W Rein Man

By Dennis Moreland

WHEN YOU'RE riding, many of your signals to your horse go through the bridle reins. You want that to be a clear channel of communication. If the bridle reins are so lightweight they feel like a dish rag, your horse may have trouble knowing what you want. You want those reins to have some body, some "feel" to them. You want a dense piece of leather with tight fibers.

Aside from the quality of the leather, you've got a lot of other choices when it comes to reins on a western bridle.

1. Split reins come in a variety of widths, usually 1/2 inch, 5/8 inch, 3/4 inch and 1 inch, and it boils down to personal preference. The 1/2-inch reins might be perfect for someone with small hands, while someone with larger hands might want the 3/4-inch reins. The 5/8-inch reins are probably the most popular ones, since they're middle of the road. For most people, 1-inch reins are too much to hold in one hand. They might be just right if you're riding with a snaffle bit, using two hands.

2. Roping reins are one continuous piece of tack, and they're typically used by ropers or people racing in speed events. They're also good for kids who don't need to worry about dropping a rein. Roping reins are usually either 1/2 or 5/8 of an inch wide, and they frequently have snaps on the ends that allow you to hook and unhook them to the bit easily. Some may have buckles that let you adjust the length.

3. A lot of times, when you get a brand-new pair of reins, they'll be stiffer than you want to ride with. But that's easy to fix. Spray them down with liquid saddle soap, and then wrap them around a round piece of pipe (avoid angle iron with sharp corners). Pull the reins back and forth around the pipe, and that will help break the reins in and get them to where they're comfortable in your hands. Q

AQHA member Dennis Moreland has been making quality working tack since 1976. Visit www.dmtack.com to learn more about his Dennis Moreland Second Edition line.

Reins are your connection to the horse, so choose them wisely.

HOLLY CLANAHAN