

I am your single tail & sjambok...

This is who I am...

Perhaps you've seen -- or heard -- the sinuous arc of a single tail whip and the loud crack it makes. Some players relish the challenge of mastering the single tail -- and it makes for dramatic scenes. Choosing a single tail can be difficult, especially because they represent a significant investment.

There are no rigid definitions for what comprises a single tail whip. Clearly, it is distinguishable from a flogger in that it has only one "tail" or fall. But beyond that, it can be hard to clearly define what you mean by "single tail."

In most instances in the BDSM community, a single tail whip is a tightly braided leather whip that can be cracked. Think the whip that Indy uses in the Indiana Jones movies -- albeit a bit smaller. It is also called a signal whip. Lengths vary, with the most popular sizes being in the 3 to 4 foot range.

You can buy smaller whips, but they become harder to crack as you can't get the momentum that larger whips afford. Longer whips are usually termed bullwhips, which can range in length from 8 to 12 feet. Bullwhips are less popular in BDSM play, as they are difficult to use in indoor play spaces or confined spaces

The stock, snake (signal) and bull whip

The typical single tail has a number of parts to it. It is usually constructed of kangaroo or cowhide, braided tightly to form a continuous taper. Signal whips have no distinct handle, and can be coiled up like a snake. Bullwhips usually have a rigid handle, as do sjambok and snake whips.

At the end of the whip, you will usually find a small bit of leather, fabric or string. This is called the cracker or popper because it is partly responsible for the crack or pop that a whip makes when properly thrown. This loud crack results from the tip breaking the speed of sound -- in effect creating a mini sonic boom. The whip's long, tapered design allows the energy that is imparted to the wider handle to gather quite a bit of momentum and force by the time it reaches the end of the whip, which is usually just a single strand of leather or fabric. The tip of the whip can move at over 1000 kilometres an hour!

Most whips in use in BDSM have a long thong or fabric cord between the body of the whip and cracker -- this is called a fall. Technically, a signal whip is one in which the cracker is braided directly into the whip body, without a fall; a similar whip that has a fall is actually called a snake whip.

The interior of a whip is called its belly, and can be made out of leather, nylon, or other materials as well as lead shot to add weight. Although you can't see it, the belly is the most important part of the whip. If you're investing a lot of money in a whip, make sure you know what is inside it. Some whips simply have strips of leather inside them; higher-quality ones will have a design that is called a double-plaited belly,

which means they have a plaited (braided) leather core, covered by a thin leather overlay, covered by yet another plaited layer, another overlay, and the final plaited covering. This makes for an exceptionally smooth taper, higher density to the whip, and an increase in the whip's ability to resist wear and tear. However, if you are just starting out, it's not an absolute must to purchase a whip with a double-plaited belly.



The outside of a whip -- the part you see -- is made up of thin strips of leather braided in an intricate pattern. The number of strands in the braid ("plait") can vary. Most whips use a four-seam plait, which means the number of strands will be a multiple of four -- 4, 8, 12, 16, etc. Higher-quality whips usually have more strands to plait. The plait can be multi-coloured, which is a nice way to customise your whip if you are having it made.

Here are some things to look for in whip construction:

- A high plait number. Anything below 8 is usually inferior.
- A plaited belly or interior.
- A tight weave on the braided exterior -- the whip should feel relatively smooth as you run your hand down it, with the leather strips of the braid laying flat and flush with each other.
- Good weight and balance -- cheap whips are usually too light to throw properly.
- Even distribution of weight and diameter from the handle end down through the fall. The fall should not be wider than the end of the braid.
- Whip connoisseurs tend to agree -- the most important characteristic of a whip is how much "life" it has. A "livelier" whip is more responsive to your movements; it is more supple and its even distribution of density and weight makes it more accurate and easier to crack. All aspects of a whip's construction contribute to its degree of liveliness.

The sjambok (litupa)

This is the official heavy leather whip of South Africa, sometimes seen as synonymous with apartheid but actually much older and still used outside the official judiciary.

It is traditionally made from an adult hippopotamus (or rhinoceros) hide, but is also commonly made out of plastic.

A strip of the animal's hide is cut and carved into a strip 0.9 to 1.5 m long, tapering from about 25 mm thick at the handle to about 9.5 mm at the tip. This strip is then rolled (possibly between heavy metal plates) until reaching a near circular form. The resulting whip is both flexible and durable. A plastic version was made for the South African Police Service, and used for riot control.

In the past, the sjambok had a variety of uses, with the most obvious being cattle driving. While it may have been synonymous with discipline of people, it was heavily used by the Voortrekkers driving their oxen while migrating from the Cape of Good Hope. Even today, the sjambok is used by herdsman to drive cattle.

The horse whip (dressage whip)

It is a long slender stick made up of a long shaft of fibreglass, which is then covered in either leather or fabric, but in most cases a woven nylon material. It is usually slender, about 1.9cm tapering to the end, with the length being about 1m. This typical whip becomes quite slender as it tapers to the lash at the end, either wound cord or a leather tongue.

This is how you use me...

This can be one of the most fun toys used in the BDSM lifestyle. It takes practice to use it safely, but the time spent learning to use it properly is well worth the effort.

Purchasing a good single tail is worth the high front end cost, because the quality is very important.

The most important thing to remember when using any single tail implement is to be accurate. Aim for that magic area - that part in the rear of the person between the upper thighs and below the small of the back. Some single tails can also be used very lightly on the back, back and front of the thighs and across the front torso of a submissive. The operative word here is - lightly!

But for the sake of this information sheet, we will concentrate on the buttocks.

The exact area should be clearly delineated in the mind of the spanker before starting treatment. It is wrong to hit either above, or below the buttock area. Those who hit on the thighs are not working within the limit set for 'maximum sensation with minimum damage' while those who hit high can easily damage the coccyx which is the 'tail' of the spine. Damage to this is usually irreversible.



The best positions for using a single tail are standing positions, where the submissive is leaning against a piece of furniture (i.e. St Andrew's cross, a wall with the arms acting as supports) or lying down on a bed or table. If standing, the legs should ideally be spread wide; either using a 'leg

spreader' with an approximate 40cm span to keep legs spread wide. If lying down is the chosen position, lay a cushion under the submissive's pelvis to raise the buttocks area. You can also place cushions on either side of the body to absorb any strikes that do happen to wrap the body.

By using the whip, the punishment is felt across BOTH buttocks at the same time as the single tail sinks into the flesh of the buttocks. For the spanker it presents a new problem, he/ she must be careful that he/ she does not wrap the whip around the submissive, hitting the sides of the body.



This is an ever present worry as it can cause damage to the sides of the buttocks, often grazing the skin. Remember that the spanker is now using an implement which is flexible thus he/ she needs to stand farther away from the spankee. The end of the whip should be halfway across the further buttock. This is because when striking there is a natural lean in the spanker and the speed of the end which will carry the whip across to the far side of the further buttock.

The objective is to whip within the sweet area. The bottom needs to be left well reddened across the centre of the buttocks without the sides being affected by wrapping. You will need to practice distance, to determine how far away to stand away from the submissive to alleviate the problem of wrapping. Start with very soft strikes, to see where the strikes land. If you are wrapping, move further away, until just the tip of the whip is striking the skin.

You may want to start your whipping session with a hand spanking. The hand can be a potent weapon and any spanking session should begin with a long session of it on the bottom of the spankee. Ideally it should start with a number of spans over the clothes but soon the clothes need to be removed to access the bare bottom.

Start with soft to medium strikes, and continue the caressing of the bottom to keep the nerves active between sets of blows. Increase the force and frequency of the whip strikes watching the colour of the skin as welts start to appear.

Alternate between very light strikes to moderately heavier administrations and vary the speed from slow to fast. You want to keep the submissive guessing as to when the next strike will occur.

Continue until the spankee shows excessive discomfort, but once he/ she becomes restless, stop and both of you have a rest.

Remember you are trying to build up the acceptance level and peaking at this point means failure.

Throughout the administration of the whipping, the submissive will feel a sharp stinging pain a couple of seconds after the actual strike has landed. Give them a few seconds (about 10 seconds) to recover before you deliver the next blow.

A good whipping can wake up your partner's nerve endings in BDSM play. Skin that has been whipped or flogged has more blood circulating to it.

This causes greater sensitivity when you stroke, lick, suck, kiss or caress that part of the body.

Tips & Warnings

- Use a flogger or whip with more than one tail when you first engage in whipping. Single-tail whips are the kind that can cause welts and even cuts or bruises when used. Floggers are mostly used to heighten sensation rather than to inflict pain.
- Use the whip on yourself first to test its strength. Then you will know how it feels and the level of pain you are inflicting on your partner.
- Agree on the limits of your bondage and BDSM play before you add whips to your toy bag.
- The spankee experiences two sensations with every stroke (nerves being compressed and then expanding). Thus, the strokes shouldn't go too fast.
- Be sure the room isn't too cold.
- The spankee should relax the muscles in the buttocks to avoid later lactic acid build-up causing a deep ache.
- Avoid striking the tailbone and the back of the knee.
- Front and back of thighs, back and front torso can be whipped with a single tail whip, but never with a sjambok.
- The fold between the buttocks and thighs is termed the "sulcus" (sweet spot) and can be quite painful when struck.
- A circular "fluffing" motion can be effective for rapid "warm-up" strokes.

This is how you clean me...

Occasionally during a whipping a small amount of blood may appear on the skin as a result of a blemish being broken open, so therefore any implement, whether it be wood, plastic or leather should be disinfected after use.

A whip or sjambok cannot be dipped into water, as this damages the fabric, leather or raw hide. The best way to clean your implements is to wipe it down with a damp cloth that has been soaked in Savlon, Dettol or surgical spirits, to completely disinfect them. You can also clean the implement with a cloth moistened with a fresh solution of bleach mixed 1 part to 10 parts water.

Then hang your implement to air dry, out of direct sunlight to avoid the leather cracking.

Your whip and sjambok should be treated with wax polish or oil-based leather dressing every six months or so to prevent cracking.

You will first need to rub the entire whip down with saddle soap (bought at most tack or livery shops). Shave the soap off a bar into a bowl and add just enough water to make a pasty/ foamy solution. Using your fingers, work the paste into the leather uniformly from the handle right down to the end of the fall. Then let the whip dry for 1 – 2 days, preferably being hung from the handle, so that it doesn't dry with any kinks.

After it dries, rub it down thoroughly with a clean dry cloth to remove any excess soap, until it is as shiny as a new car. You may want to also use a leather wax polish like Dubin (bought at most shoe repair stores) for extra leather care.

Store your whip in a dry dark place, rolled into a loose coil along its natural bend. Don't force it to coil any tighter than it wants to.

Have fun! Play safe!



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