

Use of Bitless Bridle in Teaching By Mitzi Summers

As an instructor, I find that the Dr. Cook Bitless bridle is a very useful tool . It takes years for a rider to develop an independent seat-to be able to use their legs, seat and hands as individual aids which need to work together to give the horse clear body signals. A novice rider will find it impossible to truly have an independent seat. This takes years to develop. Lungeing and lungeing exercises are a very important part of the process. However, in reality, most students are not willing to undergo up to six months of lungeing exercises to hasten true balance.

The human animal, because of anatomy and the use of tools, is hand dependent and uses the hands first in many of their daily occupations. Indeed, just to get ready for their riding lesson involves steering their car from their hands, grooming and tacking up their horse- all focused on the use of their upper body, arms and hands, Then they begin riding and hopefully try to guide their horse chiefly through the use of their seat, legs, and then hands in that order.

I find the use of the Bitless Bridle invaluable in developing an independent seat in my students without the horse suffering in the process. The role of a school horse is, indeed, to put up with unclear aids, signals, and lack of balance of their riders. The instructor has a duty to make these valuable partners as comfortable as possible. Good stable management, well-fitting tack, and developing empathy for the horse in the student are all part of this. So is the deliberate plan to protect the horse's mouth while a student learns to ride.

Probably all of you reading this can picture how we rode when we were beginning. Our hands CAN NOT be independent at first. Riders cannot help but balance at times from the reins, no matter how prepared the instructor has been to prevent this. (example, the use of neck straps for learning to post or learning jumping position). If the reins are attached to a Bitless Bridle, at least the horse's mouth is not getting hurt. The horse is not being punished for being stoic and moving forward even when asked to move forward into hurtful pressure if a bit is used.

I teach all of my students to turn their horses from their center (swiveling), so that the hands are just part of the process of turning. They also need to be taught how to slow the horse and rebalance through half-halts.

A half halt correctly done originates from the center of the rider and involves a rebalancing of the rider, (pelvic tilt, draping of the leg and, finally, impulsion into a passive hand.) With a bit it is very easy for a rider to simply pull on the horse's mouth. This, of course, does not successfully signal the whole horse. Half halts involve rebalancing the horse from back to front. I find using a Bitless immensely helps the rider identify the correct use of their bodies and the muscles involved. Indeed, the rider needs to rebalance himself as he attempts to rebalance the horse. In this way we can begin to attain what we really wish when we ride-a partnership with a wonderful creature.

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