

TALKING TACK

If you are new to polo, then the kit that players and ponies wear can be pretty baffling. To those who are used to other equine disciplines, the amount and type of tack that is used can seem unfamiliar and alien. As you will have witnessed, polo is a fast and potentially dangerous contact sport – often referred to as “rugby on horseback” – so the kit is strong, durable and is there to protect both the horse and rider. Unlike racing, weight is not so much of a consideration and the overall weight of polo kit can be remarkably heavy, but on the plus side it is also very strong.

LONG SLEEVED SHIRTS

Usual polo shirts have short sleeves, but to increase player warmth all of the La Martina team shirts for snow polo have long sleeves.

WHIP This is held in the player’s left hand along with their reins, the whip cannot be longer than 48 inches and isn’t allowed to be broken.

BREECHES Players must wear white breeches or jeans when playing matches.

SADDLE A saddle is put on the horse’s back. In polo the saddle doesn’t have knee rolls and the pommel is lower to allow the rider to position themselves forward on the horse.

KNEEPADS Players have to wear these during matches to protect their knees from being damaged during ride-offs. Recently some players are opting to wear elbow pads as well.


TAILS The ponies’ tails are plaited and tied up with tape, this is to prevent them from getting caught around the sticks – it is compulsory for a polo pony to have their tail tied up.

BOOTS Polo players’ boots are brown or black, made of leather and must be worn during matches.

STIRRUPS These are similar to those used in other equine disciplines, although polo stirrups tend to be heavier and wider to allow for a more stable hitting platform, as the players stand up in their stirrups to take shots.

SHOES To avoid the snow balling up on the ponies’ shoes they are fitted with snow shoes which have a special rubber tubing to funnel the snow out of the back of the shoe.

STUDS Two studs are fitted to both front and rear shoes to add traction. This is different to outdoor polo, where a single stud is fixed to the outer side of the rear shoes.



HELMET All players must wear a safety helmet, players can choose the colour of their helmet, and some customize with initials and pictures too.

GLOVES

A necessity for the chilling temperatures of playing snow polo, the gloves not only keep players' hands warm but can also help make gripping the stick and reins easier. Some gloves have inbuilt carbon fibre for added protection.

MANES Polo ponies' manes are 'hogged' – this is when they are shaved using clippers to a low stubble. This is done to stop the manes getting in the way of sticks, reins and other objects.

REINS Polo bridles have 4 reins for extra control and traction to the bit. Often 'draw' or 'running' reins which are connected at one end to the girth are used for extra stopping power.

STICK The cane is usually made out of bamboo and the head which is used to hit the ball is usually wooden. The length of the stick varies depending on pony height and player preference.

BRIDLE This is worn around the head of the horse and is usually made out of leather. They cannot have any sharp components and must not obstruct the pony's vision. Polo bridles tend to be made of heavier leather than other equine disciplines.

BIT The most common polo bit is a 'gag' as illustrated. Pelhams are also used. 'Softer' bits are not considered suitable for polo matches.

GIRTH/SURCINGLE

A girth is a piece of equipment used to keep the saddle in place on a horse whilst a surcingle is put around the saddle to help stabilise it and as a back up in case the girth breaks.

MARTINGALES Standing martingales are used to stop the ponies throwing their heads back and potentially hitting the players as they lean forward to take a shot.

TENDON BOOTS These are worn on the front two legs of the pony and are made out of strong hardened plastic. They are designed to protect the pony's tendons from damage, as these are vulnerable parts of their legs.

BANDAGES It is compulsory for ponies to wear bandages on all four legs during matches, this is to help protect them from injury if they are accidentally hit with balls or sticks.