tubes to prevent rubs and scratches.

The front strap connecting the muzzle to our safety halter insisted on turning no matter how we adjusted it, and it poked the horse in the nose with the buckle tongue. We replaced that strap with a leather shoestring, which worked well. However, if the shoestring broke, we would find the muzzle jammed into the horse's mouth. This occurred twice, at which point we eliminated the problem by using a regular shoestring.

We also used a Greenguard on a second horse who continually rubbed the muzzle along the fence, unbuckling the connections between the muzzle and the halter. (The muzzle itself was unscathed, despite the abuse this horse put it through.) We were forced to tape the connections—repeatedly—with electrical tape. The muzzle always hung slightly askew from his safety halter despite many attempts to straighten it. After noticing lacerations on the horse's lower lip and chin, we decided the muzzle was too large for him (we would like to see Greenguard offer more sizes).

**BOTTOM LINE.** There is a place for each of the muzzles in this trial, as horses can devise unique methods of destruction and escape. A horse shouldn't be able to easily get out of the muzzle, but the muzzle needs a safety release. It's a dilemma.

The Greenguard muzzle was effective and durable. However, we're not thrilled with its attachment straps, limited sizes and price. For that reason, the Best Friend muzzle stays at the head of the class. It's durable and a much better value for the dollar, which gives it our Best Buy award as well. 

Article by Beth Benard, Contributing Editor.

## The Fit Is It

The trick to muzzle fit is to make sure the throat strap actually fits. Start by lengthening the cheek pieces, usually to the maximum. Then shorten the poll strap until the throat strap remains in position. The poll strap may be quite short.

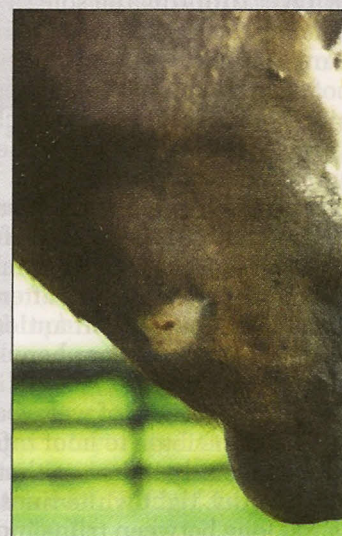
Only then should you take up the cheek straps, if necessary, so the muzzle basket hangs one inch below the end of the horse's nose. Make all the other adjustments comfortably snug, but not excessively tight, including the strap under the chin that connects the muzzle to the throat strap.

If your horse has an unusual head, such as a pronounced Roman nose or a long-narrow or short-boxy head, purchase a well-fitting safety halter and buy attachable muzzles, such as the Best Friend Standard or the Greenguard.

Pick a halter with a thicker, slightly shorter noseband to keep the weight of the muzzle from pulling it out of position. Make sure the throat strap of the halter is well-seated in the horse's throat area and not slipping down his cheek.

Recheck the fit every time you muzzle the horse: keepers slip, webbing twists, leather and rubber stretch, and horse buddies can sabotage your efforts. After you've walked the field a few times looking for a lost muzzle, checking the adjustments will become second nature.

Horses can and do eventually get rubbed areas from the muzzle, just as they can from wearing a halter 24/7. Cut a piece of fleece to cover the offending area and stitch it on by hand using heavy-duty thread. When the fleece becomes soiled, cut it off and replace it. If the fleece becomes wet, blow dry it thoroughly to prevent scald under the area.



*Muzzles can rub, so inspect your horse's head daily.*

## Introducing A Muzzle

Most horses don't mind a muzzle, but you can't just toss it on and forget it. Adjust the muzzle properly, as above, then bait the muzzle by putting an alfalfa cube or treat in the muzzle itself. Use the treat every time you put on the muzzle, and your horse will soon enthusiastically jam his nose into the muzzle.

Teach the horse to graze through the open hole by starting on short, yummy grass. Most horses will dive their heads down, snuffle around a bit, and start eating. If you've got one that seems flummoxed by the idea, pull some grass and stuff it through the hole in the bottom of the muzzle until he grabs it. Continue this, but lower each time, until your hand is actually on the ground.