

A discussion of the benefits of the Bitless Bridle over the bit method of communication, from two points of view: that of the horse and that of the rider.

The Bitless Bridle corporate logo encapsulates the four major benefits of the patented Bitless Bridle. Compared with all other bridles, the benefits are - for both horse and man - improved welfare, better performance, increased safety, and greater pleasure. In hindsight, the benefits are uncannily similar to those listed in the Declaration of Independence; life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They could be summarized as freedom from fear. The horse at liberty on the logo depicts the suspension phase of the trot, when all four feet are off the ground. It is based on Eadweard Muybridge's classic research of 1878 and symbolizes here the more natural movement that the bridle's freedom from pain provides.

WELFARE

HORSE: The Bitless Bridle (BB) transmits the hand aids painlessly, eliminating the fear and nervousness caused by the bit that precipitates so many accidents. Without a bit there is no impediment to breathing, so the horse tires less rapidly and accidents caused by fatigue are less likely. Because a horse strides in time with its breathing, locomotion is more rhythmic and graceful. It is also more efficient because the BB doesn't interfere with the energy-saving 'headbob.' As bits are a common cause of painful bone spurs on the bars of the mouth and headshaking (facial neuralgia), the BB avoids both of these serious complications. The BB is the only bridle that cannot hurt a horse. All bits and all other bitless designs (mechanical hackamores, bosals, sidepulls and rope halters) depend for their action on actual pain or the threat of pain. Snaffles in the wrong hands can be instruments of torture. Mechanical hackamores in the wrong hands can fracture a horse's nasal bone or lower jaw.

RIDER: The BB provides better steering than a bit or hackamore, and more reliable brakes than a bit or sidepull. Being painless it doesn't precipitate the hundred or more behavioral problems in the horse that are bit-induced. Freedom from fear favors calmness. A calm horse spooks less readily and recovers more rapidly. No longer distracted by pain, a horse is able to pay attention and learn. It becomes more obedient, compliant and manageable. Injuries to the rider arising from a horse rearing, bucking, bolting or having a panic attack are less likely.

PERFORMANCE

HORSE: The longer stride of the BB horse translates into greater speed. Obviously, this is of special relevance to the racehorse but other horses also walk and trot faster. The more energy-efficient stride translates into greater stamina, confidence and willingness to work. Absence of pain means that the

horse's neck is not tense. Consequently, the spine and legs are relaxed. Stiff and choppy gaits are avoided. Impulsion is improved. Elimination of bit-induced head shaking means that a horse can perform better in dressage, show jumping and many other disciplines. Removing the bit from a sensitive body cavity eliminates a major physiological confusion in the throat of the horse. A bit triggers the digestive mode, whereas what is needed is the respiratory mode. Problems such as a gaping mouth, protruding tongue, excessive salivation and repeated swallowing are eliminated when the foreign body is removed. The BB is wonderful for starting young horses.

RIDER: The key to success with a bitted bridle is 'good hands.' The term describes the minimal use of hands and, therefore, the minimal amount of pain for the horse. Less is more. The less a rider depends on hand aids, the more her performance and that of her horse improves. The ultimate of 'good hands' is no bit at all. By definition, therefore, the BB guarantees 'good hands' and focuses the rider's attention on communicating by seat and legs, balance and breathing. It makes for better riders. It also enables both experienced and novice riders to appear more capable, as they are not having to constantly correct a resistant horse. Instead they ride a compliant horse, and enjoy the harmony and partnership that defines good horsemanship.

SAFETY

HORSE: Bits hurt horses. They cause the six Fs of fear, flight, fight, freeze, facial neuralgia, and physiological confusion. In the wild, the first four responses favor survival but only the last four ('freeze') enhances the safety of the domesticated horse. Frightened horses are nervous, excitable, 'hot,' and unpredictable. They are accidents waiting to happen. Bit-induced episodes of rearing, bolting, asphyxiation and fatigue result in horses incurring fractured skulls, broken backs, breakdowns, pulmonary bleeding, fractured jaws and other disasters. Bitted horses that bolt are literally blinded by pain and are a danger to themselves and their riders. With the BB, the training of 'green' horses proceeds more rapidly.

RIDER: The bit – incorrectly thought of by most horsemen as necessary for control – commonly causes loss of control. For example, bit-induced pain triggers bolting. Also, by placing the bit between its teeth or under its tongue, a horse totally deprives the rider of control. Bit-induced problems such as bolting, rearing, bucking, and rushing or refusing jumps, are causes of serious injury to the rider or even sudden death. Bit-induced fear can be the cause of a horse becoming aggressive (biting & kicking) in the stable. A bitted horse may become dangerous at the moment of mounting. During exercise, hair-trigger responses to the bit or over-reaction to bit aids are to be avoided in an animal as powerful as a horse. The BB provides for painless communication

PLEASURE

HORSE: A bit-free horse is a pain-free horse is a happy horse. Such horses become easy to catch in the paddock and enjoy work in the same way that a dog enjoys being taken for a walk. Instead of being difficult to bridle, horses drop their heads willingly into the BB. Under saddle, they don't fidget and jig, but pay attention, and become better scholars. Without a bit, training advances more rapidly, because a host of bit-induced problems have not been generated and the horse's trust in the rider has not been breached. Horses do not become resistant, argumentative, and inclined to terminate the ride by heading for the stable. Thanks to the BB, many a horse is exonerated from being wrongly accused of what the rider had assumed to be permanent and incurable character flaws. When bridles annoy, neither man nor horse can enjoy.

RIDER: Without recognizing the real source of their difficulties, riders of bitted horses often lose confidence in their ability to ride. Because of so many seemingly incurable problems, riders become frustrated with their lack of progress and even frightened of riding. Many consider selling their horse, or giving up riding altogether. The BB enables the better nature of the horse to be expressed; a harmony develops between horse and rider, and the rationale of riding returns ... to give pleasure. The BB makes riding simpler, safer and more satisfying.

The principles described above for riding apply equally to driving, and probably more so. Being unable to communicate with seat and legs, a driver relies a great deal on 'good hands.' As yet it is relatively early days in the adoption of bitless driving but the feedback to date is most encouraging and supports the contention that bitless driving provides the same benefits as listed for riding.