

EQUIPMENT EXPLAINED

Polo is a unique sport and some of you here today may be experiencing it for the first time. At first glance, the array of equipment for both the horses and the players can seem a little complicated, but every piece plays its part and is vital to the success of the player-pony combination.

MANES

All polo ponies' manes are 'hogged' which means they are shaved very short using clippers. This is to stop player equipment such as sticks, reins and hands getting tangled in their manes. Young ponies that are still in training can be recognised by their longer, un-hogged manes.

EYEWEAR

Protective eyewear such as goggles or glasses are now a regular part of every player's equipment, they offer vital protection from errant sticks and balls as well. Plus, many models offer interchangeable lenses, so players can adapt their eyewear dependent on their conditions, which is crucial in locations such as St. Moritz where it can be sunny in the morning and whiteout by the afternoon.

BIT

The bit is used to control the pony, a large ring gag or Pelham is most commonly used in polo, but there are a variety of bits available depending on the pony's temperament and preferences.

BRIDLE

The bridle is usually made of leather, but they do vary in colour and style, with many players customising the browbands to include logos, initials or colours. The bridle must not have any sharp edges, obstruct the pony's vision or have any loose ends.

MARTINGALE

Standing martingales reduce the pony's ability to throw its head backwards, the key is not having it too tight or too loose. In polo as the players are often leaning over the ponies' heads, if the ponies were able to throw their heads back the whole way, this would result in injuries such as broken noses for the players.

REINS

There are two reins on a polo bridle which is unusual in equine sports, often one set of reins will be connected to the girth (as pictured), known as draw or running reins, and are used for extra stopping power. Traditionally reins are made from leather, although some players prefer rubber composites.



BALL

Grass polo is played with a small, white, composite ball, but arena and snow polo are played with larger, orange balls; this increases the visibility – it would be very hard to hit a small, white ball on snow! Snow polo balls are unique in their composition and are rigid, smooth and air filled.



GLOVES

Gloves are worn by nearly all players across the globe as they offer additional grip and protection. Many gloves now have inbuilt carbon fibre protection as a standard. In St. Moritz some players wear an under glove as well as their usual glove in order to maximise warmth.

BREASTPLATE

Breastplates, also made of leather, are used by most players in polo, as they stop the saddle from slipping backwards, which in such a dynamic and high acceleration sport such as polo, is very useful.

GIRTH/SURCINGLE

The girth is made from leather or cloth composite material and attaches to the saddle with buckles. A surcingle or over girth is used for added stability and also as a backup in case the girth breaks, which is rare but not unheard of.

OVER REACH BOOTS

Over reach or bell boots are a protective boot worn by polo ponies which encircle the ankle and protect the back of the heel from both their own hooves and also the hooves of other ponies.

HELMET

It is mandatory for all players (and umpires) to wear a helmet whilst playing polo, the specific rules on the standards for helmets varies between countries, but all usually have a fixed peak and three-point harness. Players often customise their helmet colours and add logos, initials and designs. Casablanca's helmet online customisation tool offers an array of possibilities.

SHIRTS

Traditionally polo shirts are short sleeved, as the sport originated in India where it was much hotter, but for added warmth in St. Moritz, the players' shirts are long-sleeved. The shirt colours differ for each team and umpires can be recognised by their white and black striped shirts. All of the team shirts from this year's tournament are available for sale in the Shopping Village, so you can support your favourite team!

WHITES

During matches players and umpires are required to wear white polo jeans. It is believed this heralds back to the historic origin of polo in India, where light coloured clothing was worn to deflect the heat. They are usually more in the style of jeans rather than tight jodhpurs favoured by other equine disciplines.

KNEEPADS

Players' knees are very exposed during ride-offs and naturally offer little cushioning, therefore in order to protect their knees, players wear kneepads which are padded leather, with Velcro straps, sometimes additional silicone or padding is added at key points in order to increase shock absorption.

SADDLE

This is the largest and heaviest piece of equipment on the polo pony. As polo has modernised and become more competitive, players are now favouring lightweight versions, which are also often specially fitted for each horse's body type in order to increase performance and comfort.

BOOTS

Players' boots are knee height, made of leather in dark brown or black. They usually have a long zip at the front to make them easy to put on and some more modern styles also have reinforced protection on the outer sides.

TAILS

All of the polo ponies' tails (except the umpires' ponies which are left undone) must be plaited and tied up, most often with tape. This is to stop the players' sticks getting caught in the tails during the matches.

CLIPPING

In the colder months, polo ponies develop a thicker, winter coat. Some are clipped, either fully or partially, to help them regulate their temperature when playing. Whilst not playing, clipped ponies need rugs in order to keep them warm.

STIRRUP

Polo stirrups are wider than other equine disciplines, this allows players to use the stirrups to stand up and reach out for the ball. It is not uncommon in snow polo to see players using additional materials, such as adhesive wraps to increase their grip. The stirrups are connected to the girth by a strip of leather, it is important this is properly fixed as the players often put all their bodyweight, and trust, in one stirrup when leaning out for a shot.

SADDLECLOTH

Also sometimes referred to as a numnah, they protect the pony's back from saddle rubbing. Traditionally in polo they are made from cotton and are either square or follow the shape of the saddle, but some modern alternatives are barely visible and are made from gel for maximum equine comfort and breathability.

SHOES

Polo ponies wear shoes, but for snow polo special shoes are required which funnel the snow from the ball of the pony's foot and stop the snow from impacting in the shoe.

BANDAGES

Bandages are wrapped, not too tightly, around each of the pony's legs to protect their tendons. They are often used in tandem with tendon boots on the front legs as well for extra protection as the tendons are a sensitive yet crucial part of the pony.

STUDS

Studs provide extra grip and are screwed into the pony's shoes. Traditionally a single stud is fixed to the outside edge of the rear shoe, but in snow polo it is common for studs to be used on the front and rear shoes for added traction.