

Bitless Benefits for Pony Clubs

A short discussion of the benefits of the crossunder bitless bridle for Pony Clubs and other youth-oriented organizations.

"The BitlessBridle took years off some of the older animals. Suddenly we had 20-year-old ponies jumping a metre - ponies that would have been narky and contrary stated jumping for fun" - Trish Ridgeway

The crossunder bitless bridle (CBB) is a benefit to riders of all ages and experience but the features that make it especially helpful to young riders, compared to a bit, are that it is:

- Painless and infinitely more humane
- Safer for both horse and rider
- A more effective rein-aid
- A means of increasing the pleasure of riding and the likelihood of achieving that harmony between horse and rider that is the goal of all horsemanship

Joe Camp of *Benji* fame recently summed up its benefits as follows:

"Forget the no-more-metal rhetoric, forget the pain, forget the cruelty - all of which are true - the darned thing just works better than a bit!"

Young riders should not be expected to use an instrument as dangerous as a bit. To expect a young novice to handle a bit with the degree of delicacy needed to save them from precipitating violent reactions from a horse in pain is unrealistic. It exposes youngsters to unnecessary risk. It is as though we insisted that toy guns should carry live ammunition.

It would bring about a major advance in equine welfare and in riding skills if youngsters were not permitted to use a bit until they had developed independent seats. One of the many benefits of the CBB is that it encourages riders to use seat and legs and avoids the emphasis on hands. There is no better introduction to equitation.

It has been convincingly demonstrated that, even in the hands of an adult, a bit frequently frightens a horse, rendering it nervous, spooky and apprehensive. If the bit is removed and replaced with a CBB, the horse becomes calm, infinitely more compliant, less resistant and far less likely to "explode."

Young riders love to compete and serious problems arise when their keen, "hot" ponies and horses become additionally excited at shows. Many such horses are currently being ridden by grooms for long periods of time in order to take the steam out of them before the competitor can take them into the ring. An alternative is for these horses to be tranquillized before they can be shown. It would be far better if the CBB was permitted and that extensive warm-ups and medication should become unnecessary temptations.

By permitting the CBB, the U.S. Pony Club could introduce a reform that will, in future years, be recognized as a watershed in the annals of equitation.