

SLING

[selection, installation, use]

The sling is one of those pieces of equipment that most of us don't put much thought into. I never put much thought into slings until I had the opportunity to design my own. Given the chance to take a long look at a sling and determine ways I thought it could be improved, I discovered there were, indeed, some worthwhile changes to be made.

The sling I'm using now is what I call a "semi-cuff" design. It is tapered. The portion of the sling that goes around the arm is two inches wide, or about 3/8-inch wider than others. That little extra width makes the sling more comfortable. I wanted a sling that's a little narrower than a cuff and a little wider than a straight cut, and that's how this solution came about. The sling width tapers down to increase comfort and stability against the forearm and hand and direct the tension where it does the most good for the hold. It stops the "cutting in" feeling on the hand and forearm other slings caused. Its 1.6-inch width means it will go through any sling swivel, including the Anschütz® ball-end sling swivel that I favor.

I have never liked anything but all leather in a sling. The rubber-backed arm loops make the sling stiffer, less comfortable, and usually don't function as intended. As a matter of fact, those with the longitudinally ribbed rubber strips actually can cause slippage (the ribs run the wrong direction). I have always had my best luck with natural (untreated) leather. I am also not a fan of synthetics. A good leather sling is like a good pair of leather boots: after use it will conform somewhat to fit the individual shooter. Leather

gets soft in the right ways and right areas whereas synthetics remain as they are as new. I find that they tend to cut in on the edges, which is very uncomfortable, and also are not as slip-resistant as leather. I have quit using the sling retainer on my shooting coat ever since I built this new sling. The natural leather and taper in the new sling design help to mold the cuff portion flat against the arm (some slings work against themselves in this regard). I also made the sling 56 inches long and ran adjustment holes down its full length so it would fit most everyone.

Bear in mind that after shooting a new leather sling for a while it will change. After a month or two I would automatically try all my settings on the sling one notch tighter. Keep checking it. If what someone worked with last year doesn't feel good this year it could be because his sling stretched. I have found that, after this initial stretching, a good quality leather sling will change very little over the course of its life.

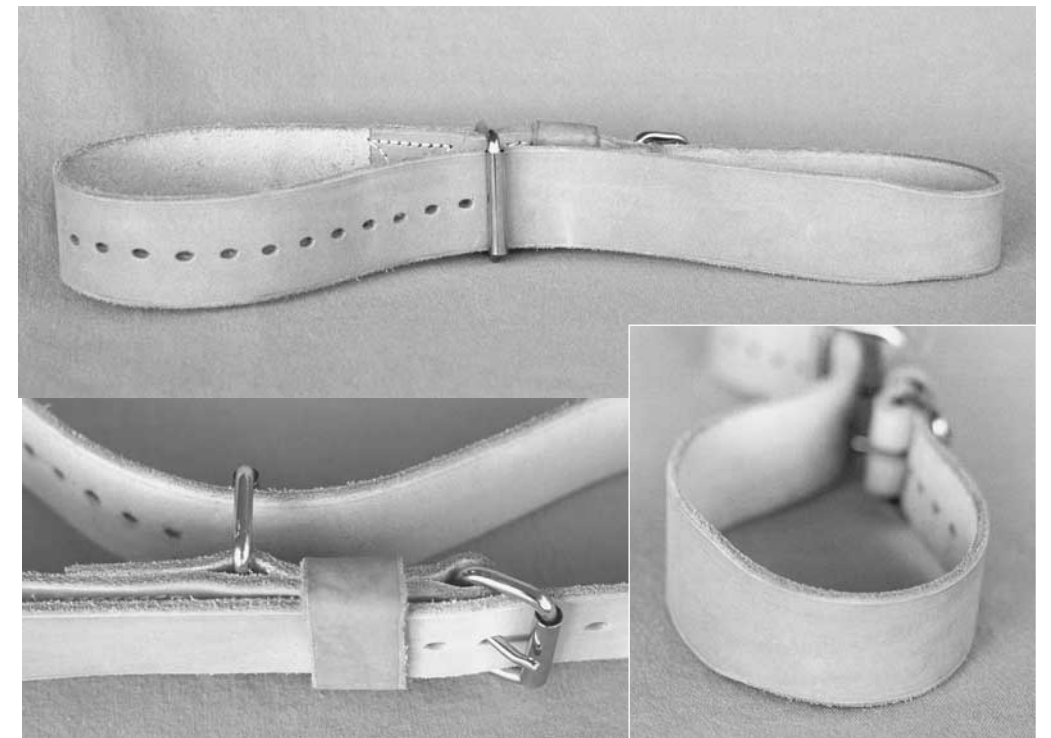
I don't recommend traditional conditioning treatments for leather slings as I have found they can lead to excessive and continual stretching. If someone wants to treat his sling I would recommend spraying a light oil like WD-40™ rather than applying a neats-foot-oil type product. Only the "outside" of the strap needs protection and that is essentially what a spray-on oil will provide.

INSTALLATION AND FITTING

I use an Anschütz® sling swivel, and have for years. This is a simple design that works better than anything else I've found. It

MY SLING

This is the sling that I designed and I'm very pleased with it. It has the extra comfort and pulse reduction of a wide cuff sling but fits and stays put like a narrower sling. I achieved this through cutting a taper into the leather strap to give it an extra 3/8 inch or so of width right at the back of the arm. It's about an inch narrower than the true cuff slings. My one-piece tapered sling will stay in place when mounted on the arm and stay there through many mounts and dismounts of shouldering the rifle (most sling cuffs have a tendency to work lower on the arm). A band that's too wide also limits the shooter in its placement on the arm, and it's not always in the right position (relative to the rifle). A narrow (swivel-width or less) strap cuts in and is less comfortable. This can also increase the effect of pulse.



is 1.7 inches wide and stays on the sling. It attaches to the rifle by a ball end that secures into a non-breakable single notch. It can't come loose when the shooter is in position, and it's then very easy to disengage after the string.

A lot of people wonder how tight a sling should be (in its pulling or holding effect).

The answer is tight enough to stabilize the rifle *and* the shooter. A sling that's too loose makes it easier to shift the shooting position around too much during the string, especially from shot to shot. I would say that most shooters probably have their slings looser than they should rather than tighter, but a yardstick is that the rifle buttpad should have