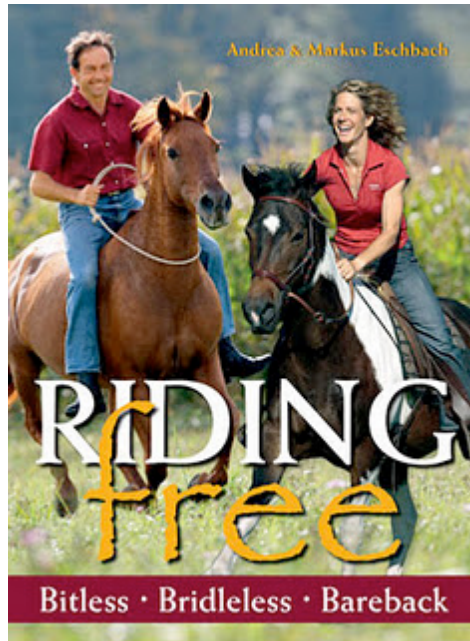


# The Sweet Feed

(blog)

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## *Riding Free*



I used to ride my sometimes high-headed gelding with a martingale and a gentle enough bit, but it did have cheekpieces. I rode bareback sometimes, but for the most part, I schooled him in full tack. These days, however, my life is different. Our family's 19-year-old Paint mare, Sugar, is not really in training. She just exists to please. My young daughter rides Sugar the most, and her preferred mode is with a bitless Dr. Cook bridle and no tack. Very low-key.

So I was happy to see that German horse trainers Andrea and Markus Eschbach, endorse my daughter's choices. They often ride without tack. They list some familiar reasons for their decisions--Dr. Cook's research on the damage bits can cause, the absolute joy and unity felt when riding bareback--and some newer ones, too. The Eschbachs respond to pretty much every question you've wondered if you've seen this type of riding before--like "Where is the emergency brake?" (Interval braking, well-trained horse, and the simple fact that bitted and saddled horses don't really have an emergency brake, either.)

The whole book has a very accessible, down-to-earth tone--there is even a page on how to contact the authors--and while you can tell it has been translated from the German, it reads smoothly and with all consciousness about English idioms. The Eschbachs eschew much of the salesmanship that some clinicians can't seem to avoid; they don't want you to buy their particular neck loop, they just want to tell you how and why to use one.

Although the Eschbachs include a caveat at the book's beginning about how you should wear a helmet even though they don't, it's a little unnerving to see the photos of them riding helmetless at full gallop. After reading their writing, however, you understand the premium they place on naturalness. (Still, wear a helmet.) Their main point is how much your riding affects your life. "We actually believe that 'Riding Free' not only applies to your horse," they write, "but also to you. Free yourself from the constraints, burdens, and stresses of your daily routine and concentrate only on the partner that is carrying you."

Sometimes, I have to admit, I have looked at my daughter and thought the whole scene, while adorable, was also a little haphazard. Shouldn't she have a cute saddle pad and set of anti-grazing reins and a grab strap on her polished English saddle, like the other kids?

Now, thanks to the Eschbachs, I know better.