

**Inge van der Haven, with her horse TRIBUTE, gained her first promotion scores when competing bitless in a recent Dutch Federation test. Here is her report:**

"Trippy (my nickname for Tribute) has been bitless for some time because he has had a nasty inflammation in his jaw. He underwent surgery but the site failed to heal and was far too painful, so I started riding him bitless.

I'm training him for dressage and, in principle, my way of riding has not changed. My instructor has always emphasized the need to ride with seat and legs. This basic approach has been a great help when transitioning to bitless. I think riding without a bit is more difficult, because your aids with a bit are 'sharper.' But I can get the same results when bitless by doing a lot of changes in tempo, making transitions, giving small resistance aids and sitting correctly.

On June 13th I rode my first official bitless dressage competition in an advanced second class test (L2). The Dutch classes in dressage start from B, being the first section (the so called 'starters'), up to the L1 (second section), L2 (advanced second section), M1 (third section), with M2 (advanced third section), up to the fourth section (class Z, which is divided into several advanced sections).

During the first test, 'Trippy' was very relaxed and I could ride him smoothly. As the judge remarked orally, after the test, his reactions to my leg aids were perfect, his head and neck were positioned correctly and he made good contact with and acceptance of the bridle. I asked her whether she considered that 'Trippy' was leaning on his forehead and she assured me that he certainly was not! I scored 195 out of 300 (65%), which meant I was awarded 2 promotion points

The second test was not quite so smooth. The judge told me my horse was slowing down in the transitions from canter to trot. I should practice this more at home. Nevertheless, I scored 194 and gained one promotion point. I'm very happy that 'Trippy' has switched so easily to bitless riding, because we lost much time and competition experience in his training during the last two years. Now that bitless dressage is possible in the Netherlands, I can return to competing and start advancing up the grades once again!

At the end of May, 2010, I rode a bitless test during the championships at my Riding Club, scoring 193 out of 300 (64.3%). The video is available on YouTube at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbgixavuuiU>

*[Madeleine Calkoen's footnote: It is of special interest that the judge's oral opinion was so positive about Trippy's 'contact and acceptance' of the bridle. That is the English translation of the German word 'anlehnung' or the Dutch word 'aanleuning.' It was because of doubts about the ability of the crossunder bitless bridle to achieve aanleuning that bitless dressage in The Netherlands was made a separate section, with specially qualified judges and separate protocols. The word aanleuning was omitted as, according to the Skala der Ausbildung, Anlehnung is only possible with a bit. Yet the judge gave her oral opinion that the aanleuning in this test was so smoothly and nice].*