

“The Mountain Canary Company’s slant on stirrups and Tapaderos!”

There is a very old saying in the country that “there are no free lunches!” Behind the dusty shrouds of man’s history in the saddle, mounted on horses or mules, is the moment when Mr. or Miss practical had a brain storm and invented the stirrup. One would think it would be heralded as the greatest invention of its century by all, but instead I’m sure it was truly defined by populations invaded by stirrup using cavalry, as the second weapon of mass destruction. The first was the shoe. When the Etruscans (pre-Roman civilization) issued shoes to their infantry, their neighbors considered it a tool of mass destruction. Oh! Heavens Ed, where are you leading us now. When a normally benign item like a human shoe or a stirrup becomes dangerous, one can recognize that there may be hidden hazards in almost anything. I was beginning to write this article on Tapaderos (Taps) when in the process I realized that this should be a work on the whole picture. How to safely use the most dangerous part of our saddle, the stirrup!

There are many stirrup designs to make their use safer. All of which are normally only seen on the English style of saddles and all shaped to completely release the riders foot in the event of a fall from their mount. This to me, indicates the true danger is riding with a stirrup is the hanging up of one’s foot during a fall from said mount. With a riders foot trapped firmly in this stirrup, death or serious injury is just around the corner.

Before I go any further, I need to imprint into your mind what to do if you ever fall from your mule/horse and experience a hung up foot. I pray this never happens. As soon, during such of an event, as possible, you must have the presence of thought to force you body to roll to the outside away from the horses feet. You must continue to do this; it is the only way to twist your foot out of the stirrup. How to prepare yourself before hand for this type of adventure when using a western type stirrup? First consider, that an easily slipped off boot is by and far the best kind of foot wear. Secondly, never stuff you foot into the stirrup past the ball of your foot. Thirdly, consider using a properly designed set of Taps on your stirrups. Fourth and the most important thing is to prepare your mind to react in the event of such a fall, by programming it to respond to roll away from your mount’s feet. This is accomplished by purposefully mental noting every time you mount, as your foot goes into a stirrup, “how am I going to roll my foot out in the event of an accidental

fall?” In the pain and confusion of the moment during such a wreck, this pre-thought out plan may very well save your life.

Sue rode Gus off of the place just after he came to our home. They came across a log over the trail which Gus crossed it just fine. But on the way back as he went to cross it again, instead of gingerly stepping over it, he reared up, paused for a wee second and then jumped over it. Because of this move, he increased their height, causing Sue to hang up on an attached branch that pulled her out of the saddle. You have got it; her boot hung up in the stirrup and left with Gus, as she hit the ground. She was wearing a loose fitting Muck Boot and it immediately slipped right off. This fuss scared the stuffins out of Gus and he headed for home, leaving Sue, luckily, not to badly the worse for wear, with just a bruised behind and getting a wet sock as she when to retrieve her wayward boot.

Sue, in this case, was very lucky. Other than trapping your foot in a fall, an open stirrup can get the rider, in rough brushy country trails, into one heck of an adventure. What if a stick or stub off of a low limb were to find its way into the front of your stirrup as you traveled along, “Katy bar the door!” I was watching the gang in the field the other day, when one of them picked up a branch in her tail. She hit the cloud line, until she could see what it was that had attacked her from behind.

Number three on our list above, was to install a properly designed set of Taps. Taps have been with us in this country since the first Spanish Hacendados moved into the brush country of Mexico. They are designed to protect the rider’s foot from brush and weather. A great description of Tapaderos and western stirrups can be found in “The Cowboy at Work” by Fay E.Ward, starting on page #220. They have been used on McClelland military saddles, to offer a safer stirrup as a hood, to keep the troopers foot from going too far into the stirrup.



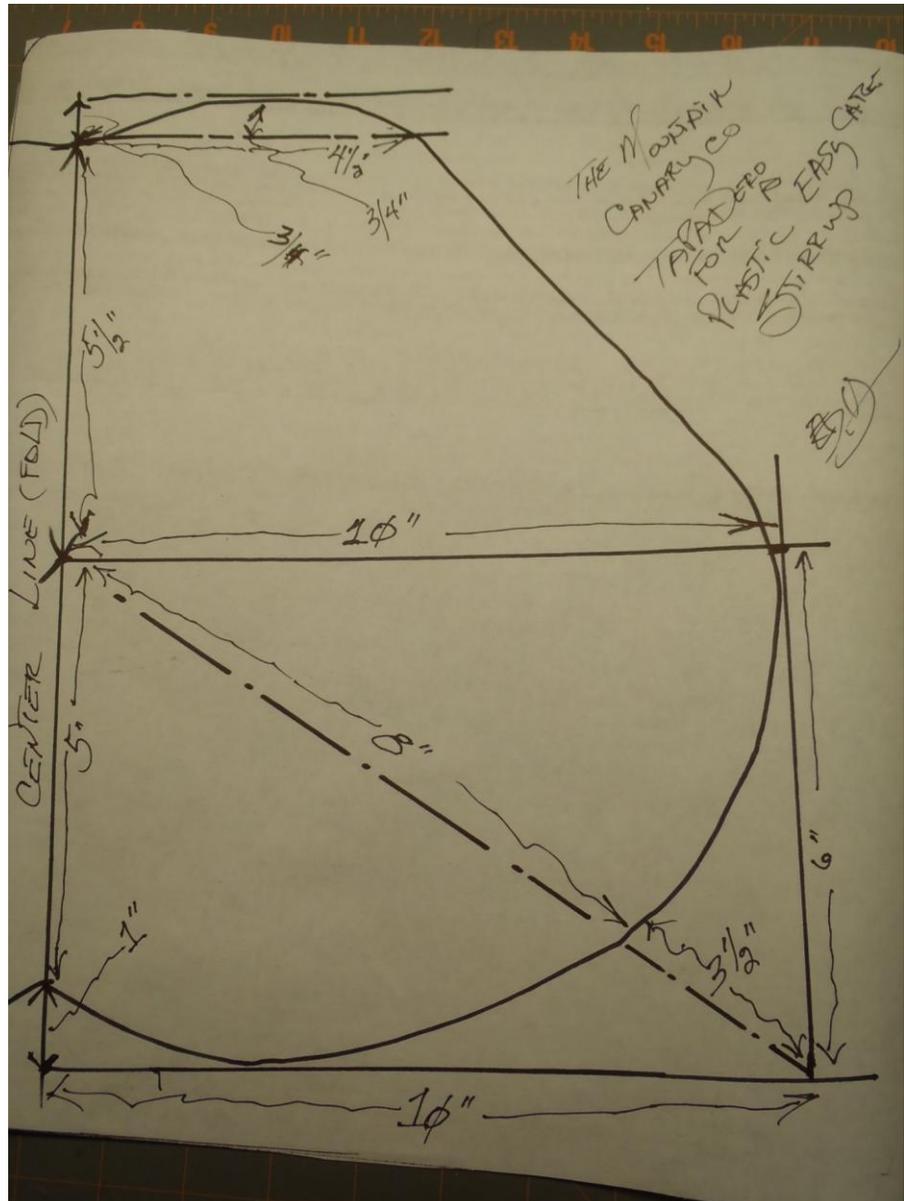
The first photo shows and E-Z Ride (nylon) stirrup.

I have used several types and have garnered my own opinion on which ones work best for my type of mountain riding. In our second book “The Mountain Canary Companies Trail Skills and More,” we wrote

a section on riding a safer stirrup starting on page #5. This article is as with everything Sue and I do, one more step in the learning process. No one knows what we are going to learn next, but as always, we are here to share it with you. I still concur that our modification of an over shoe stirrup is a grand way to go, but we are adding a new tool to our arsenal for a safer stirrup. This is the “E-Z Ride Stirrup” manufactured by easycareinc.com. (Note: In Sue’s mishap, she was using a similar stirrup, which would have helped release her foot, had it not been for the aggressive tread on her boot. Too aggressive a boot tread can change this plan in an unwanted direction!)

This is a very fascinating stirrup and very functional to boot. If you examine it closely you will see that it is, in design, a combination of two stirrups in one. Its leading edge is only as wide as a standard rawhide wrapped western stirrup, while its trail edge (foot bed) is as wide and deep as an overshoe stirrup. This gives it some distinct advantages; it can cut the weight of the stirrup considerably from that of an over shoe stirrup and secondly with the cut away on the sides, plus greater height and width, it may release ones foot faster in the event of a fall, better than another shape of stirrup. To increase the safety margin of this stirrup, I have added a set of Tap’s.

This pattern is a 1/2 sided drawing, it is not drawn to any scale. Cut out a sample pattern on



scrap material to make sure it will fit as you desire onto your stirrup, before cutting the final one from more expensive material.

Our Tap's are cut out of 1/8th inch Poly-Vinyl-Chloride (PVC) sheeting from Weaver Leather Company. It is easy to cut with a sharp box knife and is great material for Tap's. Because of the manufacturing set of the material (the direction it was installed onto its roll) remember to attach it against this roll set on the stirrup. Simply figure out the location and evenly attach it to your nylon stirrup with (1/2" #6 or #8) round headed stainless (SS) screws through (SS) fender washers with appropriate sized center holes for your chosen screw size.



This next photo shows a side view of a completed Tap installed onto a nylon E-Z Rider Stirrup. (Note: It is installed in such of a way that it does not close the side of the stirrup up, thus allowing plenty of space at the side, to offer more freedom for the release of a trapped foot.) The following photo will show the front view.



A properly designed and properly installed set of Taps should be customized to the rider's boots. To accomplish this, several things need to be considered when positioning a tap onto a stirrup. The gage for an installation should be the boot or boots to be used in this assembly. This is demonstrated in the last photo.



This last photo shows a boot being used as a gage when installing a set of Taps onto an E-Z Rider stirrup.

First by eye, position the cut out material temporarily into place with the top screw assembly, then put your boot onto the foot pad of the stirrup. The boot

needs to reflect the proper position of your foot to bear your weight into the stirrup at the ball of your foot. (Note: On the photo, the ball of my foot would be in line with the stirrup leather. Thus, my weight will be balanced down from the saddle by the stirrup leather to the stirrup.) Once you have established the boot position, rotate the material to reflect an angle that would allow your foot to stay in this position and apply the second screw down. At this point, test your boot several times at this setting to make sure it will fall out smoothly, paying close attention that you have installed the Tap long enough in the front, not to catch on the front edge or welt of the sole of this boot. Also, not to tight at the top to shorten or overly lengthen the Taps front angle, thus grabbing the boot toe which will slow it up or bind it, as it slips out. (Note: It wishes to leave the stirrup as freely as possible when the boot is dropped with the heel down!) Once you have decided that it is properly positioned, install the last screw. If on riding it you do not like this location, it is very easy to readjust it.

(Special Note: In fear of sounding like an old wife's tale. I would like to warn riders against using thin metal or sheet metal wrapped stirrups. A thin metal stirrup or a wooden stirrup that is wrapped with a sheet-metal reinforcing, may add additional danger. Falls of mules or horses with riders under them do happen. What if your foot is still in the stirrup and under the critter as it hits the ground? The metal on one of these stirrups can bend or crush around your foot! This will hold the foot

next to the animal and magnify the bad news from such a situation. This is why we only use a stirrup such as nylon or wood that will break in this kind of event.) “Just give it some thought!”

The riding of a horse or mule has been documented as the most dangerous recreational activity worldwide. I believe the most dangerous physical component of this is your stirrup. Ride safe; plan ahead and deal with it!

Ed Haefliger

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“The Mountain Canary Company Trail Skills and More”

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