

User Comments

regarding The BITLESS BRIDLE, from 2000 through 2005

Bitless Bridle User Comments, 2005

Robyn, Tuesday, November 15, 2005:

I saw you at the Equine Affaire last week in Massachusetts and purchased one of your bitless bridles. I have a 21year old Quarter horse that I was using a Kimberwick bit on. I only ride him out on the trails. I always thought I needed more bit on him to control him. I listened you tell me that most of the "bad habits" a horse has is due to the bit. One thing he used to do was when we were cantering he would lower his head and shake it hard and some times he would even buck.

I took him out for the first time with the bitless bridle and we went on a trail ride over water, through the woods and sand pits (where he would often take off on me). The first time we cantered he lowered his head in preparation to shake it like usual. All of a sudden it seemed as though he realized there was no bit in his mouth and he didn't shake his head or buck. All of a sudden he collected himself and cantered smoothly. We galloped and cantered and any time I needed to pull him back I did so as instructed in your manual. He never once spooked or bucked or shook his head.

I went back to the barn and threw out the Kimberwick. I will never use a bit with him again. I told everyone at the barn that they were welcomed to try the bridle out and that I highly recommended it.

I wish I had done this years ago.

Thank you and my horse thanks you.

Julie A. Perron, Tue, 15 Nov 2005:

Critter Publishing & Design

Publisher of The Critter Exchange/Equine Exchange

Operations Director, P.A.G.E. O.N.E. Humane

Northwood, NH 03261

www.critterexchange.com

www.equineexchange.biz

www.pageonehumane.org

Dr. Cook,

Your presentation at Equine Affaire was the highlight of the weekend for me. Your diagram of the most sensitive parts of the horse was priceless (along with your explanation of why one area was left out)! The jaw you passed around with the bone spurs along the bars also made a lasting impression. Your whole manner was educational, entertaining, non-confrontational, and thought-provoking. Thank you for being there. You made a difference in the lives, mouths, and minds of many horses with that one session, I'm sure!

I almost did not attend your talk, as I have been riding in one of your bridles for 4 years and adore it. I'm glad I decided that I should have more information to impart to others when they ask about the bridle, as they do everywhere I go.

My mare came to me as a sour 5-yr old Morgan show horse. She had been trained Western, and had obviously been "tied down" severely. Every time she even felt the bit, she ducked! I could barely bridle her (raised head, clamped teeth, etc.), could get no forward gaits, and she tripped constantly. In hand and on the ground however, she was a very sweet, though wary, horse.

A friend had been trail riding her Arabian in your Bitless Bridle, and gave me one as a present about 4 years ago. My Ellie was a different horse from Day 1! She suddenly realized that going out could be enjoyable. Her balance and gaits improved immediately. She is a very bold horse, but even in large groups, I have never had a problem controlling her in the BB. Her first time at the beach, I gave not thought to her bridle. A friend with me was worried that I would lose control. Her gelding (in a long, harsh shank) reared at the first wave and deposited her in the sand. Ellie and I had a pleasant, uneventful ride. Since then we have been on countless organized rides in all sorts of terrain, have done parades, given lessons and pony rides, and have also jumped and driven in our Bitless Bridle (although I JUST saw the driving version on your site and now REALLY want one!!). Most people stand talking to me, patting Ellie for a few minutes and then say something like... "you didn't do that with no bit, did you?"

I have also used the bit on a variety of horses that board with me and that I have helped others figure out behavioral issues on. I've never met a horse that did not respond favorably and work well in it.

Thank you very, very much for invention, your information, and your continued outreach. I hope to talk with you in person some time in the future.

Rebecca, Thursday, November 10, 2005:

Dr. Cook,

I have a 15 yr. old Tennessee Walking horse mare, that I exclusively use for trail riding. When I got her this past January, I decided to go barefoot with her, and since that time, I have been to a few workshops on natural hoof care and am now a part of the AANHCP certification program. It never made sense to me that I rode Fancy barefoot, but then used a bit. I always felt guilty about it. So, this week I tried the bitless bridle for the first time on her, and it worked like a charm! I was amazed at how responsive she was right away to the pressure, and I feel like I have more control with this bridle, than with a bit. I trail rode with the bitless bridle the 2nd time that I put it on her. When riding her with a bit, Fancy would constantly "chomp" at the bit. When I put the bitless bridle on, she seemed confused that she didn't have a bit in her mouth anymore! Her gaits are better now, and overall she just feels looser. She still acts barn sour and tries to turn around here and there when I ride her alone, but I don't feel guilty now that I'm pulling on her mouth, and she also seems a little more willing with the bitless bridle. I had hoped to ride with it all week, but got sick so I am disappointed that I have only ridden her once in it. My friend is going to try my bridle on her Tenn. Walker next week...I will let you know how she likes it. You know, we really should give the Native Americans more credit. They rode barefoot over all terrain and bitless, too. I hope that more and more people will catch on to the bitless bridle and natural hoof care, so that domesticated horses will be happier!!!

Jim, Saturday, November 12, 2005:

Dear Dr Cook:

I purchased your Bitless Bridle several weeks ago to use on my 2 1/2 yr old Grade Palamino stud colt. I want you to know that the results are truly amazing.

To begin with, he accepted the bridle without hesitation. I was very grateful for this as I do not want to use a traditional Iron Age torture device on this horse. Without inflicting trauma and pain to the horse he has also accepted the saddle pad and saddle without a flinch.

I am bringing him along slowly and so I will not actually set in the saddle for a couple of more weeks. I am hoping that I will simply be able to "walk off" with him at that point (he will actually be 3 yrs old at that time).

Your bridle is outstanding. I gladly recommend your bridle to anyone contemplating using it on a horse that is already trained or in the process of training such as mine.

Jennifer, Wednesday, November 02, 2005:

Hi there,

Recently I ordered a bridle to be donated to my favorite horse rescue (Perfect Harmony in New Mexico) and Bitless Bridle graciously offered to donate one as well to match my gift... thought you might like some more happy feedback.

I donated this bridle because I was already convinced of it's virtues. Sending two to the Rescue for the price of one was just "icing" from my perspective. Thank you very much for offering to sponsor the passion of one of your customers.

Now for the feedback: They like it. (I knew it) They like it (Told 'em so) They like it. Which now means every single person who ever encounters Perfect Harmony, will get an earful about you... and I hope eventually this snowballs into something nice for your company. It was a pleasure for me to introduce them to you.

You have no idea how much it tickles me to switch people over to your bridle. It's the same happy feeling you get when you find money on the ground, I suppose. A rescued horse is generally in so much of a disadvantage (in the sense that by the time they are rescued, they may no longer be open to the idea of communicating with a human in the 1st place,) and a simple tack item like this can mean the difference between bridging a communication gap or accidentally shutting it forever.

Hope you stop what you're doing for just a sec and let yourself feel warm and fuzzy for a moment. This was a GOOD tool for a horse sanctuary. You can quote any part of this you like.

Sarah, Wednesday, November 02, 2005:

Dear Bob,

A rather late reply. First of all thank you for designing such an amazing bridle. I have studied your web site hard, really read it and found it fascinating. I then purchased our first BB for my daughter who has a 14 hand conemara pony. She has been hunting for several years here and is a good jockey and very conscientious however her arms were being pulled out of her sockets and he used to hang onto the bit, ghastly. With the BB it changed significantly and she has just started hunting again and he goes perfectly.

My husband went and did an unofficial point to point the second day of wearing the BB. 16 I hand thoroughbred and came 6th. He then went and did another one two weeks later and came 1st. The first had approx 23 X country jumps and the 2nd 34 Xcountry jumps!

The other horses her in the yard are all in bitless bridles and are all hunting superbly. All the bits have gone. We school them on the flat and SJ them with no problem at all. I could never go back to using a bit the reduction in so many annoying symptoms has gone and one can now concentrate on working the horses properly. Several of the trainers have been tricky, one in particular but it just made me stronger and I had to stand up for all that you have done. Thank you.

Thank you so so much what an amazing contribution you have had to the equestrian world. I could continue for ages.

Marianne, Wednesday, November 02, 2005:

I have been using your bridle for several years now and let my horses tell me how happy they are. I will never switch back. I am reschooling a 4 year old whose head was obviously tied down. She leaned severely to the right.

Although you suggest the nose piece being low and I would agree on a well trained supple horse that is correct, I have found that putting the nose piece higher as a noseband would be encourages suppleness and you can counterflex at the poll easier. If you have clients who experience a one sided horse this may be a good suggestion. I would try lunging this way first to see what works. My own mare has gotten much better on her left side using the nose piece this way and now allows me....to put it lower and I say allows me since the horse will always tell you what's correct.

By the way I have from time to time lunged her in a full cheek snaffle to see the difference in her way of going and that tells me all I need to know. We are working toward true collection!!! Thank you for your product, I now own 5 of them.

Cheryl, Wednesday, October 12, 2005:

I want to say thank you for developing the bitless bridle. I have a 16 year old Arabian, Mickee, who was given to bolting after taking hold of the bit in his teeth, and try as I might, I was unable to stop this behavior. I came across your website about six months ago and decided to order one of the beta bridles. I am amazed at how my horse has responded so positively to it. The first few times he would throw his head up and mouth as if trying to get a hold of the bit. HA! It wasn't there, and he was quite confused at why I still had control of his head. We are continuing to work with him everyday, and he's coming along incredibly well. My husband, who is a completely beginning rider, has established quite a bond with Mickee, and he is now riding him. This bridle has actually made us change our mind about getting rid of Mickee, as we are now quite happy to keep him.

I also bought another beta bridle for my 3 year old Friesian Sport Horse, Pippa, and I am looking forward to using this on her as I continue her training. She has not had a bit in her mouth, nor will she, thanks to your wonderful bridle. I'm quite sure she will respond perfectly to it as she is well used to the "giving to pressure" training techniques.

Again, thank you so much for this fantastic and humane way of connecting with our horses.

Cheryl, Thursday, October 13, 2005:

I love that I can lunge my horse in this bridle because I always hated seeing horses, especially young ones, cranked down tight with the bit biting into their mouths. I tried putting a very mild bit into Pippa's mouth at the urging of my trainer, "Just leave her bridle on her in her stall for a few hours. She'll eventually get used to it." It took about two minutes for her to rub the whole bridle off her head at which point she wouldn't have anything to do with it. I never had the heart to try it again, and I vowed never to bit her again but to find a more gentle way of doing things. After all, I know plenty of people who ride their horses in a simple halter, and my horse is already the picture of perfection when it comes to "giving to pressure". Pippa is a Friesian/Thoroughbred 3 year old, and I will not begin riding her until she is 4, but we have plenty of training we can do before then. I'm going to begin using her bitless bridle in place of her rope halter next week, so I'll let you know how her training progresses.

Again, thank you so much for giving me a way to allow her to continue to trust me as we build our lifelong partnership. It means more than either of us can say.

Rita, Saturday, October 01, 2005:

Subject: The Bitless Bridle may have saved my life

Tilly is my favorite lesson horse. She is a 28 year old Quarter Horse mare, about 14.2 hands tall, and so healthy and strong you'd swear she is a lot younger than that. She is also usually calm and really lovely under saddle. We took her and my husband's horse, Rusty, out on the trail today for an hour or so ride. Everything was going very well. We finished our ride and decided to get off and walk the last half mile or so home.

As I was dismounting, the saddle slipped underneath Tilly's belly. My left foot was stuck in the stirrup. I hit the ground hard and was stunned for several seconds. So, there I was, my foot still in the stirrup, the saddle under my horse, and my hand still clutching the reins in a death grip.

A lesser horse would have let that be enough to scare her into bolting. If she had bolted, I might have been dragged to death. At the very least, I would have sustained some really serious injuries. AND, if Tilly had had a bit in her mouth, the pain of that bit being yanked hard might have caused her to panic, even if the saddle being under her didn't.

She didn't panic. She stood stoically and waited for me to get myself together, get my foot out of the stirrup and get up. She was sniffing me all over as I lay there. I think she was making sure I was okay -- she's just that kind of horse. Anyway, I did get up with no more serious injuries than a slightly sprained ankle and a bruise or two from the fall. I fixed the saddle and led Tilly back to the stable without any problems.

I credit Tilly with being calm and well-trained and for loving me and trusting me, but I credit the bitless bridle for not causing Tilly terrible pain and causing a bad accident to get SO much worse.

Thank you again for providing this wonderful product. We use the bitless bridle on all the horses we ride and they all love it. Mike, my husband, now owns Rusty and Mike won't ride with a bit now. Rusty took to it so well, I doubt you could get a bit in his mouth now, anyway. Tilly, Clementine, and Bella are the three horses I have used my bitless bridle on, and they all love it, too. Tilly, as I said, is calm and well-trained. Clementine is young and reactive, but easily controllable with the bitless bridle. Bella is scared of a lot of things, but the bitless seems to give her confidence she didn't have before.

From my husband:

Dr. Cook:

Thanks for a few more years with my wife. I was there. Any other horse **WOULD** have bolted and dragged her to death, but even if Tilly weren't the great horse she is, your bridle would have spared her pain and kept that from adding to an already dangerous situation."

And thank you, too, for turning a good horse into a great one. I don't feel bad about tacking Rusty up any more. I used to feel awful about sticking a bit in his mouth. He hated it and I hated it. It looked like what it was and that's a torture device meant to inflict pain to control the horse. I haven't fallen off yet, but I will, and it's nice to know I won't tear his mouth open when I can't let go of the reins in time. He's happy so I'm happy."

Keryl, Tuesday, September 27, 2005:

Dear Dr. Cook,

I have been using your bitless bridle since May and it has been a dream come true for my horse and I. We were having a terrible time, my horse greenbroke, loving everything except the bit. It turns out he has a under developed lower jaw and physically just has no room for a bit. From the moment I put on the bitless bridle he loved it, and it has enabled us to progress with his training... I am also involved with the therapeutic riding programs and feel that the bitless bridle would be of benefit to a lot of their riders and horses.

Frieda, Saturday, September 24, 2005:

Subject: Wow!

Just wanted to let you know we tried our new bridle today on a short ride and oh my goodness what a difference! My Paso was a different horse. After a couple of minutes he smoothed out and acted like such a good boy. He responded so well! It's a..... it's a miracle. If Casa could talk to you he would give you a big "Thank you!". I am really looking forward to some cooler weather so that we can go for a long test ride. And I can't wait to tell all my riding friends what has helped us to achieve such great results.

[Carole responds:

I'm glad to hear that you and Casa are happy with the BB! May we add your nice testimonial to our website collection?

Best regards, Carole]

Frieda, Thursday, October 13, 2005:

Subject: Re: Wow!

Hi Carole,

Please forgive me for not answering sooner. The reason I hesitated to give permission to use my testimonial was because I was waiting for the "honeymoon" to end. I kept thinking my Paso boy would go back to his "normal" self after using the bitless bridle a couple of times. Well that line of thinking couldn't have been more wrong! It still seems too good to be true, but it is true - he keeps getting better and better. Once a horse that was a real pain in the neck, he is now a joy to ride! He is responding better to all my aids and seems happy to get out on the trails. The problems I was having with him are disappearing. At one time (before the BB) I was considering selling him. He is such a sweet boy and loves people so I searched

for anything that might help us before resorting to such a drastic measure. Thank you for being there with your miracle bridle. I will never ever use anything else. And if I can't show him in the BB we'll just wait until they change the rules. Please use my testimonial and let everyone know what a great product you have! You can bet I will sing your praises to all that will listen.

Thanks again

Laurie, Mims, Florida, Saturday, September 17, 2005:

Getting my horse was a dream come true but riding was a different matter. Now with the combination of the Bob Marshall Treeless Sport Saddle and your bridle I have the effortless communication that I desired. A fortune's worth of clinics could not have given me what you both have.

Melody, Thursday, August 25, 2005:

I have a friend, Joann and she was having so much trouble bridling her horse Budlight, it would take up to 20 minutes or longer to get a bit into Budlights mouth and she wasn't riding much because it was taking the fun out of being with him. She had her vet check him physically to see if that could be the problem and found nothing. She asked me to look on the Internet for soft-mouthed bits, bosals and hacks maybe one of these would work but I came across your site and printed it off for her. She was so excited that she bought one right away and loved it.... Well I thought I'd like to try it also, I don't have any problems with my Cisco taking the bit but I do want to make every effort to make riding more fun for him too. I also bought one and I can't believe the difference, he is more responsive than before and we have only tried it once. Your Bitless Bridle is sweet... I can't say enough good about it but Thank You, you have made two older ladies and their boys very happy.

Jeane, Tue, 23 Aug 2005:

Subject: Re: Bucking

Thank you for your help. It was so nice of you to get back to me so quickly. I rode my gelding tonight and we experienced some bucking. I am pretty sure that I'm way too heavy in the hands. He kept wanting to buck going into the canter. I think I am holding on with my hands and he's feeling the squeeze. We practiced some more and I just gave him the reins and he cantered just fine with no buck. I am realizing that my horses respond with very little pressure from the bitless bridle and I'm just not used to it. They are letting me know that I need to ease up! There is definitely some Joie de Vie too!

I will stop using power pressure and keep practicing and I think we will be fine. I still can't believe the incredible stop my horses have. We were flying towards the barn tonight and with just a tiny squeeze we came to a nice stop. Thank you for this bridle!!!!

Traci, Monday, August 22, 2005:

I just wanted to take a few moments to tell you how pleased I am with my bitless bridle. I had bought mine over three years ago, but couldn't get the nerve up to actually try it. I have started riding my 13 year old mustang gelding in it this year and am amazed at the results I am getting. It has taken all the fight out of the ride. In a bit my horse was hard to control, I spent

more time dodging his head which he was throwing up constantly than riding. With the bitless he walks on a loose rein and turns with great lateral flexion. The other problem I had was his "whoa" left a lot to be desired, which made me feel unsafe when riding him, with the bitless he stops with a minimal cue. He is happy with his bitless bridle and so am I. I just kick myself for not trying it sooner. I took my horse to a natural horsemanship clinic yesterday and the clinician was very impressed with my bitless bridle. I had a lot of people ask me where I got it, so I was sure to tell them where to look it up on the internet to get one of their own. Thanks to your bridle I am enjoying a horse that I almost sold because he was too much for me. Thank you for such a quality product.

Peggy, Wednesday, August 17, 2005:

I received my new bridle yesterday and rode with it today. My horse was calm, collected and relaxed. She did not toss her head or pull on the bridle. These were all behaviors she had on a bit. It didn't matter what bit, she did not like it in her mouth. I felt like she was more comfortable, therefore I was more comfortable. She was easy to fit in the bridle and she just was calmer about the whole process.

I think that any horse owner who wants their horse to be comfortable and manageable, this is the bridle. The main reason I wanted to get this bridle is that my horse knows the verbal command whoa and does it easily with ground work, but put the bit in her mouth and she struggled with the slightest pressure. With the bitless bridle, I could ask for a whoa verbally and use just the slightest pressure and I got a complete and prompt stop. That spoke volumes to me about the comfort of my horse. I hated the amount of pressure needed to stop with a bit. I have only owned this horse for 6 weeks, and I knew I needed something different in order to enjoy my time on her back. I want to be a good partner with my horse and I feel that this is the best step toward that goal. This is a well constructed gentle aid for better horsemanship. Thank you Dr. Cook and your staff for making my riding experience with my horse a safer, and more comfortable and happier experience.

Jennifer, Sunday, August 14, 2005:

Subject: Bitless Bridle in Dec 05 Hoof Beats Magazine

Dr. Cook, I have used your bridle on my retired Standardbred basically since I got him. I was his first rider. My article about him and my photos of him (using bitlessbridle) will be in the December 05 Hoof Beats Magazine. I mention your bridle in the article.

Cody would not stop grinding his teeth. I heard of your bridle and got one. Thank you! Please check out www.sphofl.com. Click photo album and then members photos. You'll find Cody with the bitlessbridle.

Emily (and Izzy) from Northumberland, Friday, August 12, 2005:

Dear Dr Cook,

I bought a BB last year for my fizzy Standardbred mare who was at times a total 'nightmare' to ride. She pulled, jogged, danced sideways, wrenched the reins out of my hands. She also used to click her teeth together somewhat like an old lady with false teeth. She was nasty to bridle and managed to bite me on several occasions. The worst behavior though was when cantering (trying to) she would occasionally tense up, her head would come up higher and

higher, then she would shoot off at a flat out gallop and not stop until she felt like it. (Very frightening.)

When I found an article about your bridle, it all made perfect sense, so I brought one, tried it out, now I have a fabulous horse. Still fast but not dangerous, I always feel that there is 'someone there' on the other end of the reins, although sometimes she won't stop straight away, she 'acknowledges' that I want to and complies eventually. No more 'dead from the neck up' feeling. Also no more jogging and all the other bad behavior that she displayed previously.

Amazing enough, despite the others on the yard seeing such a difference in us both, they still are of the mindset that - oh I could never stop my horse without a bit - I can stop MUCH easier than when I used a 3 ring gag - bits don't stop horses, I could have used a strand of barbed wire and it wouldn't have stopped her, she was running away from pain. Now she's not getting pain from the bit she stops when asked. Simple, not rocket science!

I also had a bit of a 'run in' with a lady from a Myler bit clinic re the bridle!

Tausha, Monday, August 08, 2005 2:07 PM

Thank you for giving me my horse back! I own a 14 year old arab/qh mare who before I got her was ridden very hard and was whipped when she didn't do everything right. The more I rode her the worse she would get, she would stick her head straight up and would freak out if I put any pressure on the reins, would rear, bolt and do every thing she could to get me off. Then I tried the bitless bridle and he doesn't do any of these things, recently your bridle saved me from a dangerous situation, I was riding on a trail and she was acting very spooky, she tried to bolt but as soon as reign pressure was applied she stopped.

Subject: Gunner's Story (from the horse mouth), Monday, August 08, 2005:

My name is Gunner, my mommy adopted me two years ago from an abusive ranch, I was very scared and had booboos on my back, feet and face, but mommy loved me anyway. She took off those painful metal things (shoes) from my hooves and I love being barefoot. I hated that darn heavy thing on my back (saddle) because I knew it gave me booboos so I made sure mommy knew I was scared and side stepped, shook and nipped to let her know. She got me a new one and I don't mind mommy putting it on my back anymore. Mommy always put stuff (curb bit) in my mouth that I hated. I again, let her know that it hurt by tossing my head in the air, not listening to her, and grabbing that thing (the bit) in my teeth so it would not hurt. People use to hit me in my face because of my behavior so I was really scared. So, again, my mommy got me something new. She called it a Bitless Bridle. I had never seen this Bitless Bridle before, but I let her put it on my head since nothing went in my mouth. Mommy got on my back without the saddle and we rode around the yard (area between the outbuildings). At first, I was a little concerned (a little hesitation) with this new and different thing, but after about one minute I realized that there was nothing hurting me and mommy was asking me very nicely to turn left and right, walk, trot, and stop. I liked doing them all and I went anywhere mommy wanted to go and stood still when she wanted me to. I never once tossed my head and I listened to everything mommy asked. Mommy and I were so excited. Mommy and I can't wait to use this Bitless Bridle all the time. Mommy says we are going on a trail ride very soon with my new Bitless Bridle, I can't wait. Mommy promised she would never put things (bits) in my mouth again. I'm a very happy horse and I'm so glad my mommy got me a Bitless Bridle!

Notes from mommy: Gunner is a 10 year old, short stocky grade Quarter horse. He is about 14.2 hh and around 1100 lbs (slightly overweight due to treats). Gunner is my first/only horse. We are southeast of St Paul, Minnesota. We ride in an Australian stock saddle with a "pull up" strap, this eliminated his "cinchy" behavior. Gunner had an abscess from his shoes and poor conditions, being barefoot has done him a world of good. We hadn't cantered in the Bitless Bridle because we are still working on not "Bunny hopping" (small bucks) when cantering. The Bitless Bridle is the best thing that I have done for Gunner. I will keep you posted on our progress.

Lee Ann, Winfield, British Columbia, Friday, July 22, 2005:

I bought your bitless bridle this spring and have been using it ever since.

I'd like to comment on an experience I had recently while out riding on a group ride. I was riding with 2 other ladies and we were overtaken by another group while opening a gate, the other group rode off ahead of us, and the one lady's horse became very upset and was prancing and jiggling trying to catch up. She was riding out in front of me and the behavior of her horse was affecting mine and the lady's horse behind me. The group up ahead of us suddenly starting cantering away and the lady in front of me had her horse bolt off after them. I was riding in your bitless bridle and my horse was upset but was completely in control, then the lady's horse behind me also bolted off past us, but I was able to wait at that spot until a few other horses came along and ride along with them until my horse settled again. There was no question that the bitless bridle provided more control than a bitted one! I was very thankful to be able to keep my horse from bolting and be able to continue the ride comfortably.

I have been very happy with how comfortable and relaxed my horse has been using the bitless bridle, she is a 1/2 Arab and use to be a handful. I am using the bridle to trail ride and also train for dressage (I haven't quite figured out how I'm going to show in it).

Tosh, Tuesday, July 12, 2005:

Dear Bitless Bridle Organization:

Upon ordering my third Bitless Bridle, it is time to add my voice, in as strong a positive fashion as possible, to the many favorable comments written here. My original bridle was ordered for an eight year old Tennessee Walker my husband and I purchased as his first horse. I felt confident when we bought her, because she was such a nice mare in every other way, that a kind hand would quickly clear up her head tossing. I was wrong. As Annie is his first horse, it was important to straighten this out right away. I found the Bitless Bridle on the web, put it on her, and have had no problems since. In addition, her gaiting has improved day by day and in fact, improves with each ride on this bridle. She feels free to seek the guidance of the hand and has relaxed into an absolutely lovely running walk with amazing consistency.

With this success, even though I had no problem whatsoever with my Belgian/Saddlebred hunt seat/dressage mare, I ordered the oversize version for her. My jaw absolutely dropped the first time we rode. She broke at the poll, moved forward into my hands, and improved all her movements immediately. She looks forward to her sessions like she never has before and in over 40 years of horse riding, I have never ridden such a happy, willing horse. I only wonder what it would have been like if I could go back to all the other horses and put them in this truly inspired bridle. It is also important to note that this is a very big and strong

mare who sometimes takes some stopping! She actually is more easily controlled in the out of doors even at speed than she ever was on a bit.

The Tennessee Walker is so quiet and willing in temperament that I put her in long lines on the Bitless Bridle. She did very well from the first and when the inevitable happened and she ended up facing me, I was able to turn her around with the reins only, something that does not ordinarily happen in early long line training with a bitted bridle. She learned about six lessons worth in one lesson entirely due to the Bitless Bridle. I have just ordered the driving Bitless Bridle for her and will be looking forward to taking her all the way to pulling a cart on it.

Thank you for this wonderful advancement in horsemanship. I will be selling all of my quite beautiful conventional bridles in the near future. I wonder though, if I should sell them under the heading of "tack" or of "antiques"!!

Corinne, Smyrna, DE, Sunday, July 10, 2005 9:30 PM

I wrote to you many years ago regarding my mare and our using your wonderful bitless bridle. We've had the bridle for probably 6 years now and we still love it! I just wanted to tell you that as an instructor, I recommended to the owner of the farm that we put the bitless on the two dear horses that we put our beginner riders on. Their behavior and attitudes improved because these new riders were no longer yanking on their horse's mouths when learning to post to the trot. I think it is an especially kind way to teach youngsters to jump because the horse is no longer getting banged in the mouth at every jump. I would love to have you send me information on how to petition dressage organizations to accept these wonderful bridles. The benefits are incredible.

Thanks so much for all the work you do in making happier, healthier rides for us.

Sheree, Sautee-Nacoochee, Georgia, Tuesday, July 05, 2005:

I have been given the go-ahead to lightly ride my 2-year old Rocky Mountain Horse and I have started her in (and will continue her in) your bitless bridle. I cannot tell you how quickly she learned to turn, back and whoa in your bridle (10 minutes, maybe?). We just finished our third night of training and tonight she did the most beautiful, straight back-up (not once, but twice).

The understanding she has of the bridle seems to be almost second-nature (I only practiced with it on her a couple of times on the ground in the last few months), so I am amazed at how nicely she listens to the bridle. Of course, "whoa" is all-important and she has not once tried to walk through that command. Tomorrow night we will venture out into the open pasture and I can't wait to see how she reacts.

I mainly just wanted to thank you for inventing such a wonderful piece of tack!!!

Caiti, Wed, 15 Jun 2005:

Just wanted to let you know how much I LOVE my bitless bridle. I got it as a Christmas gift this year, and I haven't put it down since! My mare had been having many issues within the past year, including stiffness, rushing, she could not bend her neck, hitting barrels and poles (I do gymkhana events) head tossing, and clenching her teeth. I had her teeth checked, her shoes taken off, I even had a massage therapist out, and nothing relieved her discomfort. I finally started using the bitless bridle, and all I have to say is WOW! All of her problems are

completely gone. She is still a bit stiff from just not using her muscles properly for so long, but she is 99% better. I am amazed. My show circuit would not allow me to use this bridle, so for the first show of the year I switched back to a bit. It was a disaster. She was very spooky, unpredictable, and tense. I had to walk her the whole time, she absolutely blew up on me. I finally got a hold of my state horse council, and got a rule change instated, and I am back in action with my girl, and doing awesome! Thanks for the wonderful product, I will continue to spread the news of this miracle!

Jennifer, Wednesday, June 08, 2005:

One year ago I ordered my first bitless bridle from your company. It was a last ditch effort to help my newly aquired spooky, head flinging out of control Arabian gelding named Czar. I had tried a multitude of bits and hackamores and martingales all to no avail. Most of my training has been with a dressage instructor so the subject of going bitless just was never considered to be an option. One of my neighbors had heard of your bridle on the internet and she suggested that I try it.

All I can tell you is that Czar is a different horse now. The only time he starts his head flinging is when he gets over excited or frustrated (which only happens on the way back from a trail ride when I won't let him canter home or when some situation we are in makes him extra nervous) I have excellent control with this bridle and now he actually puts his own nose into it when I hold it up and show it to him! No more chasing his head around when trying to tack up.

Well, that is my first success story-now here is the beginning of what I hope will be a second one: My husband and I recently rescued a 20 something quarter horse cross. Severely under weight, curling hooves and atrophied muscles over his topline, this boy was quite a sight. His previous owner tried to ride him once- he took off with her and launched her into the stratosphere. Well, we tended to his feet and started him on a good feeding/ worming/ ground work regimen.

Once he gained some weight we decided it was time to try to ride him. We started off with a regular bitted bridle and found that he pulled horribly and would do his best to get his head down and buck. He didn't seem to know the meaning of "walk" not to mention his head carriage put him well behind the bit. His musculature at this point indicates that he was ridden over many years with someone jerking his head way back and in. I convinced my husband to try my bitless bridle on him to see if we could get any better results.

Voila, he is relaxing his neck, we can give him a lot more reign without him taking off or trying to buck and he seems oh so relaxed. We have only used it 3 times on him but the difference in his self carriage and attitude was incredible. We just ordered a second bridle and my husband and I don't think we will ever ride our own horses in bits again!

Judith, Monday, June 06, 2005:

I have a 14 year old mare that I really thought I would just use as a pet, until I tried your product! She would REAR, STRIKE and try to stomp the rider after she got them off. I had her vet checked several times and talked to several trainers that told me she did not respect me. They took her, "BEAT" her, she threw them then tried to stomp them. She would rear until she fell backwards and did not care, even if she could see the barn!

Well I gave her one last chance. I had bought her when she was 10 months old. Now we do shows, she has gone to SEVERAL SEMINARS. I WAS ABLE TO PROVE TO A "Renowned" trainer that she does a GREAT give to pressure.

I wish we could win horse shows without a snaffle. They let her show in open but will not place here because of the "head gear." I tell them if she used metal or anything in her mouth, somebody would get hurt! They say take her to a trainer.

She has several Blue ribbons in halter classes because of her look and attitude. She just will NOT wear anything in her mouth!

Thank you !!!!! so Much for letting me keep my Baby AND RIDE HER SAFELY TOO!!!!!!

I CANNOT SING ENOUGH PRAISES ABOUT YOUR PRODUCT! I am a walking advertisement, I wish others would try it. I sell it to everybody!!!!!!

Ginny, South Sound Equitation, www.southsoundequine.com, Monday, June 06, 2005:

There is another advantage of bitless bridles you have not mentioned on your website.

A horse's vision is very different from ours. They need to be able to maneuver their head in order to adjust their tri-focal vision acuity depending upon circumstances. Many horses become disturbed when, because of the bit, their head is forced into a position (to avoid pain) that does not allow them to see properly.

Karen Denbigh, Spencer, WV, Sunday, June 05, 2005:

Dear Dr. Cook,

I just finished reading your book and have emailed every horse person I know demanding they order the book. Dan Sumerel introduced me to your bridle about three years ago and I love it....I have a mare ready to go and she will never know a bit or the pain it causes. When or if I ever can get on my gelding again, he will never have a bit again either. I have no doubt than when he bucked me off 5 years ago, and broke my back, it was due to bit problems and the related confusion and pain.

My 3 1/2 year old baby will never know a bit either, assuming I ever get her going.

How anyone could ever put a bit in their horse's mouth after reading your book is beyond my ability to comprehend.

Thank you for actually publishing your book....I've known some of your thoughts for some time but with your book in my hand, I can show the written word to people.

I hope at some point I will find you lecturing someplace close enough for me to attend. I would love to meet you to thank you in person for the knowledge you have so willingly shared with the world.

Leigh, Wednesday, May 25, 2005 1:57 PM

Dear Dr. Cook:

I just wanted to add my voice to those who are singing the praises of the Bitless Bridle. Yahoo!

I've got an 11 year old Dutch Warmblood who's a rescue -- when I got him a year and a half ago, he had some major physical issues that we've been correcting through orthopedic shoeing and a range of different kinds of body work. He's a great horse underneath his issues

(both physical and corresponding emotional ones from being ridden in pain for so long), and as he's coming back I'm realizing that he's been trained to grand prix level dressage.

However, as he started to feel better, he developed an aversion to tack. He'd have panic attacks as I walked towards him with saddle and bridle -- either standing at the rail with his legs literally shaking or pulling loose and galloping off when he could (comically, when he'd run off, he'd run directly into a round pen and quiver -- no disappearing off into the distance for this horse!). But it was clear -- this tack stuff was utterly horrifying to him. He's absolutely a doll when putting a halter on him, standing still and dropping his head low for it without fail. When I'd pick up the bridle, however, he'd become a giraffe, and he'd win that battle, as he stands 17 hands and I'm only 5'4". I tried every traditional trick in the book -- coating the bit with sugar (certain that would work, as he's a serious treat hog -- nope!), lighter bits, different shaped bits, scented bits, you name it. All of which he hated with an equal passion.

And then one night, while doing a marathon search online looking for a workable solution, I stumbled across your site and thought I'd give the Bitless Bridle a try. Success! The first time I tried to put it on him, I brought it to his head like a regular bridle and he threw his head up where I couldn't reach it. So I bunched it up so it looked like a halter (without that headstall that signaled the scary bit) and he put his head right in it. The first ride he tugged a couple of times (he can be a brat in the halter when he decides he wants to graze), but with a gentle tug back, he came right into line.

We no longer have bridling issues. He's completely calm in the Bitless, and I'm discovering that I can truly whisper to him with a slight squeeze of my hands. We've made great progress with his collection, in part because I'm learning how subtle I can be with this bridle and don't feel like I'm sawing his mouth and forcing him into an unnatural collection. His half-halts are beautiful. And after a couple of rides, my worry about not having a bit to haul back on if he spooked was completely gone. In fact, as your literature suggests, he's far less likely to spook with this bridle than he was with a bitted bridle -- and he hasn't balked, either. (In the old bitted bridle, he'd occasionally balk and do mini rears. I couldn't figure out why, as there didn't seem to be a common thread between them. I now believe that it was a reaction to the pain in his mouth, because he hasn't done it once since I've had the Bitless on him. This is great news, as he's still gaining strength in his hind and I was terrified that he would hurl himself up too high and go right over -- he doesn't always gauge his strength and limitations well.)

After the first few rides with the Bitless he'd try to spit the bit out when I took the bridle off, and got a truly funny expression on his face when he realized that there was no bit. That's over with now, and I no longer have to bunch the bridle up to pretend it's his halter -- he puts his head right into it even when it's fully extended.

When I read all of the articles on your web site I was reminded of a scene in Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*. One of the most horrifically brutal punishments that slavers inflicted on their captives in the American South was a device called a "bit" -- a metal contraption that clamped their tongues down and their mouths shut so they could no longer talk. One of the characters in the novel, Paul D, was tortured with this -- the humiliation of the experience became unbearable when he realized that at that moment he had become something less than the rooster on the plantation. He says:

"Mister was allowed to be and stay what he wasn't. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub" (72).

I'm not entirely convinced that it's that different for horses.

Thank you so very much for providing a tool that is both sane and humane, and can, in fact, allow people and horses to work as partners. I will never put another bit into Stardust's mouth again.

Kirsten, Monday, May 23, 2005:

Subject: Re: bitless bridle in general

After working with my horse with the minor alterations I made, I went back to the bridle just like you sent it with a halter fuzzy at the crown. To me it was like riding in a double bridle. The amount of adjustability and control of the tiniest motion was amazing. My horse was free and is an ex-race horse - he acted like it until today. Today he performed like a \$50,000 warmblood with gorgeous, huge extensions, smooth half pass and immediate halts. This is a horse with a sensitive, hollow back - he stretched at the trot when we started instead of after an hour of work. What I like most about the bitless bridle is that it removes a problem from the equation and allows me to work the horse correctly so I can determine if any further training issues are rider problems or horse discomfort problems. I loaned to a friend and she was impressed too - her horse doesn't have as drastic bit issues as mine but is a little afraid of the bit when jumping - she said she was able to shorten his stride and rate him easily. Please feel free to use this in your list of testimonials.

Andrea, Wednesday, May 18, 2005 5:13 PM

Good Evening Dr Cook

My name is Andrea Cater, and I live near Gatwick Airport in Sussex, England.

I came across your website a couple of weeks ago and was so stunned and impressed with what I read that I immediately ordered 2 bridles for my 2 mares (mother and daughter). Unfortunately the leather ones I ordered are currently out of stock but I am using a webbing one until they arrive.

I am ABSOLUTELY DELIGHTED with the results - to be honest I did not consider that my horses had any bit related problems - I just wanted to try a more humane method of control. But reading your questionnaire put some quite significant doubts in my mind about behaviour that I had simply put down to "habit" - I have noticed positive changes already!

Best Regards - and thank you so much for this huge contribution to equine welfare!

Kathleen, Friday, May 13, 2005:

Dear Dr. Cook,

Today, I rode my regular school horse, Magic, in a lesson, using the nylon bitless bridle I purchased.

Magic is a 22 year old Thoroughbred who has been a race horse, a fox hunter, and - for the last 15 years - a school horse. Magic is not thrilled with working in an arena, regardless of the varied terrain that makes up our schooling area. He would rather canter over a hunting field and take big fences. However, he puts up with lessons and for the most part is patient. When he has had enough, he gets "hyper", ignores gentle aids, tries to turn every gait request into a canter, spooks a bit, and will not calm down. So - in the bitless bridle, without a martingale for the first time in many years, he did well. He was responsive to my requests and even responded to half-halts with noticeable changes in speed. Until, that is, he decided he'd

had enough and wanted to just canter. He still listened to me, but with more resistance. Finally, he threw in a leaping spook and threw up his head. I did lose my balance a little and did not keep my hands down. However, the big thing we all noticed was that 1) I didn't jerk him in the mouth and 2) without the jerk on his mouth, he had nothing to get angry about and settled quickly after the spook. My teacher and I like the bridle and believe that Magic will soon realize that he will not get that pain in his mouth. We think he will become a better horse, even at his age. Magic will be ridden only in the bitless bridle from now on. And, my teacher will be trying it on other horses.

Kate, Wednesday, May 11, 2005:

Hello, my name is Kate, I have a Riding Centre in the Bay of Islands. We cater for (at the moment) up to 100 children weekly and 14 children per week for 12 camps during the year. We are getting to the stage where all of their ponies are ridden in bitless bridles, they are also barefoot and coverless and just finding out about treeless saddles. Our style of riding follows Ray Hunt and the late Tom Dorrance. So there has always been a lovely connection between horse/pony and rider but always been something not right. Then along came the Bitless bridle and now the picture is becoming complete.

At a Show Hunter event on the weekend 7 of us impressed the judge so much so that she would like to come for a lesson and try a bitless bridle on her horse. She was wary when she saw us and I think expected looney horses racing around out of control. But instead was pleasantly surprised at the lovely relaxed happy way they travelled.

Here is the reason that I am writing. I am an International Three Day Eventer and no longer feel I can do it, as I can't bear putting a bit on for the Dressage. I can Show Jump and Cross Country in a Bitless Bridle, which they go beautifully in. I get looked at like I'm nuts "how can you control your horse without a bit, won't it take off". There is no pulling they just cruise along in a rhythm and jump out of their stride. I competed at Badminton, Burghley and Gatcombe for 15th, 7th and 5th. Unfortunately not in a bitless bridle as I wasn't aware that I was allowed to.

I have since coming home competed to Intermediate level, but now how do I go about changing an age old rule of "accepting the bit" for dressage. The difference in my TBs is incredible They are happy in their work no more chomping and grinding and sweating. Their movement is instantly freer, softer and rounder. The children I teach are also upset as they are not permitted to ride at Pony Club or compete at any events. What do we do!!!!

Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated. Jessica Carter, a student at my Centre, has been in touch with you about getting the PC to let us use BB but we were turned away. All they can come up with is that the instructors don't know how to teach them - PATHETIC!! Are you allowed to compete in the USA at such events? We are also afraid that they may ban BB at Show Hunter. As when I asked the Secretary if we could she said at this stage yes as long as the nose band is not low it must be where a cavesson would sit. Then she added that they would be discussing the use of them at the next AGM.

So basically we can at the moment SJ, SH and XC as long as it is not to do with PC. HELP us please!!

We are in the process of moving to 120 acres on the Family Farm and have huge plans for International camps where children come from all over the world to learn a better way for horses. Ooops lessons are arriving

P.S. we have had thoughts of connecting the bit to the BB but not connecting the reins as I don't think there is a rule stating that the reins should be attached to the bit!!

Kate, Tuesday, May 17, 2005:

Subject: huge success but...

hello my name is Kate from the Land Downunder New Zealand. Jessica, that I teach at my Riding Centre, has been in contact with you. We are I feel one of a kind and are in need of some help. Marshall and I met Hiltrud Strasser 3 and a half years ago and are Barefoot, coverless, bitless (also wondered what your thoughts are on treeless saddles) and said to be brainless by conventional standards!! We have 63 horses that all have wonderful feet. Even Flat footed TBs now hold their concavity and can go on any surface. Have even evented to 3 Star level. Unfortunately not successfully as they hate the bit which i have to have for dressage...so always do an awful test as i don't ride in a bit any other time.

How do i go about changing this age old rule of "on the bit" All the children i teach(between 70 and 90 every week and over 200 that come for camps during the holidays) are having the same problem that they ride at home in a halter or bitless bridle and don't want to torture their horses with a bit. I have come to the decision not to compete any more, but do you think we can change Pony Club and FEI to allow BB. What are the rules in USA. Here i can xc and sj bitless but not dressage and definitely not at PC or PC competitions.

At the moment we can Show Hunter but I have been told that it is going to be discussed at their next AGM(doesn't look good). 7 of us impressed the judge at a competition recently so much so that she wants to come for a lesson and put her horse in one. When she first saw us i think she thought we were going to be out of control loonies but was pleasantly surprised by lovely relaxed rhythmical happy horses and riders. Unlike the judge in the Junior ring that proceeded to give my little friend a lecture on how dangerous the BB are. She is a smart cookie and told her that from her knowledge and experience they are in fact safer than a bit. She came 4th in the class.

So where do we head? Do we just start up our own BF, BB competitions or will we be able to change the rule with perseverance. I even thought the other day that I'd give up eventing as I've done Badminton, Burghley and Gatcombe for a 15th, 7th and 5th so now i can become a show Hunter queen but Marshall shattered that dream as my next 4 young horses are all stallions and will definitely have to wear bits. So then i thought of endurance but I'll look pretty funny in amongst little fine arabs on my big 16.2hh eventer types. They have made a new rule in the TB Racing Industry that every horse must come off the truck in a bit and not have it taken out till they are back on the truck heading home - ridiculous! Any suggestions to help us change convention would be much appreciated

[Dr. Cook responds:

Hello Kate:

I hope that our emails have crossed and that you received my reply to your first email yesterday? Let me know please and if not I will resend it.

Yes, I like the idea of you starting a series of bitless competitions. This would be excellent.

Kind regards, Bob]

Kate, Wed, 18 May 2005:

Subject: Re: huge success but...

Hi Bob yes Marshall came in half an hour later and your email had arrived. I'm not very good with computers and when i sent the first one the computer had disconnected itself so i thought that it may not have sent. I have a particularly rude email from a friend of mine after i wrote to her all excited about how beautifully the horses are going in the BB. She was my instructor when i was competing in England follows the lines of Alexander Technique, Centred Rider, Spanish Riding School so thought she'd like to know more...but obviously not by her response!! Anyway I'll send it and if you could perhaps send some good ammunition back for all these non believers. CHEERS

The people that have children that ride these days are not from a horsie background. So everything they see that we do (bitless and barefoot) makes sense to them, because they haven't had years of conditioning telling them that it's alright to haul horses around corners, yank on their mouths and beat up on them when 'they' did something wrong. It has even opened my eyes, as that was normal for me to see too. But these non-horsie parents are horrified at the treatment dished out by these disrespectful brats (not that its their faults this is how they've been taught). Remember Jess Carter that emailed you? She is currently winning the Northland Show Jumping Mini Circuit. Loads of the other bitless kids are placed in the other divisions too. Another good example was, in the pouring rain, out of 30 odd kids in the metre class, we were 1st 2nd and 3rd (all bitless). For two of them, it was their first time at that height. Jess won it.

Dawnalysce, Friday, May 06, 2005:

Subject: my new bitless bridle

Hi! I just received my new bitless bridle yesterday and used it for a half hour last evening. My horse, Vista and I both love it. I don't know how we got along all these years without it.

She never liked bits, was constantly chewing and salivating, so I rode her mostly with a mechanical hackamore. She didn't like that either and tossed her head and blew her nose alot. That has all ended with the bitless bridle. She learned to respond to the new bridle in less than 5 minutes and really seems to appreciate the new way of doing things. She didn't toss her head once and there was no excessive nose blowing. She also didn't try to yank her head out of the bridle when it was time to take it off as she has done for years with her other bridles. I plan to sell all the other bridles as I won't ever need them again!

And thank you for a product that lives up to its promises. My horse and I couldn't be happier.

Lyle and Grace, Forsyth, Montana, May 04, 2005:

Subject: Our Bitless Bridles

We just want you to know how much we like our new bridles! Our Tennessee Walker Geldings responded so well to them. Thank you so much.

Becky, Ranch Riding Center TEC, Menomonee Falls, WI, Wednesday, May 04, 2005 2:33 PM:

Hello Dr. Cook,

Your bitless bridle is amazing!!! I am rehabing an ex-QH racehorse. Despite careful checking by our vet, she resisted any type of bit so much that she would either trot with her

straight up in the air or with her head tilted sideways! After trying the bitless bridle from a friend, it was like a light turned on in her. She began to relax and listen to what I was asking her. She is by no means "cured", but she's comfortable enough to listen and try instead of just worrying about a bit in her mouth.

She has a lot of get up and go and I first I was worried the bridle wouldn't control her. But again, no problem! Because she's more relaxed it is much more effective than any bit. She's had her share of spooks in it too, but I haven't had any problem stopping her in it.

Just wanted to drop you a note and say thank you.

Nancy, Tuesday, April 26, 2005:

I have a 6 year old Missouri Foxtrotter gelding. He is a trail horse and was trained in a snaffle bit. He never seemed happy in his bridle and would tense up and toss his head especially if I tried collecting him to gait. After reading about the bitless bridle I thought it may be more comfortable for him and was worth a try, especially with the money back guarantee. It took about 60 seconds for my horse to adjust to it and I had the best ride I have ever had on him. He was immediately more relaxed and willing and was very responsive to my cues. He neck reined great, listened better and after about 20 minutes was stopping on a verbal whoa. I was so impressed! I can now collect him with no head tossing and he gaits very easily. I love my little guy and am thrilled that this bitless bridle worked. All of my bits will now be nice looking wall decoration!

Nancy, Wednesday, April 27, 2005:

I forgot to mention that my horse stood perfectly still when I put this bridle on and was very relaxed. He's a little sensitive about his ears and he really appreciated that I was able to give his ears a lot of clearance when I slipped this on his head. This bridle should help anyone who has an ear shy horse that hates being bridled. My horse also has a small mouth which made biting more difficult but now that is not an issue any more.

I thank you and my horse thanks you for a great product!

Sue, Sunday, April 24, 2005:

Subject: add my testimony

My experience with my bitless bridle has been so positive that I want to share it with others who may be considering this step.

In February I purchased a 12-yr-old sport horse who had been left unriden for several years. He tossed his head often, even though I had his teeth done by an equine dentist, used a very mild bit that fit him well, and rode on a loose rein most of the time. I ordered a bitless bridle with some reservations - would there be enough 'stop' power in this bridle to give me control if he tried to run off with me? Would it stop this head shaking?

I am pleased to say, YES - the bitless bridle gives me all of the control I need, even when he really misbehaves and YES - the head shaking stopped with the very first use of the bitless bridle! It was wonderful to see a level of tension leave my horse. My rein cues can be so much more subtle with this bridle, making our dressage work more lovely and our trail rides more tranquil. The leather and workmanship is of the highest quality, making this an exceptional value for the money.

Thanks from both of us!

Eamonn, Thursday, April 21, 2005:

Hi Bob,

Hope all is well with you.

Good news below - but with a catch. The starter told Simon a bitless bridle would not be allowed in future races because of Jockey Club rules!! Can you help us with any data, case studies, etc. as we go into battle (well conversation initially).

Subject: RE: Chumley a day in the life

Virtually a year ago we met Chumley (racing name Play it Again) who was going to be shot. The farmer who had him said we could have him for meat money or he'd go to the factory. The last thing we needed at the time was more horses to be honest, but we weren't going to let the poor fellow be shot at 4. He came to us and started eating, and eating, even laying down and eating. He had no manners with humans or horses and the herd excluding him for many months until he finally got the idea.

He's lost 170 kilo's since coming into training and has never done any more than he needed to do in his work (I for one misread him and didn't most popular horse with the grooms). Yesterday he was up against horses from big yards that would have cost literally 100's of times what we paid for him. He was raced without shoes and without a bridle at Cheltenham yesterday in a schooling race. In the parade ring he looked so relaxed it was almost worrying, but as Simon said later "I guess if you've been on the way to the abattoir, racing isn't that frightening".

The moment the race started Chumley knew his job, Simon rode him and said he floated round the track even though the ground was patchy and sticky.

Never headed, won eased down

A star is born (and saved)

Holly, Thursday, April 21, 2005 8:46 PM:

Hi Dr. Cook,

Just a note to say I love the Bitless Bridle I am using on my 8 year old Paint/TB gelding. I trained him using the Parelli Natural Horse-Man-Ship Program (we're almost done with Level Three) and he was always so much braver, safer, and easier to get "round" in the halter than a snaffle. I couldn't figure it out and was so frustrated I almost sold him; although I could ride him bareback and bridless, we could never get that flowing together feeling needed for eventing in a bridle. Now we have it!!! He stretches into contact for dressage, puts enthusiasm into jumping, and is so relaxed and rateable out in the fields.

This horse makes a burping/gulping/cribbing noise periodically. The vet told me his tongue was probably catching up on the roof of his throat and forcing him to swallow hard. The equine dentist confirmed that he is quite narrow through the throatlatch and is a horse that I would have to "ride by the seat of my pants". As far as I can tell from his behaviour, he feels like he can't breathe in the bit. While I understand the concept that a horse should trust you and your equipment, I can't imagine trusting anyone enough to tape my mouth closed and then make me go jogging! It would be lovely to see the dressage rules changed so the bit is legal in all phases of eventing. But I'm thankful to have it for schooling and the jumping phases as we wouldn't make it without one.

Jeannie, Wednesday, April 20, 2005:

Hi Dr. Cook!

Thanks so much for your note. I did so enjoy talking with you yesterday too!!

I am going to take Danseur out in the forest today, for a long ride, and see how he does with the BB. I'm sure it will be fine though.

You know, I have told all my friends, riding friends that is, all about the BB now! They are all so happy for me. Of course, they are waiting for me to try it out a bit longer, and I will do that! But of course!! :) On Thursday, if the weather stays nice, I will go over to the hippodrome here in Maisons-Laffitte where there are two big jumping paddocks filled with jumps. Then I can work him obstacle and see how he does. I'm sure he will do even better than ever. One of my American horse friends is going to come over next Thursday, of next week, to see the bridle and see Dansy on the jumps. I do love to jump, and he does too, when he is happy!! (Now he is very happy!!)

Also, Danseur is recovering from two serious diseases. Back in September of last year, after the summer break, I started back jumping him again. Although he is 14, he has always been healthy, and has perfect conformation for jumping. He has a nice, well-rounded style over the bars. Anyway, he was so lazy and slow, and just wasn't jumping well, and I started to want to sell him. Well, by November, he wasn't doing any better, and was so lazy! A friend of mine here suggested that I have some blood work done, just in case! Well, I did, and by December, found out that he had LYME DISEASE and PYROPLASMOSIS..... WOW!! He had two things, and then received two treatments for these two maladies. So in Jan, Feb & March I just worked him slowly back in shape, lots of long rides in the forest, etc. I didn't really try to jump with him, as I wanted him to be ready for it.

At the very end of March, I decided to try to jump with him! Well, now he is back in shape (he works about one hour per day, which is not an enormous amount, but it keeps him fairly in shape). He did so well jumping, and I was ecstatic! Now, with the BB, it will even go better, I know!! Often times he arrives at the jump slightly ahead of himself, or behind.... I mean, he either takes an extra little step just before jumping, or he jumps long... and it is very hard to stay with him over the jump! Now with the BB, I won't risk jerking his mouth with the bit if I am not completely with him!! :)

I have done the first part of the questionnaire concerning the bit. I will wait for another month after using the BB to fill out the second column. It's a great idea!

OK, well, sorry to have once again taken up so much of your time. Here is a little picture of Dansy & me, going over a bar in the beginning of a jumping class. My record with him is 4feet, 9inches. He's a pretty little chestnut, actually quite built, and has a heart of gold! A little mischievous at times, but very affectionate and a nice boy! This was taken last week, so you see the HORRIBLE bit in his mouth, but NEXT WEEK, maybe I'll send you a pic of us jumping with the BB, and I'm sure you'll actually even see a smile on his face!! :) :)

Take care, Dr. Cook, and I'll write again later and send you the questionnaire once it is all filled out!

Jeannie, Thursday, April 21, 2005:

Hello Dr. Cook!

A thousand apologies for writing you again, and bothering you, but Danseur was FANTASTIC today on the bars!!!! I took him over to the hippodrome, where we have two

jumping arenas. He did soooooo well! He was flying over the bars. Over straights and oxers, at ease, confident, having a very natural body movement, as if I weren't even on his back! He had his shoulders up and his head down, very rounded and beautiful!

Yesterday I took him out on a hack in the forest, and he had the most forward movement I have ever seen him display! He was in the turbo mode when he was trotting on the way back! I looked down and literally thought that my horse was miraculously flying!! So with that forward movement and all, I just knew that he would do well today with jumping!

So this afternoon at the hippodrome, I started with a warm-up of course, and after 10 minutes of trotting around, he had his head down, and was snorting away, his relaxed-like snorts!! :) Then I cantered a bit, to warm him up further, and he still kept his head down! He was eager to go on the bars, and didn't refuse even the colorful or scary-looking jumps, like he did to me last week with the bit! My friend who was with me, actually two of them, were both so impressed with Dansy! He was a very happy camper today, and so was I, I can tell you!!

I just HAD to tell you this wonderful news. Thank you for transforming my relationship with my favorite, four-legged friend!!! This is the beginning of a new era for us!!!

:)

Jeannie, Monday, October 03, 2005:

Hello Dr. Cook,

I hope you're doing well. I am, and enjoying the nice, fall weather here in France!

My Danseur is feeling his oats these days! I still continue to have success with the bitless bridle, and still surprise people all the time with it. He is going well, still putting his nose down once he sort of warms up and decides to yield to me (that was like pulling teeth before with the bitted bridle!!!) :) and generally everything is going well. I will, after now using the bridle for 4 or 5 months, fill out the second half of the survey, and will send it in. Been very busy lately. I actually showed the bridle to my vet today, as he happened to be at my stable, and I told him about you. He liked the bridle!

Anyway, there are two things I wanted to mention to you. Firstly, part of the stitching where the right side ring is attached to the muzzle strap is coming undone, and the piece of nylon that is sewn in there is torn out now. I don't know why this has happened. I shall have it repaired at the local sellier's... Just wanted to let you know.

Secondly, yesterday, while riding in the forest, with the fall weather and all, he got a bit excited and took the reins and sort of ran away with me for about a hundred yards or so, while trying to catch up to the mare that was in front of us!! It was the first time that I absolutely could not stop him. I wonder if there is a little trick I'm missing or something. I will read more off the web site, too. Usually I can stop him, but I guess he is getting used to the feeling of being freer (which in itself is a great thing!!) and he was just a little cheeky! I did punish him though, after I stopped him, and from then on, he behaved himself IMPECCABLY during the rest of the ride! He had better!!

Well, don't mean to bore you, but one last thing.... Would you like for me to send you a link to a short, online photo album I have made of my horse, from when he went out to pasture for his 5-week summer holiday while I went to the States to visit my mom? He had so much fun!!

Hope you are doing well, Dr. Cook!

PS Oh, I forgot to tell you, but now I lunge Danseur with the BB, and I take off the reins, and hook the lunge directly to the ring that hangs down at the place of the reins! I don't even

need the surfaix (don't know the word in English) that I had recently bought, to attach the lunge to, and I don't need elastics, or any other device! He yields when he is warmed up, finds a fantastic position, and really pushes forward, completely relaxed! It's great! Without the reins, he can put his head down as far as he wants, without danger of catching his feet in the reins dangling down, and he is not contraried in any way!

[Dr. Cook responds:

Hello Jeannie:

It was good to hear from you again. Thank you so much for such a comprehensive report, together with the completed questionnaire. I counted that Danseur and yourself had a total of 57 problems when using a bit and that 54 of these were solved with the BB after 5 months. This represents a 'cure' rate of 95% which is fantastic. Congratulations.

I think you must be the first to report that the stitching has given way on the 'O' ring at the noseband. It has even loosened the nylon strengthening that was part of our design to prevent this problem. We will keep a watch on this in case we need to further strengthen the design here, where the strain is always greatest.

As you will know, horses are herd animals. If a companion horse runs ahead, most horses will want to follow on, rather than be kept behind. You tried see-sawing the reins vigorously, I expect. What about training Danseur to obey a verbal command WHOA! Presumably, there was no option for circling? If none of these work you may have to simply sit back and enjoy the ride until Danseur is level with his 'friend.'

By all means, send me the photo album. I would very much like to see it.

Thank you for the note about lunging. Worth passing on.

Life is good and my wife and I are as well as we can expect for our age and probably a good deal better than we deserve. The bridles are spreading far and wide. We now have an agent in Russia and Norway. An Italian user has translated our manual and many articles, so we are becoming multi-lingual as well as international.

Thanks again for writing. Continue to enjoy Danseur ... he sounds like a character.

Kind regards, Bob]

Jeannie, Saturday, October 08, 2005:

Hi Dr. Cook,

I was happy to have your email. Now I have just sent you a link to my online album of Danseur. It only takes a few minutes, and I hope you like it. Obviously, Danseur is the little chestnut with the blue head collar on! What do you think? Everyone tells me he is a bit heavy, but you know, it's his morphology pretty much. He will never be skinny. He is just plain built!!

Thanks for your words of wisdom and advice. Yes, he was particularly happy that day he ran off with me, and I tried everything I knew of to stop him, short of standing on my head in the saddle, but to no avail! LOL But then I just had no choice but to sit back and enjoy the ride!! LOL

I'm glad that you and your wife are well, and that the bridle is spreading across the world. I have a friend here in Maisons-Laffitte who owns a stable (where she takes in boarders) and she competes, etc., and she recently ordered a BB after seeing mine. She knows Danseur a bit, and she sees the difference in him now. He is so much better now! A year ago I totally wanted to sell, or get rid of my horse. Now, thanks to you, we are an excellent couple again, and I am really sorry that I had entertained those thoughts. He is a new horse, and I have a

deeper understanding of him. We communicate much better now, all in all!!! (I guess actually, I am his new PERSON!!) :)

Oh, one thing I do (and I wanted your opinion on this) is that when I brush him now, before & after riding, I use the SHIATSU method, which takes into account the energy flowing along his meridians, instead of brushing in the traditional manner (in the direction the hairs grow). Have you heard much about this? It involves of course the yin & yang.... Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not into FAR OUT things, but I do think that this medicine definitely has its place, and I don't put it down. Our western medicine, as you know, is far from being the only authority in the world!! So anyway, I figure IT CAN'T HURT, so I do brush him in the way a girlfriend of mine, who studies all that with the German school, showed me. Very interesting. The ends of the meridians are stimulated as well, and apparently it gets all the energy flowing in the proper sense. OK, well,.... for what it's worth!!

:)

Take care now, and enjoy the autumn weather!

Jeannie, Wednesday, October 12, 2005:

Hi!

Just to let you know how happy I was yesterday. I went over to the hippodrome in ML to work Dansy, alone, and without a coach or friend with me. My confidence wasn't up super high, being alone, etc. but I figured that at least I would work him on the flat, and perhaps jump a tiny little bit. (often on Tuesdays & Fridays I take him over to the jumping area)

After a few minutes warm-up, when I saw how nicely relaxed he was, head down, great forward motion, snorting and all like he does when he is happy.... I thought to myself, OK, I'll jump just a little!

I put a cross (maybe about 70cm) up, and then a small oxer. I warmed up with trotting over the cross a few times, then cantering over. Of course, he had on wings!!

I was so thankful for the bitless bridle! He loves it! Then I did the oxer, and PIECE OF CAKE! So we did it a bit more, then I raised the oxer to IM10... He loved it! He flew over the jump! Since he's starting to get a bit furry with the cooler weather, he was all sweaty, but after a few minutes, I got off him, and RAISED THE OXER again! I set it at IM25 (not too wide though, I must admit). Well, I got back on, and told him that if he did it well, we could leave!

We went back around, to do the jump. Well, he wanted to do it, but the height surprised him so much (he hasn't jumped bars like that in years) (not on a regular basis) that he sort of fizzled out in front of the bar. It's funny, but we are so close now, that I swear he communicated to me that he WANTED to do it, but the height had surprised him!! :) (Do I sound like Mrs. Pumphries of "All Creatures Great and Small," by James Herriot??) :) So I then told him again that if he did it well, we would go! I did not beat him or yell at him for the refusal...

So we went back around, and he FLEW over the jump! He was such a good boy, and after that, we went directly out of the exit, towards the stable!

You can imagine how happy I was! Thanks to you!

You don't have to reply to this, as I know that you are busy, and sorry to take up your time, but I did want to let you know! I'll have a big smile on my face all day now!!!! Thanks to your wonderful invention!

:)

Christie, Monday, April 18, 2005:

Dear Dr. Cook,

I have two of your bridles and have written before about the great results I have experienced with your bridles. I rode a new horse that would be considered "green broke" for the first time since acquiring her this past weekend with the bitless bridle. Her trainer said she was very hard to handle and would need some sort of huge metal sort of bit. I rode her for two hours on the trail, over water, with other horses she'd never seen before and had a great ride. No problems whatsoever.

That just reinforces my opinion of NO BITS!

Sarina, Tuesday, April 12, 2005:

Hi Dr. Cook,

I wrote to you a couple of months ago about a horse named Boomer that was headshy and shaking his head in the bitless. You said to give it a chance, and you were right. About two weeks later he was wearing his bitless without problem. He was still shy if I reached for his head, but once I petted him and he saw it didn't hurt, he'd bring his head down. A couple of weeks after that and he was totally cured, he's not headshy at all. I never worked with him on it either, I just would try and pat him every once in a while to see how it was going. So now both my boys are bitless and happy, and the snaffle I tried to put on Boomer that one time is being auctioned on Ebay!

I am going to put the boys in a dressage schooling show. The trainer is going to ask the judge if they can use their bitless, she's really impressed with how it works and how well it works on the boys. However, if they say no, I don't want to put them in a bit just for a show. So I was wondering if you had any suggestions about how to get around the rules on that. Or I could just go in bitless for the score, it doesn't matter to me. I read on the site that you were looking for people to write letters in for support of the bitless in dressage shows, I'd sure like to send letters. I think their rules regarding this are pretty stupid.

Thank you for helping my horses!

Robyn, 10 Apr 2005:

I bought a Bitless Bridle a few months ago because my horse, Amber, hated jumping (she would refuse any jump or even trotting pole). Now she LOVES to jump! Today I tried stopping Amber at the fence facing the jump to see what she would do, and I could barely hold her back! She took off at a near gallop and jumped it with glee. It made me so happy to see how much Amber had changed. If I had tried that in a snaffle she wouldn't take a step towards the jump, and if I tried to make her she would buck and rear until I gave up.

Now my friend is interested in buying a Bitless Bridle for her 2 ponies. One of them was a rescue pony and is now being trained. She is quite head shy, so trying to put a bit in her mouth is really difficult. The other pony is just young and loves to refuse jumps and counterflex away from the rail. The 2 ponies are different sizes (one of them wears a cob size halter and the other wears a pony), and my friend would like to buy one Bitless Bridle that she can adjust for the two of them. I was trying to find some information on the website for her, but I couldn't find any on sizes and prices for pony-sized bridles.

PS: I always get compliments on how nice the leather is on my Bitless Bridle, and I just laugh because I bought a Beta kind! I love the Beta because it is so easy to clean, and it is strong, but apparently it looks just like leather!

Robyn, Saturday, April 16, 2005 11:03 PM

I know I've emailed a lot but i just keep thinking of more to say/ask. I'm devastated that I have to put a bit back in my horse's mouth for show season now that I know all of the bad effects it can have on a horse. I was wondering if a very gentle bit, such as a "Happy Mouth" (made of rubber), would have such harsh effects as a metal bit. I would like to show my horse in a gentle bit, and then put the Bitless Bridle back on for schooling.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Hello Robyn:

No bit is needed for show jumping but if you are planning to enter dressage competitions a bit is required. The way to get round this is to compete HC. This way you get scored but cannot be awarded a ribbon, even though your score may well be the best.

The other way round the regulation is to place a simple (cheek piece only, with no noseband or brow band) bitted bridle (the smallest bridoon would be my choice) over the top of the BB and have two pairs of reins. You can't be forced to actually use the bitted rein and yet you are complying with regulations.

Let me know how you get on.

Best wishes, Bob Sunday, April 17, 2005]

Adam Adrian Crown, Maitre d'Armes, www.classicalfencing.com, Sunday, April 10, 2005:

Dear Dr. Cook,

I must preface this by saying that I am by no means an expert horseman, nor am I involved in high-performance equestrian competition of any kind. My principle activities are trail-riding, for the simple pleasure of being with my horse, and cavalry exercises with lance and sword, which he seems to enjoy as much as I do. My partner, by the way, is a 21-year old arabian gelding, who has retained many of his stallion traits, has keen perception and wit and loves to work out. He was "cowboy-ed" around I think, before we met.

I have always had a gut-level dislike for the bit in principle. Having had relationships based on pain, force and fear, I knew I didn't want that kind of relationship to my horse. But I was too ignorant to question the "traditional wisdom", too new to know what questions to ask. Nevertheless, I soon abandoned the bit for the rope halter/bridle popular among "natural" horsemen. I then tried the crossover bitless bridle. Here is what I found:

My horse responds as well to the reins with the crossover as he ever did with the bit. In fact, I had to lighten my hand substantially to avoid over-steering, so I'd say he steers MORE easily with the crossover. I sometimes ride with two hands, but generally with one, and he neck reins just as well with the crossover.

While he often resisted taking the bit, he quite willingly puts his head down and toward the crossover bridle as if he'd put it on all by himself if he could.

In all, I am completely satisfied with the crossover and --especially after reading your book -- I cannot imagine putting any bit into any horse's mouth ever again. I doubt there are many folks using the same computer they used 5 or 10 years ago, but they're still using the same bits we used a couple THOUSAND years ago? And the only rationale for doing it is

"because that's the way we've always done it" a reason I consider to be the mark of an idiot. When asked the other day why I don't ride with a bit, I replied "Same reason I don't handcuff my dates."

I hope these comments will be useful. My sincere thanks for your research and for developing the crossover.

Les, Pasadena, California, Friday, April 08, 2005:

Subject: Bridle Materials

Hello:

We have used your bitless bridle for three years and it is fantastic. Our horse always hated having a bit in his mouth, and after he found he could evade the bit by tucking his head between his front legs he became unridable. The bitless bridle stopped this behavior within 5 minutes. People can't believe I ride a 17 hand thoroughbred on trails, jumping, etc. without using a bit.

Julie, Friday, April 08, 2005:

Dear Dr Cook,

Reading something on your website the other appeared strangely familiar to me until I reached the end. It was my words!

I can now see where I was going wrong back then but also how far me and that little horse has come as a partnership.

The residual pain ceased, so much so I'd even forgotten he used to be so "heady" and I spent so much time being reared with, bashed in the face and being napped with into bushes, ditches, etc!.

Secondly, I ditched the pacifier and he became quiet in his mouth, no chomping or grinding. I guess I thought the correct thing to do was to satisfy an oral urge that in fact was probably stress.

Me and my little horse are no greats, but when we finally got our act together and got out to do a little long distance work with a view to affiliating to do more advanced classes, he did me proud.

We've galloped flat out on a beach which meets a road at the end and experienced no control or steering problems. Something you don't do if you have any doubts about stopping! It is as you say, a bit is not required.

He'll never be the easiest horse to ride in that he's so sensitive and reacts negatively and strongly to physical discomfort. That suits me fine as it's better to know so that so I can do something about it.

I'm in the last couple of months of study finishing a short dissertation on the history of biting from the Eneolithic period to date.

The inspiration for this and my fascination with biting was finding out about the bitless bridle so a big thank you from both of us for your innovation and work.

Ellen, Wednesday, April 06, 2005:

My younger daughter, Lea, won our two-year-old PMU in the equinesite.com essay contest, under-18-division, two years ago. The farm where my two daughters took riding

lessons had said that if their daughter or our Lea won, we would raise the foal together as a "farm project." Well, Lea won, and all of a sudden the farm family was no longer interested. What were we going to do, tell Lea that Spearmint would have to go somewhere else? So we took her anyway (what did we know?!). We moved Spearmint to a wonderful farm that has other PMU's. We work with two trainers, we read a lot, and we get tons of support from that rescue that brought Spearmint and 95 other foals down from Canada that year. It's been quite an adventure.

Spearmint is progressing well, and it seemed time to expose her to some tack. We watched one of our trainers and our riding instructor put a bit in Spearmint's mouth (two separate times). Knowing Spearmint's personality, we were already thinking about the Bitless (which we heard about on our e-group) for her. The trainers said, "She'll get used to it." But my daughters and I watched Spearmint craning her neck and opening her mouth as wide as she could trying to get it out and we thought, "Maybe, but right now she's asking us to take this uncomfortable thing out of her mouth." So we ordered the Bitless Bridle.

Today we put it on Spearmint, with our very skeptical trainer. Wow. Spearmint was 100% comfortable, just as if she had only her halter on (and we had adjusted it, as you said, with the one flat finger and proper noseband position). We set it up to use for driving with the surcingle, and she was perfect. Turned left, turned right, trotted, stopped on a dime, all with light cues. We went all over the farm, and out in the road. My 15-year-old daughter, Shira, the best rider among us, said it was awesome to see how Spearmint's eyes were softer and her head more relaxed than the horses Shira rides with a bit, and she said it was amazing that you can actually see how being pushed instead of pulled is much more in line with the natural responses of a horse.

I can't predict how the Bitless Bridle will work when (if!!) anyone ever gets on Spearmint, but we (especially Spearmint) are SO pleased to find a bridle that keeps our horse happy, is in tune with her physiological needs, and promotes good communication between horse and human. THANK YOU!

Danielle (and Sports Bar), Thu, 31 Mar 2005:

Dr. Cook,

I've used my Bitless Bridle on my horse about 4 times now since purchasing it (I need to ride more!).

First of all, as soon as I opened the box, I was very pleased with the workmanship and feel of the bridle. While I really wanted the chestnut leather, I opted for the Beta version due to its lower price. Even so, I never thought I'd pay so much for a bridle, but it's been well worth it. I like the Beta material - it looks like leather, even when you're close to it. And it will certainly be the least work-intensive to care for.

My horse is a young Standardbred, retired from his harness racing career due to an injury. No doubt from his time on the track with constant severe pressure on the bit, he was a pretty hard-headed horse as far as steering and stopping. I tried several different bits, trying to find one that he seemed to like. In all cases, he both chewed on the bit, and hung his head low while riding. He was also a very head-shy horse. I never thought these things could be attributable to the bit, I just knew he didn't like it.

Things are already quite different. When I first used the bridle, I adjusted it too loosely, as many people probably do, and left a scuff mark on his cheek. However, he was immediately easy to control. In fact, I've been amazed at how easy he is to control, without a bit or curb

chain. I've got the adjustment right now, and am leaving no marks on his face after riding. I'm confident that I can take him out onto the trails this summer (which I know will be new and nerve-wracking to him), and I'll be able to control him.

In addition to being easier to control, he no longer hangs his head down while riding. At all. That's just amazing to me. He seems happier to work now. Even my husband, observing from the ground, said that he seems happier with this bridle. He's also becoming less head-shy each time I visit him, which also pleases me immensely. We have been able to now start working on his "pleasure horse" gaits in earnest, instead of worrying about having the correct tack. He's doing an awesome job compared to when I had him bitted. At this point, I feel that it would be cruel to ever put a bit on this horse again, and when I can buy a cart and start driving him, I'll be coming to you for that bridle, as well.

Thank you so much! I'm just amazed at the number of issues this bridle seems to be fixing. It would be unfortunate if your company ever ceases business, but if that happens please let me know in advance, so I can buy a spare bridle to have in case something happens to mine. It's really too bad that more people do not realize the benefits of going bitless.

A small story from the other day: I was riding in the ring, and talking to another rider about how I hoped to collect my horse's canter some day. She pointed out that the bit she had on her mare had helped quite a bit with that, because it brought the horse's head in. (Of course it did, it was shanked and had a curb chain.) Then she suddenly noticed that I had no bit at all, and expressed amazement at the control I'd had. She had just assumed that I had a bit of some kind on him. I didn't say anything else, but I'm confident that we'll collect the canter just fine with the bitless bridle.

Thank you!

Danielle (and Sports Bar), Saturday, July 02, 2005:

Dr. Cook,

I just wanted to send you a follow-up note, to let you know that the bitless driving bridle I recently purchased is working just as well as my riding one.

Even though Sports Bar is a professional harness horse, I'm still surprised at the high level of control I have with no bit - especially driving, where you have less control and from a greater distance than while riding. I had to adjust the noseband higher than recommended, in order to get the blinders positioned correctly. Despite this, I have perfect control over him, so I'm not at all concerned about it.

He obeys the bridle so well, that even when I let the kids drive, he obediently zigged and zagged everywhere they purposefully (but mostly accidentally) told him to go. So, that pretty much cinches the fact that I will never bit my horse again.

Finally, regarding his head-shy behavior and how we seemed to be overcoming that. Now, he will jam his nose into anything I hold out to him, whether a halter or one of the bridles. He helps me put them on. He also seems to enjoy having his head stroked and held, and he will cuddle for long periods of time. I have to assume that this is because he no longer fears anything that comes towards his head, since now nothing that does ever hurts or causes discomfort.

Again, thank you so much!

Kathleen, Saturday, March 26, 2005:

Good Afternoon Dr. Cook!

I love that I get to connect with you directly! I have such a passion for this work and to share it especially with you is very motivational. I love it.

Well, let's start off with Shalimar. No learning curve with this one in the BB. Yes, removing the shoes and modified trimming did not stop either the stumbling or the crooked traveling. His hind end tracked nearly 10 inches (up to 18 inches) to the right of his front end tracks. I needed to ride with my right leg back 6 inches. Over time this created an incorrect seat as he was my only mount for periods of years. After the fourth 20 minute session in the BB he began to need less right leg. On the buckle he was straight on a true trail walk (working extended walk with extended head and neck) by six months bitless. No stumbling as well. My range of 8-18 months...his questionnaire started a year ago and then I put it down not to return to it until just recently. So his development was quick and obvious. As far as the melanomas...once the new center goes up I have another gray 1/2 Arab coming to board with us. He has thickening as well and an equine dentist advised his owner to look to a bitless alternative to steel in the future. I will be working him in a bitless as soon as I can get my hands on him this summer. I will get you his information as well for a questionnaire.

I was anxious to start Kaleigh. You should know Kaleigh was bred by Carole Coyne in Rochester and sold as a 2 or 3 year old to a woman in Mass. for quite a bit of money. This new owner invested money into training and such...never got to show her. Kaleigh became progressively dangerous and unpredictable. Kaleigh was given to a breeder here in New Paltz and bred (she was 6 or 7) then through the grape vine came to Dave and I when it became apparent that she was hard to herd manage and no trainer would take her on as her reputation grew.

She was worked briefly here in a snaffle (came with front shoes) until she ran us into a tree on a quiet trail ride. I removed the steel all around and began hand walking her in a halter and lead. Moved to the BB within a few months after ground work was perfect (all in a halter).

She is now focused and manageable in the BB....she was instant. Starting the first few 20 minute sessions, we had communication without pain and fear and she was happy. Now I am dealing with saddle fit issues and persistent bucking. She was worse in the treeless model. I am now in a wintec wide with the flatter rails down the tree and she is moving better. Best of all...I can take her to the Landsmankill Trail rides and hunter paces and she behaves and performs willingly in the BB. This is a horse no one would take down the road let alone to an organized ride.

If I were to write it would be about this horse. She is a story to hear. Her father is Erin Go Bragh a very famous event horse that retire not too long ago. He is still alive and at stud, you can read about him on the Hideaway's Farm website, just do a search. She saw many trainers...all of which suggested putting her down or just putting her out to breed. She is gorgeous and substantial, much like a small warmblood.

I have to be very careful with this horse. She still harbors great fear. I think the BB has taken her to a place she may not be mentally ready for at times. She is very afraid on organized rides when other horses come up behind her but she continues to listen through the BB. I have jumped her in the BB...even hand galloped her. She responds to the flicker of my pinky finger in it. This horse does passage without knowing it. I have phenomenal control when she is in her BB. She runs around like a lunatic in steel.

On to Myrtle...she has been ridden only twenty or so times since she arrived...she needed to grow up so I just threw her in a field and work only on the ground with her. She is this years project. She did not even know how to be a horse for pete's sake...but! She is my number one show horse for the new center. She stands 17.1 and moves like a cat when she

looks at the ground! She is plagued with all kinds of good quirks. We can see how she moves out of them this year in her BB (I have to call Carole and order her one that will fit better). This one would prove interesting as I have access to an organization called Recycled Racehorses. They have a website. I am going out for a clinic with a saddler (I manage a company called Dutchess Bridle and Saddle as well) this spring to their farm in NY. I will take with me two of my BB's and stories about the two ex-racehorses I have here and their BB's. Susan may be very interested in knowing what I know retraining these horses from the track in BB's. Another project but if she bites I will let you know.

I would love to share these stories. Give me some guidelines. I want others to know how hard Kaleigh worked at cooperating. After all she went through in steel she still had the heart to learn something new from me. She honors me each time she lowers her head into her BB. Then she does it again five feet outside the barn door when she stand still for mounting. And we walk down the driveway with my fingers wrapped around the buckle of the reins, happy to be out together. Who wouldn't want to share in her struggle? We all feel better about our own hardships after we share the load of another.

I am one of your biggest advocates. I am in my mid thirties. My job at Dutchess Bridle and Saddle puts me in direct contact with people like Courtney King and Lendon Gray. I would love to show these people that it doesn't take a double bridle to do fourth level. I can't even have conversations with them when they discuss the advantages of the kk ultra over the myler loose ring in extension work. How about the new bridles with the padded crown...well, if the bridles were not cinched to their heads we would not need to worry about nerve damage would we?! I don't know an athlete that can focus and perform in tight equipment...do you...even cyclers have to have specific sunglasses for comfort.

Kaleigh came from a highly reputable connemara farm in New Paltz that spans my reach into regional inspectors and breeders. I am very close friends with the DC of a NY based Pony Club...this is where I clinic to young people (funny Terri tells me that when I travel there, more adult show up to the meetings than all year). As a graduate of a NY based Pony Club, I have access to regional and national competitions.

My hope (like yours) is that with our new center, David and I can educate more people and demonstrate the BB to more sceptics. I need more Kaleighs and Shalimars. And they will come...when I build it. As a competitive trail rider, eventer, and dressage rider I will be able to show others how the BB goes in hand with excellent horsemanship. This as well as alternatives to shoes, rigid trees, today's idea of feeding horses, restricted turnout, "caged" stalls,(forgive me) vaccinations,...I could go on.

My horses tell me they are happy. I continue to information seek. And access to individuals like yourself make me a better advocate for the horse. You keep going...run with this...I need you to find out more so I can do my job rehabilitating these horses. If telling the stories behind horses like Kaleigh will retrain people...I will put together her case information. Just help me with some guidelines and the story is yours.

I know you say it will take time...I was at KOP this year in Penn...were you? I see a move toward innovation. People are breaking away from the standard courbette and stubborn lines...yes they have their diehards. But even courbette felt the pressure this year to innovate. Stubben will never change. Anyway, this year is a trip to Beta overseas. I am curious to see what information I can bring back. My point...I think this is as good a time as any to push for a change. I had an interesting conversation with Frank Baines at KOP about how the industry has seen drastic changes just in the past five years. Baines has been in the industry for decades.

Well, Longwinded as it is, my reply is yes. We should work on a bitless story. Let me know your thoughts. Keep asking me questions about the questionnaires. I have four adults in BB's, two babies (both will start in BB) and then 5-6 to move into the new training facility when it opens at the end of May. That is just to start. I have not networked yet and I downplay the timeline on the new center. I want to be settled before the onslaught.

Diane, Thursday, March 17, 2005:

Dear Dr. Cook and Carol,

I finally had an opportunity to ride with the Bitless Bridle and it was fantastic. I put it on my horse led him around for a few minutes and off we went. My horse has been standing around for 3 months due to all of the snow and ice but he was as calm as could be with the new Bitless Bridle and seemed to really enjoy the ride. Since then, I've told several of my friends about your product and we've even used it on one of their horses with equal success. I know for sure that 2 of my friends and fellow instructors will now be purchasing your product.

I am more excited than ever about the Bitless Bridle and I look forward to my ARIA presentation so I can continue to inform people of its benefits.

Cheryl, Tuesday, March 15, 2005:

Hi Dr. Cook,

My name is Cheryl and I have a 3 1/2 yr. old Morab (see attachment). I live in Massachusetts and have been working with Cathie Hatrick Anderson from Bobcat Farm. I purchased Adar in Nov of 04 from a breeding farm in VT, 1/2 mile from Canada (Half Moon Farm). Adar was delivered to me the beginning of December. He had spent most of his life in a herd with tame, but wild horses if that makes sense to you. He did not even know how to walk on a lead when I first took possession of my fine boy! I'm 30 years old and have owned and been riding since I was 4, however this is my first experience with a green horse. I did not want to send him off to a trainer, I wanted to be involved in his training and I wanted some who used gentle, yet firm methods.

This is how I found Cathy, it was actually on the internet with a search engine. What she has done with Adar and myself in 5 sessions is incredible. To date I have been on him 12 times and never with a bit in his mouth. Cathy actually shot a video of him. He is the first horse she has ever done a first time ride on with a bitless bridle. I really didn't want to use a bit on this one because of the hands besides mine that will eventually be tugging on the reins, which as we all know lead to that tender spot, the mouth (my two inexperienced nieces). I finally got around to ordering my boy's bridle today. I had been using Cathie's when she is there for sessions and in the meantime a double diamond rope halter with the reins attached behind the knot. Well I just wanted to say thanks for creating such a great product and when he is all tacked up with his new bridle, and new saddle (a black english endurance), with his winter coat gone I will send a picture to you. If you go to www.bobcatfarm and check out Cathie's guest book you can read more on Adar's training with the bitless bridle and Cathie's comments.

Frieda, Monday, March 14, 2005:

Dr. Cook,

I got my first bitless bridle about three years ago primarily because my older QH gelding was so stiff throughout and heavy on the forehand during dressage lessons. He had been abused before I bought him and it took a couple of years to gain his confidence. Even then, however, he just couldn't seem to relax when ridden and no matter what my dressage instructor did, this horse could not balance properly. The bitless bridle changed this dramatically within about a week. Because my horse never seemed to mind his snaffle bit on trail rides, I didn't connect the stiffness and "boring through" the bridle during lessons to a biting problem. Since he was safe on the trails (except for being stiff and awkward) I kept thinking that more riding and instruction would eventually help. More lessons did not help--only the bitless bridle made a difference. The only problem I had with the bitless bridle is one that I wrote you about initially (my horse's wide forehead seemed to pull the cheekpieces too close to his eyes). You wrote back directly and we worked out the problem.

At any rate, I'm ordering another bridle today. I have just gotten a coming seven year old Arab who hasn't been worked with since he was started at age three. The new horse goes well in the bitless bridle and I don't intend to put metal in his mouth.

I am a Mounted Patrol member for our Sheriff's Department and the bitless bridle has gotten a lot of comment. I used the old snaffle yesterday at a training because the bitless bridle didn't get put in my trailer and people were wondering "where my bitless bridle was".

Thanks much for designing such a useful bridle--I'm sure all of our horses would thank you too if they could!

Lee and Blue, Staten Island, NY Tue, 08 Mar 2005:

Subject: Love it but wish for a draft leather headstall

I bought your bridle at the 2005 Penn. Horse World Expo. I had seen it advertised several times in Horse Illustrated and I always wanted to try it. Your sales representatives at the Expo were very helpful in describing the bridle and how it works. I must also thank the woman who sold me the bridle for getting my credit card back to me after i stupidly left the booth with out it after my purchase.

I have an 11 year old Clydesdale cross named Blue who is all clyde in the body and all race horse in the head if he is out with other horses on the trail. He's not a bad horse and i never had many control issues. I bought the bridle mainly because I kept thinking that maybe I had a better horse than I thought. That line in your ad really got to me. After riding him in the bridle I will not ever put a bit into his mouth again. My fellow barn mates were less than supportive of the idea of going bitless but after I returned from the trails I was asked by a fellow draft horse owner if she could try the bridle on her horse. I am sure as more people see the success I am having with the bridle and how much Blue likes that they will want to try it out for themselves.

My only complaint is that I REALLY wish you made the draft headstall in leather. The beta is great, but when it comes down to it I love the look and quality of leather. But leather or not, I love the bridle and I am shelving all of my bitted bridles from now on. Thank you for your innovative and wonderful product.

Linda, Tue, 8 Mar 2005:

Subject: Re: new bridle

dear dr cook: i just got a minute the other day to test the bridle out on my trail horse. this horse worries on the bit and is very spooky not to mention that he doesn't seem to pay a great deal of attention to me. i rode bareback so that i might be able to feel any uneasiness or tension before i get bucked off. much to my surprise he listened to me and was very light in the front end. he was so relaxed. my husband said that he looked like he was actually enjoying himself and he picked up on the leads without any hesitation. as soon as the weather warms i will be out of the pasture and into the woods so the real test will come when i am riding with others. i can't wait to order my mini driving bridle. i'm so glad to have found your ad in the magazine, thanks for all the research and care to help our "kids" to communicate with us. neighs and nickers...

Rosemary, Mon, 7 Mar 2005:

I am absolutely astounded! My 21 year old mare, who has always, tossed her head, chewed the bit, and run through, has done beautifully from the first time I put her new bridle on. I was afraid she wouldn't listen when I asked for a halt, but she did from the first moment. I expected a more difficult break in period like that of a new bit. I just can't tell you how relieved I am that she isn't showing signs of pain any more. You have made her a pleasure to ride again!

Kate, Sunday, March 06, 2005:

Dear Dr. Cook,

Thank you for your bridle. Well, my mare thanks you for your bridle, and I know that my two young horses will thank you as they come to know it (I have two coming into training this year, and I have been loath to "bit them" and now I don't have to!).

I have a lovely mare (low-level dressage), who has never had an issue with her bit, but when I bought your bridle (because of two youngsters to be started this year, and knowing what a hassle it is to find an acceptable bit for an individual horse, thus looking for a good alternative) I tried it on her, and she's just so happy with it. Right now, we have tons of snow and ice, so our rides are not very active, but by the end of our first ride with your bridle, she had quite caught on, and was totally "in the bridle" as we ended and had a nice bit of foam about the mouth, as if we'd had a good training session during good weather. I was floored. She's a smart girl, so I wasn't surprised that she understood the favor being granted, but that we had such an "on the bit" experience with no bit was awesome! I'm not sure why people in one of these e-writing groups was complaining about not being able to collect with this bridle! It does everything a bridle needs to do! And here was a horse with no complaint about a bit, yet was so much more ready to seek "the bit" than before! She is totally into your bridle! So I am so glad I bought one. I am getting a larger size for one of the youngsters, but I will start them both with it, and hope (am sure) to have happier horses as a result.

I did test this bridle with one, and he was catching on quickly, so I'm pretty confident that the learning curve will improve with the lack of bit. I will certainly let you know how it goes with these two young horses. I'm so excited! I'm so grateful to have a very thought-out alternative to bits or the regular bosal (no offense to bosals, but they certainly don't offer what your bridle offers).

I will write again, I'm sure, but I can't tell you how grateful I am to see the results. I'm still floored over how grateful my mare was to not have that bit. I think in her case, it was a mental thing. And, although I looked briefly over your text on bit issues, I'm not sure I recollect the mental aspect of the bit. I think now of the use of bits on slaves in the American South, and how they were used as a source of humiliation to the slave, to be bitted like an animal. Well, I know my mare is that sensitive, so I rather think that she was glad to be freed of that humiliation. I had chosen that bit very carefully as one she accepted easily, but now I've been shown that, yes, it was the least of the lot, but she'll be even better without one at all!

[Dr. Cook responds:

Hello Kate:

What a lovely way to start the week!

Thank you for passing on the good news and for the promise of further bulletins. May I add this one to our collection?

I had never heard about the practice of biting slaves. I wonder if you could give me a reference?

Yes, it is interesting that a horse that had exhibited no apparent aversion to the bit should show so much improvement when the bit is removed. But horses are evolved to hide their hurt and so signs of pain can be quite subtle. Take a look at the three-part article on the website "Fear of the Bit." The questionnaire in the third part will be of particular interest to you, as it lists over a hundred signs of bit pain and discomfort, many of which are overlooked by riders as they are not aware of the bit connection.

Kind regards, Bob]

Kate:

Dear Bob,

What a surprise to hear back so quickly. I suppose I imagined you as quite the Rock Star, and that I might get a form E in a few weeks thanking me for my e-mail!

I got to ride once more in your perfect bridle before the North Pole descended (I'm in Vermont, so we got this horrific winter storm also), and once more, Lucky let me know that this was the right move. I have just received the larger bridle I ordered for her big-headed son, Twinkle. I will start him with it on the ground tomorrow, and when the weather gets better, mount up in our little paddock and practice his baby-learning. What a complete relief it is to be freed of the worry of ever biting him. He has such a baby-mouth, the idea was just horrific to me, knowing that the wrong experiences with a bit can ruin a horse. Really, thank you, again, so much, for this clearly logical alternative. And I know that Twinkle thanks you, even though he doesn't know it yet!

And, may he never know it! I read your articles after getting your e-mail, and I will never bit a horse again. I knew I liked this, but thanks for shedding the light on so much I didn't know about bits. I really love my horses, and I can see now that even though Lucky was willing with the bit that I'd found for her, that clearly the differences when we went bitless were indicative of discomfort. Thank goodness all this time I had been working "light" as a religion, but still, to see her few issues clear up with your bridle was enough to say to me "light is not enough." I will also say that we switched to a treeless saddle recently, again bought for the youngsters, knowing what pain is caused by saddles, and the on-going issues of backs changing shape over time as horses change condition. That made a big difference too, and I knew it was crucial for Twink, as he's so young, and is not yet used to a saddle. But see, here again, I had an adjustable

saddle (the Wellup), and while Lucky was great, she was better in the treeless. I was always one to ride bareback as a kid, and later I had one horse who couldn't "hear" me with a saddle on (and had been ruined to the bit), so I rode him bareback only, so that I could use my seat and weight to let him know what I wanted. He was perfect bareback, and unfortunately, he didn't live long enough to know a treeless saddle and a bitless bridle. But, thank goodness, I found both in time for these two youngsters in my barn (and my lovely Lucky).

Ah, the slaves, and the bits, yes, I will have to find that. I know I have seen it mentioned a couple of times, but long ago, so I'll have to think about where I read it. It was definitely as a punishment. It was evil, and I think it really helped me to think about the effects of bits on horses.

Oh, and I wanted to ask you about one thing, this business of salivation. Now, fortunately for my horses, I was made acquainted with the writings and teachings of Charles de Kunffy- who taught me to be light -, and so I was taught, that the real meaning of the salivation was due to the horse truly carrying himself and the rider on the topline, that when a horse is truly longitudinally flexed, the head will "hang" and because of this position, the salivary glands are activated and some salivation will occur. I have found this to be true, as I did not use one of the bits that causes salivation, and I have never noticed that the truly longitudinally flexed horse chews at the bit. Also, I did notice that Lucky had some foaming (very slight, as usual when she works through) after using your bridle. I understand (and agree) with what you say about the business of not wanting the horse to be working and "eating" at the same time, yet, my (albeit) brief experience with your bridle seems to bear out what de Kunffy says, that there is some activation of the salivary glands due to the longitudinal flexion. I have to say, that I have seen the effects of the wonderfully expensive bits that cause salivation due to the metal they are made of, and I have seen this on plenty of horses who are not honestly longitudinally flexed. So, I would say, there is a huge difference there. As I indicated, I have never seen more than the slight sign of it, even when I know we've worked well. So I guess I'm just asking if you are aware of this type of differentiation in what is desired when it comes to salivation, or if you were just referring to the type of bits people are using to gain the artificial sort of salivation. Or, is this all just imagination, and something else is going on when a horse is longitudinally flexed? I'm curious because you have studied this so much. And while I know de Kunffy is very much an expert, I have caught him on something else, where I know that the veterinary answer is different. (Not to say what he was incorrect in treatment of the horse, but that the physical reason behind it was off.)

Yes, please use whatever I have to say to help get others to give up bits! I promise to let you know how it all gets on. Now that I am really ready for these two young fellows, I can't wait for good weather to come. I really dreaded it with the business of bits and trees, and now I just know it will all be so much easier for them. It will all be "just" training! But so much simpler for them to understand than "why are you in my mouth?" and "why is this horrible thing on my back?" Both of them have had people on them, and are not afraid of the weight, so really, it's all down to pain. Will it involve pain? And now I can say, no, it won't involve pain. It's just getting used to someone being up on the back, versus someone being on the ground. Weird, but not painful. And, in time, fun, as we do things that are new and different, but not horrible because of a bit hurting them or a saddle that doesn't fit quite right.

Oh, thank you! My horses thank you! I'm sure I sound silly, but really, I cannot thank you enough for this answer to what horses suffer from most. I really dreaded the biting process, and I knew that if I had to bit the baby-mouthed Twink, I wouldn't do it for a long time, but that was just putting off what I thought was inevitable, yet I didn't want to do it. This

is a baby I saw birthed, I was there to make sure that mom was ok, he was ok, I did the imprinting on him, I've seen him grow up, I know his nature, he's a headstrong, yet loving, young man who looks at me as his two-legged momma. Yes, logically, bit him like the cowboys, put the bridle on and give him his grain, he'll get used to it, he'll be fine, but in the end, I just didn't have the heart to do that. Whether it was some intuitive knowledge, or just the fact that every problem I've seen with a horse goes to the bit (or saddle, but even then, I knew in my heart the bit was far worse), I just couldn't do it. I couldn't even offer the bit as some yummy part of the day. I didn't know about your bridles then, but I knew that there had to be a better way. I knew I was going to get him a treeless saddle before I started him, and I knew that there had to be some good answer to the bit out there. So, thank goodness for the internet! That is how I found your bridle. I didn't order one right away, but at least I did in time. Actually, I got the treeless saddle, and said, what the heck, I may as well try out this bridle. Can you imagine? A baby brought along without either encumbrance to learning?

Last summer I took a course in equine massage, and I thought "Oh, how my horses will love this" and yes, they do love it, so now imagine, a youngster who has no bit pain, no saddle pain, and gets regular massage! Is that not a happy learner? I'm really intrigued to see how the learning curve is effected by such a combination. I'm sure you'd rather know the effect with just one variable, and although I hate to ruin your scientific study, I'm sure you'd also be interested to know what a combined effect might take.

I will be noting progress very carefully, as I would like to write something for the magazines as things go along. I have never seen any articles on either your bridle or treeless saddles in the general horse magazines. I think it's about time. They seem to have plenty of articles about bits and saddle-fitting! Seems sort of silly that they don't have the proper alternatives.

Well, I will let you know how things progress here. And I will try to find the reference for the use of bits on slaves.

PS: By all means, let your Tufts colleagues know that someone thought you were a Rock Star!

Sue, Monday, February 21, 2005:

Subject: So far...so good!

Just rec'd my Beta bridle and couldn't wait to try on my 20 yo TWH. He's a great ride...very calm and collected on trail, but I've always sensed he wasn't "happy" with TWH bits. My trainer had cautioned not to try your bridle as "TWH's must balance out of their mouths". (This theory was one I bought into from the start).

So -- what a surprise when I sat upon him with your bridle in place! I tried him in the indoor arena, for safety's sake as your brochure suggested.

Ears were forward the ENTIRE ride! Several people watched with interest and all commented on how happy he appeared. He never gaits well in an arena with his old bit, (very pacey), but today I couldn't hold him back! And...when I'd stop in the center (a former signal that work was done)...he didn't park-out, but actually seemed to want to keep on going around! A few times he did a little buck when he realized there was no metal holding him back...but they were happy bucks, I think! I'll see what happens tomorrow.

Oh -- by the way. The 2 men watching us copied down your website!!

Beth, 2/16/05:

I am a current member of both USEF and USDF. It would be a great pleasure to send forth arguments for rules changes for the bitless bridle. Just point me in the right direction and I'm off and running!!

I own a 65 stall boarding stable in Tucson. As of today, we have 27 barefoot horses that are in active use (pleasure riding or competition as opposed to broodmares or youngsters). We were "conventional" until fairly recently and are doing our best to become more "natural". For example, we don't have enough turn-out space for horses to be out 24/7, so we put the barefoot horses out in herds at night.

There are 8 horses that use the bitless bridle regularly, mostly for dressage. In May, the Tucson Dressage Club puts on a USDF/USEF recognized horse show. My little group of deviants will be making our debut barefoot and bitless!! Would you be interested in us manning a booth with information about the bitless bridle? We could even sell your book and take orders for bridles. The show generally runs 4 rings and gets riders from Phoenix, and the rest of Arizona, as well as some from New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, and occasionally California.

My trainer is an "S" dressage judge and while she is not ready to join our ranks, she is keenly observing how well my horses go bitless and how problems are being solved. If I can win her over, she will be a strong voice at the Judges' Forum and the USDF convention. Wish me luck!!

So glad to connect with you!!

Cindy, Sunday, February 13, 2005:

Have been using the bridle for about 2 weeks and am very pleased. My horse has had some body work done to correct a twisted pelvis which caused her left hind adductor muscle to be very tight. This manifested itself as an unwillingness to bear weight on that leg and an inability to bend left. We do dressage so this especially created in her lots of anger when asked to bend. The canter has been the most difficult for her and she's still not there yet but since she's unable to grab the bit, become hollow and take off she's realizing with the new bridle this type of disobedience is not an option. She's using her body much better her neck is by no means round but it's not hollow either. Within 30 minutes of using the bridle she figured it out and moved nicer than I'd ever seen her go. She spent awhile "looking" for the bit with her upper lip (comical) but then gave up? or got involved with what she was doing. I have more control with my sometimes hot horse and she's less angry about it.

In the process of working with her canter I am jumping her, something she seems to have great talent for and the bridle is fantastic for her. Sometimes she feels a bit heavy in the hand but she's not moving on the forehand or rushing so I'm chalking that up to a slightly different feel from this type of bridle. Would appreciate any ideas about the rubbing.

I was recommended to this bridle by the person who is doing her (and my) body work (rolfing). But most of his clients are dressage riders and haven't the nerve to try it (because of the AHSA rules??). I am so glad I happened upon it, this has changed my whole appreciation of my horse who I bred and love and had become quite frustrating.

Romeo, Thursday, February 03, 2005:

Subject: Did you know about this...

Painting Horse (who also wears a BB) ?

In fact, the spring issue of The Gaited Horse Magazine will feature Romeo on the cover and a 4 or 5 page layout all about him AND your advertisement appears on the very page with Romeo and I riding with the Bitless Bridle. I don't know how visible it will be, but he's wearing it and I thought it a fun coincidence.

I bought my first BB about 5 years ago for a very special mare who would literally rip the reins right out of your hands with a bit. With the BB it never happened and when I gave her away, her BB went with her. Then when I bought Romeo I quickly found that any pressure on the bit would cause him to go straight up into a rear, I didn't need him that light on the forehand. I immediately bought another BB and the rest is history. We frequently demo his BB and I know of quite a few people that have purchased one because of how relaxed and attentive the horse becomes.

Cheryl & Sam, info@paintinghorse.com, www.paintinghorse.com, Wed, 2 Feb 2005:

I bought my first BB about 5 years ago for a very special mare who would literally rip the reins right out of your hands with a bit. With the BB it never happened and when I gave her away, her BB went with her. Then when I bought Romeo I quickly found that any pressure on the bit would cause him to go straight up into a rear, I didn't need him that light on the forehand. I immediately bought another BB and the rest is history. We frequently demo his BB and I know of quite a few people that have purchased one because of how relaxed and attentive the horse becomes.

Thank you so much for being a beacon of hope for horses....iron free!

Elizabeth, Wednesday, February 02, 2005:

Dear Dr. Cook:

Hello to you!! I was looking over the user comments section of the Bitless Bridle site and saw my emails there – it brought a tear to my eye to see you did add them. Thank you so much for if anything I have experienced can encourage someone to have the courage to “buck the system” and try your Bridle it would be wonderful. I don't know if I told you but Bebe and I are now working on First Level dressage solely due to your Bridle. I haven't been able to ride these movements since prior to 1993 and my first major accident. When I was attempting to ride First Level back then it was a complete disaster from bit pain . . . then the accident that disabled my back. The first time I rode Test One this past summer I came home and cried with happiness because Bebe did it willingly even eagerly for the first time in our partnership. I am now taking lessons once a week and when we tack up he can't wait to go into the arena to work – another first - all because of the Bridle. He turned twenty-four May 2, 2005 and no one can believe how well he moves but you and I know why!!

The best reaction of all came a few weeks ago when I was in the arena with the Prix St. Georges rider in our facility schooling Bebe at the same time. She complimented me while we were working on rudimentary lengthenings. I have been working around her now for a year while she has seen us continually improving and I told her that I was doing all of this without a bit. She was visibly astounded and finally looked closely at his Bridle as we went past. She never realized he was without a bit before. I could tell she was impressed and that just about says it all doesn't it?

I also purchased the first new trailer of my life last November and we have been to the Cleveland Metropark bridle trails a few times since then. Bebe's level of excitement at being

out in public is boundless – he is beautiful and he knows it, loves to be petted by the children and just generally shows off the entire time. I was never really worried without the use of a bit even in this very public forum with all kinds of distractions. He is extremely strong on the trail as a lot of Thoroughbreds can be, despite his age, but the control with the Bitless Bridle reigned supreme. Eighteen years ago on these same trails he used to run right through my hands using at various times a full-cheek snaffle, a Dr. Bristol and a Kimberwicke snaffle with a martingale. Now we can have the fun we finally deserve!

God Bless You, Dr. Cook.

Curtis, Monday, January 31, 2005:

Subject: Re: Bridle fit

Thank you for getting back with me so quickly, I can't tell you how much I appreciate it. Are you going to be at the Pennsylvania Expo? If so I will see you there.

I don't want to return the medium it fits my other two horses. It fit Ace (Tennessee Walker) perfectly and he responded perfectly to it. Because his head is a slight bit shorter everything was in place. I still had it fully extended but that is fine. I will enclose a picture in it for the very first time. Lenny (our older Leopard Appaloosa) has always played with the bits in his mouth, enough to drive you distraction, I have a collection of rejected bits. I put it on him Saturday and it was just like your add says he was great (well as great as an older Appaloosa with an attitude can be)

I rode Knight with it on Friday on a three hour trail ride and I was more then pleased. I didn't get the head to tuck but Knight likes to make me work to get him to do anything. I think that if I get a little more length it will be perfect. I let my sister-in-law try it out on her mustang and she is sold on it. She plans on getting one from you. The medium was perfect.

Should I measure his head and send it to you to see exactly what I need? My real dilemma now is whether to get another Neoprene one or a leather one.

Looking forward to hearing from you. I really hope you are going to be in Pennsylvania.

Holly, Wednesday, January 26, 2005:

Hello Dr. Cook,

Last month my vet discovered rows of small melanoma tumors on boths sides of my grey mare's (Cricket) mouth, right where the snaffle bit would rest. He told me that I should no longer use a bit and that it could have been the cause of my horse's spooking and bolting. It seems to hurt her to examine her mouth where the tumors are. I couldn't imagine what a bit was doing to her!

I have broken bones in the last year and half due to her spooking and was ready to sell her and quit riding before I was seriously hurt. After doing a lot of searching and research, I found your website, liked what I saw and decided to take a chance on the bitless bridle. I tried out the bridle and discovered that I had far better control than I ever had with the bit. Even though she spooked a few times on the trail, she did not spin, bolt, or run away as she had so often in the past. She would not stop with a bit, but she really stops beautifully on command now and listens to me much better. I am so glad I tried your bridle and it has given me confidence and trust in my old friend as well as more years of gentle riding for both of us!

Jacki, Oak View, California Friday, January 21, 2005 12:05 PM:

To One & All:

I bought your Bitless Bridle one year ago after reading at length of its attributes, and have never used another since. The quality and workmanship are beautiful, and since day one I have never had a rub or sore spot develop-honestly! I use this bridle daily, for arena work and out on the trail, and am amazed at how relaxed and accepting of it my mare is. She was in a mild snaffle previously, but would never seem comfortable with that metal in her mouth, making faces and gnashing her teeth at times. She readily puts her head into the Bitless Bridle, stands quietly with it and responds even better than before.

Whoa does not begin with your hands nor bit, so I have never had a stopping problem with her under any circumstances: she stops with a shift in weight and my voice. The feel is wonderful and very soft, and you can easily adjust to any initial differences, especially the ones created in your head! My thoughts to anyone thinking of going bitless: why not--you have nothing to lose, and it just may work for you, too. Now, if only I could convert the multitude of bridles in my tack room that are collecting dust.

Leslie, Wednesday, January 19, 2005:

Hi Dr. Cook,

I have submitted my article on your bridle and have managed to borrow one from a friend. So far, I must say, it is brilliant and I am about to order one for myself. My spooky, star-gazing horse puts his head down nearly to the ground and ambles along. When I do ask him to do something more difficult, he is not nearly as resistant as usual. If I am using too much hand I know it immediately because he lowers his head, allowing me to ease off and get us both back on track.

A BITLESS BRIDLE TESTIMONIAL (Published in 'Horse Canada, March/April 2005 as part of an article by Leslie Smith Dow entitled, "Sore Mouth Mysteries; While there are many possible causes for sore mouths, experts agree that the bit is a common culprit."

Determined to see whether going bitless would solve my star-gazing National Show horse's high-headedness and inability to relax or stay in a frame for long, I borrowed a friend's Bitless Bridle for two months.

From the moment I put it on my 14-year-old chestnut gelding, the Bitless Bridle was a success. Perceiving no bit would go into his mouth (despite my initial fumbling with straps around his ears) Cruise Control (barn name: Beamer) instantly lowered his head and snorted happily.

Our first riding experiment was in a windy arena with flapping plastic sheeting that usually scares him silly. Though he attempted to bolt (only) on three separate occasions when I applied moderate pressure on the reins, he stopped in his tracks. Steering and flexing were accomplished without problem. Since he was already 'long and low' from the moment I mounted (most unusual) it only took a little leg to get him moving forward. A little inside rein and – presto! – my horse was in a frame. At the trot, the same thing happened. Asking for the upward transition, he rounded instead of offering his usual head-tossing, and produced a rhythmic, even trot.

Leg yielding on a circle has been a bug-bear of ours, with Beamer attempting to canter out of it or stop. Though the problem did not disappear, when using the Bitless Bridle, I found it did not escalate either. When I fell into the trap of using too much hand (instead of leg) to

control him, he would lower his head too much – signaling me to ease off. Half-halts seemed to go ‘through’ better; my horse seems to be truly listening to me, instead of worrying about the bit.

Overall, the bridle seems to help horses and riders alike; riders tend to use hands less (too much leads to over flexion), applying legs and seat instead. The horse is then free to relax and tune in to what the rider is ‘saying.’

Caveat: Due to icy and otherwise miserable weather conditions, I have not tried the Bitless Bridle while cantering or galloping, so I can’t attest to its turning or stopping power at higher speeds. I expect, though, that it will be at least as effective as my loose ring jointed snaffle. It couldn’t possibly be worse.

Samantha, 18 Jan 2005:

Dear Dr. Cook

I publish a magazine in the UK called National Equine Student - as the name suggests, it goes out to all academic and training institutions in the UK where equine-related qualifications are taught, including the vet schools (20,000 copies per issue). The mag is a combination of traditional magazine and an academic journal, with research papers.

I have also recently purchased one of your fantastic bitless bridles. I use it on both my cob mare to great effect (who was a chronic headshaker when ridden in a bit), and also on my arab mare, who I have broken in 'naturally' over the last few months, and ridden bitless from the outset.

Anyway, I was wondering if you would be prepared to let me publish an article on the theory behind the bitless bridle in the next issue (which, incidently, is a tack special, and goes to press on 4th Feb) - I read 'Pathophysiology of bit control' on your website, and thought it would be ideal.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Thanks and best wishes

Samantha Hurn

Publisher, National Equine Student

Wendy, Thursday, January 13, 2005:

Subject: Re: Bitless Bridle

Hi Bob,

I really enjoy using the bitless on my mare. She is a much happier horse when doing dressage and more comfortable and relaxed going down the trail. She is fluid and supple through transitions, and her lateral work has greatly improved. Her heart rate is slightly lower on trail and recoveries at vet checks are quicker too. Attached is a picture from this springs 100 mile FEI*** Biltmore Challenge in Asheville, North Carolina. The photo was taken by Genie Stewart-Spears and you will require her permission to reproduce it.

Thank you!

"Going bitless" is a growing trend here in Ontario. Many people ask how I like it and some Novice riders have tried it. Most Team riders reaction is that it won't be enough to keep their horses under control. I'm sure you encounter that quite often. I've found that most people who school their horses on the flat and also condition on trails are more open to the

idea. Sadly, not enough endurance riders concern themselves with training the horse to move in a balanced and responsive way.

Paul, January 01, 2005:

I recently purchased a nylon horse size Bitless Bridle, and wanted to share my observations on the bridles utility and effectiveness. I've used the bridle with three different horses this week, all of whom are used in a riding program for the disabled, and all of whom have worked in both a sidepull and a conventional curb or snaffle in the past. None are possessed of the more obvious bit related "vices", and ranged in age from 7 to 18 years of age, but all showed much greater willingness to move forward, halt and turn, within only a few minutes time in the bridle. They all seemed more relaxed and attentive, and all showed much more enthusiasm for their work than I'd seen them display before. I had no problem fitting the bridle to the three very different sized heads, one a very large Quarter Horse, another a Pony of the Americas, the other a very typical Arab. Each individual was very willing to let me take the time to adjust the bridle to their different sized heads, and the bridle proved effective and horse-friendly! The user's manual was very good at emphasizing the important points of a good fit and the means by which the bridle communicates effectively and humanely. I'm very happy with the results so far, and I think this bridle, besides being a great revelation for any riding environment or discipline, has great potential in the world of riding for the disabled. It gives an effective control to riders, who in the interest of the horses mouth, are typically restricted to less effective sidepulls due to their often unsteady seat and hands. Many thanks to you, and the other good people at The Bitless Bridle, Inc. I'm looking forward to trying the bridle with the other horses in the program, and I will keep you updated on our progress!

Janet and Zeus:

Dr. Cook, Well I have had three rides since we last spoke. It took one more ride for him to stop that head shaking. I really love the bridle! He responds much quicker on everything, turning, stopping etc. I think he really appreciates not having a bit in his mouth anymore. I have no more head shaking. The only head shaking I get is when the horseflies start bothering him. I am in South Florida and we get the horseflies real bad in the hot summer months. I am trying to sell everyone in my stable on your bridle. It is amazing!

Bitless Bridle User Comments, 2004

Phyllis:

I've been using your Bitless Bridle for well over a year now on my quarter horse. Using a bit (french link snaffle) he was very heavy on the forehead, very unsteady in his head and not wanting to consistently use his hind-end. After a very short time using the Bitless Bridle, he quit being heavy on the forehead and was much more willing to use his hind-end which made him steadier in his head. Another wonderful thing that happened was I quit riding with my hands and rode with my legs and seat. The only problem is I can't legally show in it. I was wondering if you could help, or direct me to other dressage riders that would like to try and

get your Bitless Bridle legal. Maybe if all of us worked at it, we could make a positive change. I know my horse has never been happier!!!! Thank you.

Christie, Little Grass Ranch, 1/3/04:

I just wanted to comment on your Bitless Bridles and how my horses are working with them. I hate bits and haven't used them in a long time \neq more than 8 years. I had been using just halters with clip on reins and a bosal for one of my quarter horses until I got two of the Bitless Bridles. They give me a bit more control without bothering the horses at all. I have one mare who is not yet three and was just started this summer. After working at a trainers for a month with a snaffle bit, she returned to my ranch with raw spots on her face from the hardware. I had received the bridles that week and immediately switched her to the bitless model with great results. Now she'll never have to carry a bit again. My older mare (who likes nothing) is also happy with hers. Great concept! It's ALL I will use from now on.

Thanks.

Christie, Kerrville, Texas, 5/11/04:

I have two of your Bitless Bridles and am very happy with the results. I don't use bits anyway, but have been using a bosal on some horses and a halter on others. In both cases I find that your bridle gives me just the amount of extra communication and steering that I need.

Currently I teach horsemanship for the Kerrville Independent School District in Kerrville, Texas (Club Ed) and work privately with horses. My website is www.littlegrassranch.com and on the "Horses" page I have included a reference and link to your website. In addition, I will be taping a television show next week where I am planning to demonstrate the bridle on my three-year-old filly.

If you would prefer that I not include a link to your website (I keep telling so many people about you that I feel it's just easier to have the link) I will certainly remove it.

Christie, 5/15/04:

There were a couple more things I wanted to share with you.

There was a reference to a War Bridle on your site. I learned a lot of my horsemanship from a Cherokee and a lot more from a Pawnee who both trained horses using a war bridle. The Cherokee used a loop over the lower jaw - one continuous loop simply twisted once. The Pawnee trainer used the same concept, but it went on the outside of the mouth. I've tried both and unless you hold them real tight they have a tendency to fall out/off the horse's head. The next step with the Cherokee man was to just use a little web belt around the horse's neck and to rely on leg signals and simultaneous pointing with the hand to turn the horse. Finally, it was only necessary to gently pull on the belt a little if a reinforcement was needed. Horses trained this way will also turn by pointing, or a little tap on the withers and a light pressure from the heel. I have two horses that will work this way and I'm training more to do the same.

The other thing I wanted to mention to you is that recently I started a filly who is now 14 months old. I have found that when you let horses participate in their own training that they will tell you when they are ready. In this case she kept running up under the stirrup leathers of the saddle another horse was wearing so I gave her a little one to wear that day. I also put a Bitless Bridle on her for the first time - she'd only had a halter on a few times anyway. After she was feeling comfortable with the tack (about a half hour), a friend's 7-year-old child got on the filly. We were right there beside her to snatch the kid off in case of

trouble, but there wasn't any. I was able to turn the horse from the ground, then the child was able to turn her on his own. The experience lasted about 10 minutes and every time a child comes near this horse she is running to the tack house to get her little saddle. We've tried this several times, never for more than twenty minutes with great results. I am confident that using the bridle will make starting babies much easier. Don't think I'm nuts, but the little horse is very proud of herself. You can see it in her expression that she gets it.

Christie, April 18, 2005

Dear Dr. Cook,

I have two of your bridles and have written before about the great results I have experienced with your bridles. I rode a new horse that would be considered "green broke" for the first time since acquiring her this past weekend with the bitless bridle. Her trainer said she was very hard to handle and would need some sort of huge metal sort of bit. I rode her for two hours on the trail, over water, with other horses she'd never seen before and had a great ride. No problems whatsoever.

That just reinforces my opinion of NO BITS!

Brenda, North Carolina, 1/5/04:

I have been using your bridle three weeks on a green, 4-year-old spooky Arabian/Quarterhorse who was also bit shy from abuse by a heavy handed rider. The results are amazing. I would say the shying and spooking has been reduced 70% and I have received riding results it would have taken me weeks or months to achieve with a conventional bit and bridle. The second time out with the Bitless Bridle and my horse was completely adapted to it. (The first time out he couldn't believe he didn't have a bit in his mouth and was confused as to what to do). It took me a little longer to have complete trust in the bridle as far as stopping, but I soon forgot I was riding bitless. I don't really understand how your product works as it is 100% painless and applies very little pressure at the pressure points, but I can attest that it does work beautifully. I strongly recommend it to anyone who wants a whole new way of relating to their horse.

Kim... honored and grateful customer and owner of some thankful horses.-1/19/04:

I have used your bridle for a year now. I am an English rider and eventer. I use your bridle in both show jumping and cross country. I think that your product is wonderful. I am new to the eventing world and new to English riding. I sometimes get 'left behind' and now, thanks to your bridle, my horse doesn't suffer for my mistakes. I just started my daughter using your bridle and her pony thanks you. Every time I am at a show I always get a question or two about my bridle. Most times it is the judges and they are amazed how nice the horse responds to the bridle. Thank you for this wonderful product.

The following eBay item is a little different from the usual advertising blurb and seems worth recording...

Item Description:

The Dr. Cook Bitless Bridle. This Bitless Bridle is the headstall only. I purchase them without the reins as I find the reins a little too long for my students (my opinion only). This unique crosspull action allows you to very effectively and humanely control your horse. For more info on these bridles, see www.bitlessbridle.com

This bridle is the black beta version (not leather). I use the beta versions and they do not cause my horses any chaffing. The upkeep for these bridles is easier than my leather Bitless Bridles. To clean it just rinse it off with warm water and a cloth or sponge and hang dry. I use the Bitless Bridles with all my horses in my lesson programs. My dressage and jumping horses can be used by beginner riders without fear of their sensitive mouths being ruined. I teach my green western horses how to neck rein in these bridles. I find my horses more responsive to ride and my students learn quickly that they do not need a bit to ride horses in a controlled manner.

This is an extra headstall I do not need so I am selling it. The beta headstalls sell for \$83 new (without reins), \$140 for the headstall and reins on Dr. Cook's website. NO RESERVE in this auction!! Please email with any questions prior to bidding. Winning bidder please contact me within 48 hours of auction end and payment must be received within 7 days of auction end. Winning bidder pre-pays S+H within the USA for this as-is item. Insurance extra but suggested. Good luck and please see my other auctions!

An early correspondence with Ysabelle Dean in Australia, who later in the year became our first Bitless Bridle Associate Clinician in Australia (visit www.strasserhoofcareaustralia.com and click on the Australian Equine Arts button at the bottom of the Home Page)

Ysabelle, 1/9/04:

I have finally ordered that bitless for my daughter's pony. The child is so impatient for it to arrive that she is checking the post office box every day in great excitement. She's been such a pain about it that yesterday I had to let her use mine on Kara. The fit is not too bad, perhaps a little loose in the noseband.

This mare was a real doozy in terms of problems - physical and emotional. She has a parrot mouth, a bony lump in an awkward position on her chin, and has apparently suffered a cracked poll at some stage. And that's just her head! We have sorted most of her pain issues out over the last three years, and discarding the bit is the final hurdle. I have meant to do it for so long, but realize in retrospect that deep down I was concerned that the mare might react badly in the first instance - fear of the unknown, fear of more pain. Which she did, a little - but that's okay. Lindsey is extremely competent and gentle in the saddle, and I was right there on the ground, and we managed to talk KARA through it, and I guess the bitless spoke for itself in terms of pain issues anyway.

She is still suspicious and a bit worried, but we ended on a good note, she was perfectly relaxed afterwards and I don't anticipate much negativity from her today. I am just anxious not to do anything to lose the trust she has now for us, and she was not to know, at least initially, that this new bridle was not going to hurt her. This mare was a rearer and a bolter, after all, and it is my 11 year old child on top. In the past I have had many occasions to wonder if giving her such a "problem" pony to retrain was such a smart move. But she has done extremely well with her, and the pony, who used to be a switched off emotional wreck, adores her now and follows her everywhere. Sometimes it almost looks to me as if Kara is mothering Lindsey, watching out for her. Probably just a fancy, but the body language is amazing at times.

Anyway, the plunge has been made and now we can follow through. I'll get Lindsey to write you a report when we have her properly fitting new bridle and she's had a chance to put in some serious work with it. In the meantime I attach a photo taken about a year ago.

The pony has come a long way since even then, and hopefully now she will come on even further. From the little I have read of MITM, I don't think I could ride in a bit now anymore than I could put shoes on my horses again.

Ysabelle, 1/19/04:

Lindsey's pony has continued to improve in the bitless, and Lindsey is delighted. So is the pony from what I can see. She is no longer afraid of it. Lindsey says she is quieter, more confident and less prone to rush her jumps or go into her big bone-jarring trot rather than a more collected trot or a canter strike-off. I myself have noted that she looks extremely soft through the spine and is less prone to set her underneck muscles at faster speeds. I had her teeth done last week, and the dentist said despite her shocking parrot mouth her teeth were very sound, and another part of her was likely to wear out first. This is good news as the rest of her has proved extremely resilient to liver and terrible feet problems.

Krissy & Chylo, February 2004:

I wrote you about 2 years ago on your Bitless Bridle. I've been meaning to write again and give you an update!!

As I've told you, BEFORE the BB CHYLO was a lawn ornament, now, she is my partner!

Last year, I decided to do the MSPCA'S Horses Helping Horses 12 mile trail ride with her! Mind you, we do go trail riding, but this was in the company of 50 OTHER horses we have never been around. Chylo and me started earlier than the others. I wanted to make sure she was confident and okay with the situation. YES, I rode her in HER BB. Let me tell you, I had a WONDERFUL ride!!! She was calm and relaxed, keeping an even pace when others were coming up around a bend, or trotting by her, shying at something, etc.. Her whole body was relaxed. She was ENJOYING herself and had on her happy face.

One woman stopped and inquired if that was the Bitless Bridle she had heard about. I was very proud, and said, 'YES, it's the BEST!!' She was riding her horse in a hackamore, and she said she wanted to try it. I told her she absolutely should. She said my horse looked so happy and cute in it!! After we finished the ride, Chylo was still 'fresh', and so calm, alert, just plain 'ol happy. The best part was, she drank from her water bucket with her bridle on. I didn't have to fuss, like some others did, with taking off her bridle to drink, worrying about putting a halter on her, she was just happy and content!

Now, on to a personal note. I want to thank you for giving me my dream horse. It WOULDN'T have been possible without your invention. She and I are partners now. There is NOTHING we can't do. We are truly ONE when we are together. All my old bridles have been sold - out with the old thinking, and in with the new. I know, I will never use anything but the BB (I just purchased another one to go with her western saddle!).

Our time around the barrels have increased, her strides are longer, she moves freely! People have mentioned about the stopping power of the BB ... it's FANTASTIC. You just have to remember that you don't just stop with the bridle, you stop with your seat, weight, and body.

Thank you Dr. Cook, I wish I had written sooner, but I've been out enjoying my horse!!

Deb, 2/10/04. American Spirit Farm, Massachusetts:

I am writing this letter to strongly recommend Dr. Cook's Bitless Bridles. I have had my first Bitless Bridle for over 3 years now. My first bridle on my mustang was a traditional bitted bridle. One day I wasn't paying attention when I was taking out the bit from my mustang who was still green and she threw her head, smacked the bit into her teeth and that was the beginning of my introduction to a Bitless Bridle. We could not stop her from running backwards and throwing her head every time we tried to take a bit out after that. I finally decided that there had to be a way around putting a bit in her mouth but I did not want to use a hackamore on her either. She's a tremendously smart mare and can figure a way around most things so I didn't know where we would go next.

A good friend of mine had her vet recommend Dr. Cook's Bitless Bridle for her Appaloosa who has a deformity in his windpipe making him incapable of riding with a bit. She swore to me that if I tried the bitless, I'd never use a bit again. I didn't believe her until I saw the difference in her horse REO and I was hooked. I bought the Bitless Bridle that day and tried it out on my green mustang mare.

Oddly enough, when I started riding with the Bitless Bridle, more positive results came in ways I never would have expected. She began to get excited to be ridden and would prance her whole way out from barn to the ring. Her balance immediately improved on circles and when bending. She immediately began to carry her head lower and travel from her hindquarters. She traveled in a more forward manner. She had been very inconsistent when trotting with a bit in her mouth but when we changed to the bitless she would trot with energy and consistency. Her steering and ability to stop were just as good if not better than when we worked with a bit. People that saw us ride together had a difficult time believing that my mare had not been trained in dressage for more than 3 months. She was bending at the pole (naturally), balanced and happily doing more advanced moves without use of a bit or any outside aids such as side reins, martingales or tie downs. I was a believer and continued to work with her in a Bitless Bridle and have been riding with it for the past 3 years. I know that it personally improved the lightness in my hands when riding.

However, the best thing the Bitless Bridle did is it totally changed the way I thought about riding and training my horses as well as how I taught with them. My riding methods and teaching methods changed as I tried to learn even more about biomechanics of horse and rider. My horse and I excelled thanks to this bridle.

About 6 months ago, I was asked to teach lessons at a separate farm than my own. I noticed that all the horses were either high-headed or difficult to make more forward in a lesson. The first thing I realized was that the rider's hands were heavy and inconsistent on the horse. With a bit in their mouths they chose not to move or they pulled up their heads to try to avoid the pressure of the bit. The following day I brought a Bitless Bridle with me to the other farm. I got quite a bit of resistance from both the owner of the farm and my own students. They feared they would have no control over the horses and no ability to stop. (I convinced them that it was worth a try since the horses didn't ride out when asked anyway and I would be the first person up on the horses so I could demonstrate the bridle.) Each horse, in turn, went into frame, moved forward beautifully and seemed so much more willing to please and work with myself and my students. From that day, my students all rode in my Bitless Bridles for both dressage and western. When I left a short time ago, several people chose to buy the Bitless Bridles from Dr. Cook.

When training my horses and teaching lessons at my own farm, I exclusively use the Bitless Bridle. We use the bitless when we ride and teach dressage, hunter/jumper and western. I got rid of all of my bits since there is no use for them at my farm. Dr. Cook has made me a believer and I send all of the horses I train to their new homes with a Bitless Bridle. I feel it is well worth the cost of the bridle to buy one for each individual horse and send it home with a new owner. (Then there are no excuses why they cannot use it.)

Thank you so much for opening my eyes and making a tremendous difference in myself, my horses and my students!

Please feel free to contact me by email or phone to discuss the Bitless Bridles or to see them utilized at my farm.

Thank you.

Nancy, Columbus, NC:

I love my new bridle and so does my horse. His canter is suddenly amazingly light, and the canter-walk transitions that we have been struggling with for weeks are now effortless.

Please add my name to the petition to have your bridle declared legal for competition. I event at the Novice level, and show First Level dressage. Thank you.

PS I am about to trade my biothane in for leather. I love this bridle. Yesterday was our first day using it, and I happened to have a dressage lesson. My horse was worried about it for a few minutes, then he gave a couple of giant "sighs" and settled down to work. My trainer, who is an FEI judge, could easily see the change in him. Said he seemed much happier about his face, and his canter was lovely.

Irmgard:

I like to support your quest to change regulations within the Equine Federation that show horses be allowed to compete in Bitless Bridles. I would even like to take this a bit further and urge the Equine Federation to promote the use of Bitless Bridles to all their members & clubs, especially those teaching the new generation of horse lovers/owners. A piece of steel in a horse's mouth can be a cruel tool in almost any hand, but the most softest. Inexperienced riders should be greatly discouraged from using such a harsh instrument. (After studying your research this should be a logical step for any association that's concerned with the welfare of the horse.)

Irmgard, Waterville, Nova Scotia, B0P Canada 2/24/04:

I am very grateful for your research into that subject and the ultimate development of this most sensible piece of equipment. The Bitless Bridle has done everything for my two horses (and a few other horses whose owners followed suit) that it promised. I am using my BB almost all the time. The only time a bit is still used when demanded in competition. Dressage is one of those disciplines where they demand a bitted bridle. Which bit do you recommend as the LEAST invasive, the LEAST damaging, the MOST EASILY accepted by the horse for those non-avoidable occasions. Your answer will be very much appreciated (by my horses).

[Dr. Cook responds:

I suppose the answer to the above question is that almost any bit would, in my opinion, be acceptable on the firm understanding that an attached pair of light reins remain slack at all times. - Bob]

Wendy, Canadian Endurance Team, 2/24/04:

Subject: Best bridle in the world!!!

Well like it or not you've got yourself a new spokesperson for your bridle!!!

I received my bridle today and tried it on my seasoned Endurance horse "FLIRT" as well as my 4yr. old just recently-started gelding. I've always raced Flirt in a hackamore and ride at home with just a biothane noseband. She is extremely well trained in dressage and we do some very advanced maneuvers, but I've never felt her as relaxed, supple and responsive as tonight. The first thing I did when I got off each horse was to apologize for all the pain they must have been suffering through with what I was using before. My 4 yr. old dropped his head as soon as I touched the reins and immediately understood giving side to side. I can't say that happened when he first had a snaffle in his mouth!! I'm a huge advocate of natural horsemanship and both horses are very responsive with great attitudes already, so I can just imagine how this will improve our performances. After one ride I feel totally confident enough to take Flirt in a mass start race with it. I can't believe how little pressure it took to halt. I really only used my seat.

We need to spread the word in Canada about this bridle. Do you have brochures I can give out at races? I will be getting tons of questions. Nobody has seen anything like this up here. ... Its going to make me sick seeing horses fighting bits and torture devices at races and shows. It must be hard for you too. I've always said I'd be more impressed with FEI dressage if it was done with a halter instead. I'm glad my sport has no bit/bridle restrictions.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!!!

Wendy:

I will definitely offer it to other interested team riders, but it will be a while. We're buried under several feet of snow and the first Ontario race isn't until the end of April. Please go ahead and use my testimonial. I will send you a photo as soon as possible too. I initially came across your ad in the American Endurance Racing magazine "Endurance News" and checked out your website (which would make anyone want to try the bridle!).

The first ever FEI Canadian Championship 100 mile Endurance Race will be held this July near Winnipeg, Manitoba. You might want to consider donating a bridle as a prize as a very positive way of promotion to Endurance riders, or the various FEI Endurance races in the USA for that matter. That's where you'd find the top riders, and what they use everyone will copy! The only thing is that most Endurance riders like colorful, flashy (yucky) equipment or team colors.

Had my 4 yr-old out again tonight and had a good test of responsiveness/control when a deer terrified him suddenly. Easily turned him to face it and even though he was fully freaked out (crazy Arabian with tail up, snorting ... you get the picture!) he stood there, which was a nice change from his usual; bolt from what scared him, a few strides, then get even more frightened and panicky if I had accidentally bumped him with the bit to turn and stop. I can see it would be a real confidence builder for many young horses, when they don't get punished in the mouth for spooking.

I also used to gallop Thoroughbreds and had several that flipped over backwards regularly on the way to the track. I wonder how they would have done with a Bitless Bridle. Thanks again.

Wendy, Canadian Endurance Team, 4/27/04:

I'm having a fabulous time with the bridle. FLIRT has completed two races so far in it and went very well. I had just the right amount of control for the start and later on in the race I just leave the noseband loose and she's quite happy in it. I think she is moving much freer and is happier with less restriction and no pain on her head. (I will offer it to the other Team riders, but they are the ones who need training and education - not their horses! Most of them feel their horses need curb bits and martingales for control and I don't think they would benefit from the bridle. I will try though!! Anyone who rides with a lot of contact and doesn't know how to give to their horse will not be pleased with the bridle!) I met some other bitless users in Indiana at a race and last weekend who loved theirs, and at a race in Ontario I had a lot of people come over to see what I was using and ask my thoughts on it. That is very kind of you to donate a bridle to the Canadian Championship Race, thank you.

Wendy & FLIRT WITH ECSTASY, Ontario, Canada, 1/12/05:

I really enjoy using the bitless on my mare. She is a much happier horse when doing dressage and more comfortable and relaxed going down the trail. She is fluid and supple through transitions, and her lateral work has greatly improved. Her heart rate is slightly lower on trail and recoveries at vet checks are quicker too. Attached is a picture from this spring's 100 mile FEI*** Biltmore Challenge in Asheville, North Carolina. The photo was taken by Genie Stewart-Spears and you will require her permission to reproduce it.

Thank you!

PS: "Going bitless" is a growing trend here in Ontario. Many people ask how I like it and some Novice riders have tried it. Most Team riders' reaction is that it won't be enough to keep their horses under control. I'm sure you encounter that quite often. I've found that most people who school their horses on the flat and also condition on trails are more open to the idea. Sadly, not enough endurance riders concern themselves with training the horse to move in a balanced and responsive way.

From a forum at naturalhorsetrim@yahoogroups.com with kind permission:

Chris, 3/13/04:

Subject: "Metal in the Mouth"

A while back we had a thread about the Bitless Bridle. Well, I just finished reading Dr. Cook's book, and "WOW"! It had the same effect on me the Dr. Strasser's books had.

I had been using a Bitless Bridle for the past year on recommendation from my SHP. Now after reading the book, I could never go back to a bitted bridle. When you read the effects it has on the horse, physically and mentally, in all good conscience how could you subject your equine partner to such torture? There is a list of over 100 problems that result from the horse being bitted. When you read the list, I'm sure as it did me, I thought of the horses I've had and sold and the reasons why, most of them could be attributed to bit or saddle fit problems. Our equine buddies are stoic, they take what we dish out and when they hit their limit, act out. Only we don't know what they are saying.

In my two years of rehab on BUCKWHEAT I have learned so much from him and research, and reading these posts. Dr. Strasser's books got me started and Dr. Cook's book is right up there with hers. It definitely is a "must read" for anyone who owns a horse. If we care so much about our horses' health, it has to be whole body, not just feet or supplements or ala carte care. Everything must be included.

Buckwheat loves his Bitless Bridle. When we trail ride, he is calm and forward, and on the buckle. Just the slightest touch will get a response from him. He is such a joy to own and such a teacher to me and all of us, including my SHP. I strongly encourage everyone to get their hands on the book and read. Even Dr. S. uses bitless for her riding.

Bitless, shoeless, treeless and loving it!!!

Ann, Kansas:

I had written to you questioning if your bridle would create any problems for my mare with a dentigerous cyst. As you said there was none, my biggest problem was convincing the stable owners that it was safe for the beginners to ride my mare with it. Once they did they began thinking that it would be good for all the lesson horses. Hurray! That's pretty good considering the thirty years plus of only using bits!!!!

My most pleasing results was with my "spirited" 11 yr old gelding (Saddlebred/Thoroughbred) paint. He was very difficult to stop from any gait. The first time out with the Bitless Bridle was with two other companions. We all would trot back to the barn and I was able to stop RIOT (his name) while the other two kept going. His stops were comfortable and relaxed. He stayed put `til he was commanded to go. It worked over and over. I was very pleased and I'm sure he was too.

Next time out was a trail ride on an exceptional windy day (we're in Kansas). He and the other horse spooked and I thought it was going to be a major bolting for both (us riders were way off balance). However, I had RIOT under control in two steps and the young horse followed suit.

My TWH gelding thought he could strong arm me. But it only took a couple of turns and he realized that I was in the driver's seat.

The most fun has been sharing the bridle with so many of the boarders and hearing the positive feedback. Now i have to save my money to get each horse his own bridle because if I use all three horses at once then i would have to figure out who has to use a bitted bridle..... Thanks

Sue, 3/22/04:

I've used the Bitless Bridle twice since I received it last week and am ecstatic about how my horse behaves and responds. I think she realizes how fortunate she is to be "free" of the bit! She's always fought the bit, and foamed at the mouth, tipped her head, and was essentially just very hard to control. She's a very spirited Saddlebred, and if she'll respond like this, any horse will. The most skepticism I had about it was that she might not want to stop - she stops on a dime! We are much happier riding together than we ever have been. Thank you so much.

Laura, Centreville, VA, 3/23/04:

I only recently started using the Bitless Bridle. I've used it for approximately 7 out of the 8 rides I've had on my 7 year-old Paint mare since the spring thaw.

My mare was never difficult about bridling. She also didn't have any major behavioral issues. Occasionally though, she would grab hold of the bit and dive-bomb into the corner of the ring or bolt. This would usually occur when she was tired and wanting to end our working session. I would be left completely powerless. As a result, I was tensing up and not able to relax as much as I should when riding her. It was also a constant battle to get my mare to relax at her poll. Since I ride only for my own pleasure, I didn't fight her too much on this.

In the few rides I've had with the Bitless Bridle the above problems seem to have all disappeared. My mare listens to me better and hasn't once tried to dive-bomb or bolt. She is also much more relaxed and better about using her body. I can't fully express to you how pleased I am with this product. I was told in the past that my mare needed a more severe bit than the snaffle I was using. It turns out that it wasn't a more severe bit that was needed -- just no bit at all! Thanks!

Maria, Chorley, Lancashire, England, 3/27/04 :

I am just emailing to let you know what wonderful success I am having with the Bitless Bridle. I have a pure Cleveland Bay who has gaps at the back of his teeth (so a bit shouldn't make any difference so I'm told) - but after trying him in the bitless he is so much more relaxed, happy and I have more brakes!

I am so glad I went to the trouble of having one shipped over. I purchased a leather bridle - the only problem being that British Customs make a huge charge on new items. Do you have any outlets in Britain? - I know the British are a bit stuck in their ways but with the right marketing I'm sure the bridles would do well.

Cynthia, Greenwich, CT, 3/30/04:

I just wanted to tell you how much I am enjoying my Bitless Bridle. I ordered your Bitless Bridle because my horse, EMILY, would freak out every time I attempted to put the bit in her mouth. She would raise her head, back up and it would take two people to get the bit in her mouth. Needless to say I always ended up frazzled and angry. And no one wanted to ride with us because it took so long to tack up!

Thankfully, I learned about your bridle and ordered it last week. We've ridden four times so far and it has been a miracle. She took to it right away and actually lowers her head for me to put it on. What a pleasure it is to ride now.

I also wanted you to know that the first time I tried the bridle I accidentally put the noseband too high. She shook her head like crazy and I realized that it was not right. But that is the only issue we've had. My fault! Thanks again for a super product and one that has changed my life! You may use this as part of "Users Comments" if you so desire. I would be happy to include my home phone or correspond with anyone who wants to chat about your bridle before they buy.

Iris, Oxford, CT:

I appreciated the time you took to talk with me on the telephone earlier this week. I now feel confident to forge ahead with the new bridle on my own. I decided to let my trainer do her thing for these first three weeks of the season and not get into a tiff over this. When I start to ride next week, I will start in the round pen, on a quiet evening with the new bridle. I will keep you posted on our progress. Thought you might like to see a couple of photos of HOSANNA taken last year when she first came over from Germany.

Thank you again for your help and encouragement.

Iris :>), 4/15/04:

Subject: FIRST RIDE!

I wanted to tell you that I had a great first ride on HOSANNA last night! Yahoo!!!! I only rode for about 1/2 hour and everything went well. I used my new Bitless Bridle (although Diane was against it and said I'd be sorry), and it worked beautifully! I'm SO happy. I don't think Diane had it fitted correctly when she used it. As you instructed, when HOSANNA'S attention drifted I see-sawed the reins a little and she came right back to me. She held herself in perfect position all on her own. No pulling or tugging from me.

I was pretty nervous getting on b/c HOSANNA was in a real tizzy. I asked that she be in her stall and fed when I got there. Well, of course, she was still outside and had not been fed. While I was getting her ready, the barn staff started rattling grain buckets and then it was pandemonium. I hate to be in the barn when they are feeding b/c the horses all start screaming, banging hooves against the walls, crashing around their stalls, and dragging their teeth over the stall bars. I find it really intimidating.

So poor HOSANNA missed getting fed with the other horses and she was so wired about it we had to lunge her for a while before I got on. Once I did get on, though, she was great and I walked and trotted and did turns on the haunches and leg yields. I'm going to ride again tonight and then rest up my poor sore muscles over the weekend. So that's my good news! I'll keep you posted.

Iris:

HOSANNA and I have continued to do well with the Bitless Bridle. I ALWAYS use it, but my trainer, when she rides, continues to use a snaffle. HOSANNA and I even drew a small crowd one day when we were practicing. She is such a splendid mover and I had one of those diamond days where everything went right. The last 2 weeks have not seen much activity, because we've been having severe thunder storms in the evenings when I usually ride, and last week, HOSANNA had a sliver removed from her neck that required a few stitches, and our vet didn't want me to ride her.

So, this Wednesday, will be our first ride for awhile, I expect she'll be full of P&V. My husband has promised to take some digital photos of us as soon as we are back on track and I, of course, I will email some to you. A number of people have mentioned how beautiful she looks with the Bitless Bridle on and that she even seems to be happy! What a novel idea! I urge everyone to go online to check out your web site. It is a battle, though, to get people to think in a different direction and try new things. Thank you for your continued interest. I will keep in touch.

Nancy, 4/10/04:

I wrote you a few years ago when I had such great results with my mare using your bridle. I sold her last spring to a good home and am leasing at a large barn. The owner of the gelding I am leasing is graduating college and aims to be a vet. I will be using the Bitless Bridle on her gelding, RALPH, and hope that it brings a new vision to the numerous folks in the barn.

Thanks again for this bridle.

Stormy May 4/14/04:

Thanks for sending along the latest article. I've been working with USPC to get the BB allowed in all activities but so far it's still being discussed by the Dressage and Eventing committees. They will be difficult to convince since their ruling will have to go against USDF and USEA and they try to follow those as closely as possible. The BB will be allowed for the flat portion of testing in "extraordinary circumstances". I guess that's a start. It is now allowed in all pony club lessons and all of the disciplines and phases except for dressage and the dressage phase of eventing. I'm starting to see at least one or two BBs at each rally I go to.

I'm now riding my Dutch Warmblood mare in the BB you sent. She has always been the difficult one. We've been trotting and cantering for the past few days and she still has a 20-30 minute temper tantrum when I first ask her to trot but then she is good as gold. She has not tried to buck or bolt at all with the BB. With the experiences I've had, now I trust the BB more than a bit because the horses are much less reactive in scary situations than they tend to be with a bit in their mouth. It also gives much more precise control than the non-leverage jumping type hackamore and just that little needed bit of leverage with the "pulley action" through the noseband ring.

Of the people who have switched to the Bitless Bridles on my recommendation, all have been thrilled with the results, with the one exception of a little girl on a pony and the pony realized he could put his head down and yank her out of the saddle without causing himself pain. I suggested they hook up some grass reins to limit the pony's stretch but I think they went back to a kimberwick instead.

Keep up the good work.

Stormy May, Marysville, CA, 9/21/04:

I received the warmblood bridle today. Can't wait to try it on my mare! If I can ride her in it, I'm sold! I've had huge problems with her temperament ever since I got her at 6 months old, and now she's 11 and still green broke on a good day.

Terry, 4/16/04:

Got a beta Bitless Bridle on Friday and tried it out this weekend. I am riding a 4.5 year-old Egyptian Arabian colt (ACE). I began backing him this January. I am very lucky to have found a very good mannered pony that while he required a half-year of ground work before he would accept me on his back, he was very controllable with just a halter once I started to ride him. In fact I was afraid to move on to a bit as it just didn't seem necessary. I heard about your product by listening to the Rick Lamb Horse show off the Internet.

I have been riding him with a halter only and bareback so far. We do a lot of riding at liberty in the horse pen. I live on my own 80 acre farm so I get three to four rides in, each day. I do a lot of night-riding due to the fact that we live in Alberta Canada and night falls early in the

winter. Our progress has been very successful. I thought he was very good with the halter, but have to say that he is incredible with the Bitless Bridle.

I was surprised that my first try was, as explained in the documentation, a bit of a learning experience. However, once we got through the third ride we were in sync and direction changes required incredibly light feed.

I am not sure if the combination of the beta fabric and reins have created a magic combination for feedback with Ace. I am considering getting the padded leather headstall but am hesitant to change such a good combination.

Your documentation infers the leather system would give more refined control. Is this always the case? Or do you think if it works really good stick with the beta.

I love the system, and have recommended it to my wife. She will be trying it out this week on her 4-year-old colt. He is not nearly as receptive as Ace. She is currently using a Parelli Hack. I believe this (the BB) is a far more effective solution and am excited to see how he responds. She will most likely be purchasing one as I feel it will help them connect better.

Thanks for a great invention, and your compassion for horses. I never liked using a bit and never will again now that I have tried your product.

Pam, 4/19/04:

I just wanted to let you know that I used the bridle on my horse this weekend and he says "Thanks". We had such a happy time riding! He's like a different horse. I gave your business card to my trainer; her request. She'll probably be in contact with you sometime. She said she'd like to get some for the school horses. Thanks again.

Gina, 4/26/04:

Carole,

You have been very cooperative, and I have enjoyed doing business with you. Since I have gotten my horse, I have been dealing with a lot of Internet equipment. You have by far been the most responsive and willing to "get things right!" I can't tell you how refreshing it is to deal with people who stand behind their product and want customer satisfaction. Thank you again for all your help. Gina Cheney, 5/18/04:

Just wanted you to know how much I truly love the Bitless Bridle. My TWH had a problem with the whoa and pulling through the bit. He is like a different horse with the Bitless Bridle. I never knew I could enjoy riding him as much as I do now.

I have talked your bridle up at the stable where I board my horse. I have one friend who is going to order from you this week, and I have another who is at least riding in a halter now. They witnessed the change it made in PIZAZZ. I will continue to tell people how great this bridle really is. Best thing I ever did for my horse. Thanks for a wonderful product.

Jerry, Gardnerville, NV:

I really like (the bridle). I'm just getting use to it. I rode my horse without a bit for 3 years or just a rope halter and a sidepull and she did just fine. But she is really easy with your Bitless Bridle. I believe my wife will see the difference the first time she tries it. I will advise

you on the progress. I get stopped all the time and they ask me about it. I'm a good advertisement for you. I live close to lake Tahoe and ride there all the time.

Very satisfied customer

PS: I'll let you know how my wife does with the new bridle. I'm hoping it will be a lot better because she won't sell the horse so I'm stuck. I personally don't like the horse and I hope she doesn't make me a widower.

PPS: We received the new Bitless Bridle today. We just got back from a 5-hour ride so Judy's horse was really tired. So she decided to try out the new bridle. The horse took to it right away. We could see the difference in just a few minutes. Judy will ride her in the arena for a month before we take her out on a ride but I think this will work out just fine. Want to be real careful because the horse is a butthead. I knew it would make a big difference. Judy's horse kept pulling and chewing on the bit all the time.

Judy, 5/8/04:

My husband recently bought me a Bitless Bridle from you. I have a 9yr old mare that is great on the trail most of the time, but going up and down hills she would throw her head around and was hard to control. I received the bridle on a Saturday and rode her everyday in the arena for 6 days. Yesterday, Sunday, we rode out our back gate and into the pinenut mountains. She was so relaxed and for the whole ride did not throw her head. Even in the wind coming back towards home she was very relaxed. Thank you for your wonderful Bitless Bridle. I felt very confident and comfortable the whole ride.

Jerry, Gardnerville, NV, 5/11/04:

I guess my wife wrote you about how well her horse has been doing with the new Bitless Bridle. She rode her in the arena for 5 days straight and on the 6th day we rode the trails and she did fantastic. She has been a problem horse for years and here it was all the time - the bit. She never shook or waved her head around like she used to. She was more relaxed and paid attention. I would recommend anyone to at least try the Bitless Bridle. It amazed me how well she did the first time on the trail. I think we will be keeping the bridle.

Jerry, Gardnerville NV, 5/24/04:

Judy has had that Bitless Bridle for a while now and the horse just gets better. She has been riding her on trail now and she is just fine. Even when we had some motorcycles come be she remained calm. The bit was a big part of the horses problem. Once she put the Bitless Bridle on she calmed down right away. I would recommend to any one to a least try the Bitless Bridle. After you try it you won't go back.

Tracey, 5/3/04:

Greetings from England

Having recently purchased a Bitless Bridle from you, I just had to tell you how happy I am with it.

I look after an Arab mare, whose owner was very skeptical, and would have considered a more severe bit. The Arab was difficult to catch, threw her head in the air when you tried to put the bridle on, clenched her teeth, rubbed her face on anything she could find, etc. Under saddle, she was a dream - as long as you controlled her with your legs and seat. The minute

you took up the contact, she became argumentative, shook her head, and would not settle. A classic case.

When I took her on, she was in a jointed snaffle. I replaced this with a straight bar, rubber snaffle, and her ridden behavior improved, but not significantly. I decided to get rid of the bit, and firstly looked at hackamores. However, the owner of the Arab is a novice, and I was concerned that more harm than good may be done. I decided to do some research and look at the alternatives - and that's when I came across your Bitless Bridle. As soon as I saw it, I was sold. I'm not a believer in bits, but do not like the alternatives which restrict breathing or cause pain in the lower jaw. Your bridle was the answer.

It arrived last Friday, and I rode the Arab yesterday in it. What a change! She instantly became compliant, and for a horse that has a reputation for not jumping, we were doing a course of 4 foot jumps within half an hour of fitting your bridle. The local riding community have shown an interest in it, and I'm sure you will be getting more sales in England. In fact, I'm about to order another one for the Arab's companion. A little Welsh Section A who likewise is hard to catch, clenches his teeth, is stubborn, and it makes my heart bleed when I see the little girl yanking the bit right through his mouth. He constantly has his mouth open and head tucked into his chest. Not for much longer! I'm off to order his own Bitless Bridle.

A big, big thank you for delivering a product that the riding community should embrace, and that everyone should try.

Tracey, Lancashire, UK 5/13/04:

Subject: More 'Greetings from England'

Thank you for your kind reply to my email. No, I don't mind at all you passing my email address to your office associate. I'm more than happy to chat to any potential buyers of your bridle. The Arab mare that I look after has changed her character. She has gone from being difficult to catch to being so relaxed that all you now need to do is go into the field, walk up to her, and she will walk by your side to the stable - no head collar required! This improvement only took 3 days! She no longer raises her head when the bridle is put on, rubbing her face is a thing of the past, and she is a joy to ride. Her flat work has improved, and dressage movements are carried out with ease - and, as I have said previously, she is loving her jumping.

I'm pleased that her novice owner has taken to your bridle with confidence, and now understands that removing the bit does not mean removing "control". I have to say, I hate the word control. Surely a horse and rider should be a partnership where the rider asks - not tells - and the horse complies because he wants to - not because he has to. Anyway, I digress. The mare's improvement and the novice's acceptance of the bridle is a massive achievement in a very short space of time. All down to you - thank you.

The Arab's previous owner is coming to see her on Saturday. She wants to see for herself the difference in the mare, and wants to see the bridle in action. I'm hoping she'll order one for her own Thoroughbred. Fingers crossed!

Thank you for your kind words and I look forward to hearing from your office at some point. In the meantime - the greetings come from Lancashire in the North West. Us Northerners are a friendly bunch - and we probably write emails that are far too long!!!

Colleen, New Castle, Colorado, 5/7/04:

I bought my bridle last October and thought you'd like to hear from us: I and my horses - love your bridle. I have introduced it to several others: trail riders, other polocrosse players

and young horse trainers who are all keen on the concept and are very impressed with how my mares go in it. We even went foxhunting last fall sans bit and had a perfectly lady-like ride.

I have excellent control over the horses, though barely have to exercise it. Both mares are very relaxed and happy to obey. My finished horse, the 15 year old, has improved in regularity and acceptance (I notice this improvement carries over to those times I need to use a bit as well (dressage tests)) and the 3, rising 4 yo, is quite happy and easy to control. Her gaits are regular, is supple left and right, and she offers to round her back all by herself - of course, I have treeless saddles too.

I play polocrosse and use the bridle at practices all the time. I still have as much "handle" as I ever did and have the peace of mind knowing that even in my enthusiasm, or heated competition, I am not pulling her mouth (at all).

I saw a comment about neck-reining. We have no difficulty with this at all. I have yet to compete at the A-level (flat out galloping and hard stops) in it and will advise as the season wears on.

The only frustrating thing: the side rings (leather version) constantly twist out and I feel the square then delays the release of pressure because the strap cannot slide as well - perhaps round rings would be better on all models? *[Customer Service comments: This has been done]* Oh, and, I ordered the horse version (15.3 hh mares) but the nose piece is WAAAY too big.

Otherwise, a marvelous invention and I am sure horses everywhere would thank you.

Catherine, 5/7/03:

Rode him in Western last night and he did fine--and I did fine. I have a bit of anxiety when I ask him to trot in the English and I think he feels that. I am going to have my trainer work with me on the longe line to get my seat in the trot on the English saddle. Also, when Thunder doesn't want to do something, he protests. He had a bit of an attitude in the round pen last night, but when I hopped aboard, he was fine. His bridle seems to fit ok. I do check it. My friend purchased a bitless. Thanks.

[Dr. Cook responds:

I have been reviewing some of the feedback that I have received over the last two years. It is now ten months since I last heard from you, so I thought I would write to enquire how you and Thunder were getting on. I hope all is well? - Bob 8/2/04]

Catherine, 8/5/2004:

Here is my latest on Thunder. I think the last time I wrote was when he tossed me. Nothing broke, but my ribs got moved around. I feel pretty sure that it was the saddle. I had a hunter saddle on him, and I think it hurt him. I thought it fit, but apparently not.

I have not ridden him very much since the toss-off. He acted antsy every time I got on. I turned him over to a trainer last January and had him work with Thunder for Western Pleasure. I have been doing ground work with him and have started clicker training which is fun for him and me.

The trainer started Thunder back on the bit around April--a gentle O-ring. Thunder is doing fine with it. I have just started back riding him. When I ride him alone, I use the bitless. When he acts up with me, I tend to pull in his mouth, so the bitless is better for both of us. I ride him with the bit when my trainer is with me. Thunder still does some head tossing with

me, and I am not quite sure why. He is fine with the trainer. He doesn't toss much; I just let him work it out, and we move on.

Before the toss, we had started (with the bitless) riding really well together. I did a lot of visualization with him. I could think "whoa," and he would whoa. Then I decided that it was time for me to learn to canter on him. I could not get into it correctly. That is when I realized that I did not have a proper seat. A western saddle does not help to learn a correct seat. So while my trainer was riding Thunder, I hopped on my English saddle and worked with an English trainer to regain my seat. I feel pretty confident with that once again.

I have found that Thunder reads me really well. I have to remember to stay very focused with him and to visualize. When he tossed me, I considered selling him, but cried every time I thought about it. So I decided I needed to work on me and my own confidence in riding.

Thunder has an absolutely beautiful slow western pleasure trot. It is like riding in a car with great shock absorbers. So in the past year, we both have progressed. That's my latest on my Thunder--probably more than you wanted to know! :-). Thanks for following up.

Pat, 5/8/04:

I have recently purchased a bridle from Bitless Bridle Inc and your email address is on there. First I would like to say how wonderful it has been. My 'boy' is 6 years old and has been riding out for about eighteen months. As a newcomer to horse riding (I am 52) I wanted to try new ways of making the experience as wonderful for him as it is for me, hence the Bitless Bridle.

I am sure you have had many similar quotations since you started us on the trail of new ways to enjoy your horse, and for them to enjoy us. What I would like to ask is, are there any franchises or outlets in the UK? I would be very interested in starting one myself. I am convinced that this product is the best thing since sliced bread and since having been asked to demonstrate it at the local livery yards I know personally of at least 6 ladies who have or are placing an order.

Please let me know if there are any plans to market it here. I am a tutor with managerial skills. I would love to be at the forefront of such a marvelous product showcase.

Lisa, Boerne, Texas, 5/10/04:

I am interested in getting on the petition to allow the Bitless Bridle in the USEF. I have used the Bitless Bridle on my jumper for two years now and just started her back into the show ring. She is totally awesome in the Bitless Bridle. I ride all my horses now in the Bitless Bridle ... it is wonderful. I need to know what USEF's position is on the Bitless Bridle as we plan to show in it in the jumpers. Some one said that one steward had disallowed it because it was like draw reins. Personally, I don't see it at all. And seeing some of the stuff horses are being shown in, disallowing the Bitless Bridle is ridiculous.

Risa, 5/12/04:

After riding for many years in a rope halter (as I was too lazy to even put on a bridle most times) I have progressed to your Bitless Bridle. I love it! I am using clip-on rope reins. I

have found my horse to be even lighter to the weight of the reins than with a rope halter. Without a bit my mare has one less thing to disturb her and she is quite a pleasant ride!

Lisa, 5/17/04:

NORMAN was a ten-year-old TB, who had a bad reputation for getting wild; rearing and tearing off when jumping or doing anything other than a walk. I bought him despite the warnings, as my first horse with only childhood experience as a rider, just because I fell in love. They had him bound up in a martingale and twist bit, "for control" they said. I had to bail off twice in the first month, so I hired a trainer who made some progress, but kept remarking that he just got so nervous as the ride progressed. I had noticed his preoccupation with the bit, so I had his teeth floated, but no real difference noticed. I was beginning to think I had made a mistake, but his eyes were just so sweet, I couldn't believe he was just "bad".

Fate took a strange turn, and poor Norman cut his tongue almost off on a nail. In order not to lose all of the training so far, I bought your product since he couldn't wear a bit for 8 weeks. Nervously, I got on him with the bitless, and behold a miracle! He was a perfect angel. Normans tongue healed beautifully, and all of his bad behavior completely disappeared. Additionally, He no longer ran from me in the pasture, but trots to me. He offers his head into it like a dog wanting to go for a walk. It has been 3 months now. He is a perfect gentleman, and has no desire to "take off". Bless his heart, he was just misunderstood for 10 years.

Thanks for the innovation.

PS: Bob, you know, silly me, I hadn't read your user comments and, well, what I had to say is simply redundant!!! Really is amazing that there are still bits in this world. Everyone says the exact same thing, over & over, and over again! So, I will add that I love it that you made it in leather and that it looks like a real bridle. It was the determining factor in my original purchase, FYI.

Nicoletta, UK. 5/20/04:

We have had our bridles a while now, and I keep meaning to write and say 'thanks'. Would not like to use anything else now! Can't tell you any dramatic tales of improvements; we just have two well-mannered family ponies we take out on rides, but the bridles just seem like the right thing. Would not like to see our ponies ridden in anything else, and would not like to use any other bridle on any future horse.

Don't know of anyone else who uses them in England, but would love to see them in much more general use. Best wishes for the business, it's definitely the best piece of 'tack' we have ever bought!

Mary, Columbia College, 5/22/04:

I just received my new bridle on Thursday. I'm going to fill out the survey but I had to write and tell you that I love it! And so does my horse. I had only used the Bitted Bridle a couple of times in the last 3 months, for lessons, after reading the Centaur Reborn. I rode during that time with a Parelli halter. It was fine but I missed the finer communication you have with a bridle. The Bitless Bridle gives me all that communication and then some. My horse no longer tosses his head, as he did with the bit, moves forward with energy and in a good head

down position. I've been boarding him at a barn that uses the Strasser method for the last two years and gotten a treeless saddle. All of the above have given me a happy horse totally unlike the one from two years ago. Thank you!!

Mesonika, Caliente, CA. 5/30/04:

I have been riding in my Bitless Bridle for about 2 weeks. Wow, what a difference in my mare! I've always ridden with light, flexible hands and an independent seat, and I've used the gently shaped German Aurigan KK snaffle bit on my horses.

I've never had any complaints from any of the horses that I've started and worked under saddle until I began training my new Arab mare, and my 3 year old TWH filly which I have just started riding lightly in the round pen a month ago. These two girls strongly complained about the bit ... any bit. The Arab had a brief but cruel start prior to my buying her; she came with healing bilateral cheek lacerations 2 inches long from some wire bit. But the TWH filly is mine since birth, with no emotional/physical baggage and would not tolerate any bit at all, even just to have it hang in her mouth preliminarily. Both have dental work religiously.

The Arab now lowers her head to accept the bridle and is totally relaxed on the trail, licking her lips and swinging from her hips. She is VERY fast and still green and I have absolutely no problem with control out on the trail. Who knew??? I'm going to order one this week for my huge headed TWH filly. What a wonderful invention.

Thanks.

Kath, 5/31/04:

Thank you for such prompt postage of my bridles. Got them Friday 21st May 2004. Unfortunately my daughter's pony is poorly with the dreaded strangles, but making good recovery, therefore it will be a couple of weeks before testing Dr Cook's on TOFFEE.

I have tried bridle on Hazel (my 10yr 16hh chestnut mare ... and she's a typical chestnut mare!!). The first time was really funny as she kept putting her head down in an attempt to avoid the bit and looked really confused when there was no bit to avoid. I watched her shadow along the road, her bottom lip was really stretched out and was bobbing up and down, then she kept making popping sounds sucking her lips together.

I must comment on how funny our first trial was with the constant slapping of her lips!

Now seriously ... Please bear in mind I have only owned Hazel since Christmas 2003 (5 months).

Dr Cook's bridle for my highly fizzy mare so far has been fantastic. She is quite nappy (barn sour I think you call it). I used to ride her using a flash cavesson noseband bridle, but removed the flash as she hated it being tightened.

Hazel has always been reluctant to leave the farmyard (we had a bout of strangles when she arrived and she was stable-bound for 12 weeks with a grill stopping her from

On my 2nd trial of Dr Cook's we hacked out with another nappy horse. We decided Hazel was to lead all the way; and this would be a massive test not only for your bridle, but more importantly to me and Hazel.

Of course she was reluctant, but there was no head bobbing in an attempt to evade the bit, there was the expected nap attacks when she tried to run home, but a little flick with the reins on her shoulder was enough to get her going forward (important point - whip wop style - I never take a whip). Hazel even led the way to areas she has never been, and I always felt in

control the whole time. I'd be lying if I said I didn't have to give her the left-right head shake to make her listen, but the fact is that she DID listen.

HAZEL WILL ALWAYS FALL BEHIND A MORE EXPERIENCED HORSE. Last night I asked her to cross a bridge, which until now she would always refuse. It is very narrow and yet again I dismounted. But with encouragement; being sympathetic and patient to her anxiety SHE **CROSSED THE BRIDGE!!!!!!** My friend said that was the best bit of our ride. I disagree; it was the scariest bit!!!! I do not believe she would have walked the bridge without these factors:

ME (of course)

a horse to meet on the other side

patience

non-anger

BUT WITHOUT DOUBT - USING A BIT FORCES HER TO FEEL CONSTRICTED.

Hazel I think is claustrophobic (if horses can be). She does not like to pass narrow spaces and becomes the typical rearer! But riding with the Bitless Bridle meant she felt less restricted. She could truly lean on our relationship and trust where I was asking her to go.

Hazel also rode a controlled walk, trot, canter; and she even walked into a castle ruins courtyard to do some extra schooling (10 meter circles/turns on the forehand/haunches & leg yield etc...)

HAZEL WAS BRILLIANT!!!!

All I can add is THANK YOU!!!! THANK YOU!!!!!!

*******WE LED ALL THE WAY TOO!!*******

Laura, 6/4/04:

Subject: Showing Bitless

I have given up on riding with a bit in the schooling shows in which I hope to participate. I couldn't handle the "double" bridle of the bit and the bitless. So instead, I called the show manager and said, "I was wondering, as you allow hackamores, etc., in the western classes, could we please use a bitless in the English?" I pointed out that perhaps the bit rule for English was based simply on tradition and custom, and if that was the case, it really was neither fair nor necessary. So hopefully they will change the rules!

Laura, 11/3/04:

I still haven't made any progress on getting allowed in schooling shows with the bitless, but I'm still trying. I have, however, gotten 3 more people to try it and I think they are ordering bridles. One of them had a question, though, as to why one has more control. She asks, "Why would the horse stop easier etc. if there's no pain or pressure....it's not like the horses are trying to be nice." I apologize if this info is on your website. I haven't read it all in a while.

The other ladies who have tried the bridle say that their arms are hurting from having to hold on tighter or something. I said that in my experience, that two things happen after using the bridle consistently, and that is the rider begins to trust that she is okay without a bit and doesn't "hold onto" the horse, and also the horse realizes that he/she is not free! I certainly don't have sore arms and I use it all the time. Do you have any comments I could pass on? Thanks!

P.S. I tried the mini driving bridle and even though the noseband was too small, I drove her with it and she loved it!

Thanks for spreading the word.

I liked your advice to those who are complaining of sore shoulders. I would only add that another reason for someone having to work too hard to communicate is that they have failed to fit the bridle correctly. your comments about your experience with driving your mini. I wonder if you would like to expand on this comment a little so that I could add it to our Users' Comments on mini driving in particular. We are short of feedback on driving in general, so anything that you could add would be most helpful.

Lisa, Land O Lakes, FL, 6/5/04:

I would like information to sign up for any petition to allow the Bitless Bridle really for all competition but specifically for dressage. I just bought a beta bridle, your company was great. We switched for a large headstall with a medium noseband that they put extra holes in for me. After more than 10 years with a "fussy, uptight, bit hating mare" and after two rides with the bridle, I am amazed. She actually had nothing to fight with ... her lower lip was flopping. The skeptical trainer was so pleased.

Kathy, 6/8/04:

I bought a horse last year. The seller sent a bit along with the mare (SUSIE). I used the bit the first time I rode the mare...she reared. The second outing, the same thing occurred. She anticipated "pain" when I asked her to "whoa". I decided to use the Bitless Bridle.

With the BB Susie was delightfully surprised ... no pain. The next ride the bitless was used; again ... no pain. Susie now "dives" into her bridle and off we go.

The following item is reproduced with permission from Dr. Jessica Jahiel's NEWSLETTER:
From: Darleen

Subject: Bitless Bridle for beginner lessons

Dear Jessica:

I have been an appreciative follower (and contributor) to your newsletter for years, and have eagerly recommended it to all sincere horse-owners. As a riding instructor (and instructor training other instructors) I am responsible for the mental and physical well-being of 6-8 lesson horses giving 65 or more lessons a week, (5 instructors) mostly to "city-people" beginners who want to learn more about horses and riding. (Most of them do not have their own horses to practice on.) These adults and children all come with very rough hands and during the weeks it takes to help them with that, we end up with frustrated horses.

I heard of the Bitless Bridle a while back, but don't understand how it works, and whether it would be a safe addition to our riding facility for students until they are able to achieve quieter hands. I am an ARIA instructor and want to do the safe and correct procedures for these new riders, but I also have very great sympathy for these patient horses they ride. Would the use of a Bitless Bridle be an improvement to our tack use in beginner lessons? Once riders get good, quiet hands, we could then switch them back to the kimberwick bit we often use, which the horses seem to prefer over snaffle or others. Since our beginners and just above beginners use the same horses, the horses would stay used to both. Do you think a bit-less bridle would work? And where are they available for purchase?

Thank you for your time in considering my question.

Jessica Jahiel (6/15/04):

Hi Darleen!

Thanks for the kind words, and for the support. Both are very much appreciated.

You've touched on a subject very dear to my heart - the protection of horses during beginner lessons. School horses ridden by beginners are all candidates for sainthood. They put up with an immense amount of pulling and pushing and thumping, and do their best to keep their unbalanced riders in the saddle. It's every riding instructor's obligation to look after the horses in the lesson program, and using bridles without bits is a grand way to remove one source of pain and confusion. Beginner riders are terribly hard on horses. They don't mean to be abusive, but they grab at the reins when they feel insecure, try to balance themselves on the reins when they're learning to post, and invariably think that they are supposed to PULL on the reins to turn or stop the horse. You are absolutely right to be looking for ways to keep the horses from being made miserable whilst the riders are learning the basics of balance.

There are various forms of bridles without bits. The best and most effective one, IMO, is the Bitless Bridle (www.bitlessbridle.com). If you'll visit the website, you'll find a great deal of information about how the bridle works, how it should be adjusted, etc. It is made in various materials - Beta would, I think, be the best for a riding school - and the price for a headstall and reins is comparable to that of a reasonably good-quality conventional schooling bridle; that is, around \$140. I know that it's often possible to find good schooling bridles at lower prices, sometimes even under \$100, but with a conventional bridle you also have to figure in the cost of the bit, which adds at least another \$30-50 and so takes you right back up to the cost of a Bitless Bridle.

[Customer Service comments: Jessica's price quote is correct for the price of a Beta headstall with reins but many riders choose to use their own reins, in which case the starting investment for a Bitless Bridle is reduced to \$83]

If you want a less costly option for absolute beginners on reliable schoolies, you can remove the bit and cavesson from the schooling bridles you already own, and substitute a simple English hackamore noseband (sometimes called a jumping hackamore noseband). This is a thick, leather-covered rope noseband and flat leather chinstrap. The noseband ends (at the level of the horse's mouth or a little below) in two rings for the reins, and has two attachment points for the bridle's cheekpieces. Don't confuse this with the sort of "hackamore noseband" that is actually a small mechanical hackamore, complete with curb chain and shanks for leverage - that one doesn't belong in anyone's lesson program. The kind of hackamore noseband you want can be found in most tack catalogues, for prices that usually range between \$20 (e.g., State Line) and \$30 (e.g., Dover) depending on the quality of the leather.

By the way, the reason your horses seem to prefer a kimblewick to a snaffle is almost certainly because the snaffles you've been using are single-joint bits and thus - in the hands of less than expert riders - quite harsh. Even though a kimblewick is a curb, the shanks are so short that the action is extremely mild, and the usual mouthpiece is solid, with a port that provides some tongue room. You might consider buying a few French-link snaffles (much milder than single-joint snaffles) for the horses that are ridden in bridles with bits. Otherwise, for the horses' sakes, I would definitely continue to use the kimblewicks in preference to single-joint snaffles.

I think that rider safety is enhanced when the horses are more comfortable, and when an inept or unbalanced rider jerking the reins can't tear a horse's mouth to pieces. School horses (and other horses!) are in constant danger from novice riders who imagine that the bit is there to "control" the horse or - heaven forefend - to serve as brakes.

I commend you on your responsible attitude and on your desire to make life better for the horses in your care. If you're coming to the ARIA National Convention in October, please come up and introduce yourself. I would be delighted to discuss this matter with you in person.

HORSE-SENSE is a subscriber-supported newsletter. If you would like to help support HORSE-SENSE, please visit the website for information. Thank you!

=====

Jessica Jahiel's HORSE-SENSE Newsletter

<http://www.horse-sense.org/>

Copyright © 1996-2004. Jessica Jahiel, Holistic HorsemanshipÆ

=====

Materials from Jessica Jahiel's HORSE-SENSE Newsletter may be distributed and copied for personal, non-commercial use provided that all authorship and copyright information, including this notice, is retained. Materials may not be republished in any form without express permission of the author.

=====

Cady and Sparkles, 6/17/04:

My name is Cady and I own a spunky three-year-old Tennessee Walker/ Racking horse named SPARKLES. Before I got my bridle she was using a rubber bit and was acting really bad. She would grit her teeth and stomp. I was also having trouble with her rearing and trying to buck.

We tried different bits but nothing would help. One day I tried riding her with a halter and reins and she did good except she had some trouble stopping. Then my mom found the Bitless Bridle website and we ordered one.

I was amazed how great my horse was doing the first time I rode her with it. She seemed like a different horse. My sister and my mom also got one and their horses do great too. Every time I see a horse with a bit in its mouth I feel so bad for it, knowing all bits cause pain. I wish more people knew about the Bitless Bridles. My horse says thanks.

Christina, Denmark, 6/18/04:

This is just great. My horse is a very happy one now, and she is enjoying a ride without any bit....(she can eat as much grass she wants on the ride, and she does:-)

I like to ride in nature, and fast, sometimes. I have no problem stopping her, what so ever. She is responding very well. Every body should ride with one.

Thank you.

Tom, Houston, Texas, 6/22/04:

Subject: Success story

I spent 60 days reading and studying about The Bitless Bridle. Eight months ago we purchased a 10-year-old TB, hunter/jumper. He had all of the classic signs of experiencing bit pain. He was throwing his head, rubbing his head on his legs, trying to grab the bit, turning the canter into a gallop all on his own, a wild eyed look, difficulty in getting a relaxed slow canter or trot, difficulty in getting him to bend around the leg, refusal to relax, attempting to avoid a bend by just flexing the neck... it goes on and on. After several months of ownership he got tagged with the label "bad attitude", "stubborn", "hot" and "hard headed". He was an absolute puppy dog on the ground but that sweet disposition disappeared under saddle.

I spent a few months, before I made the decision to purchase The Bitless Bridle, doing groundwork, doing things to get him soft and supple utilizing a rope halter. This is a horse that had been asked to go in circles and jump over stuff his entire life. He was bored and tired. Once he was soft and responsive, willingly yielding his head in a rope halter, the transition to The Bitless Bridle was easy. Yesterday I put a rider on him who also had never utilized this type of bridle. The first 15 minutes the horse looked confused, was trying to figure out how to find the bit that must be in his mouth. He spent the next 15 minutes trying to figure out how to respond to this new experience. Finally, he spent the last 15 minutes relaxed, eyes soft, willingly giving slow relaxed trots and canters with no indication of being unhappy or uncomfortable.

It is funny how when I now look back on all of the "experts" responses to my suggestion that we try a Bitless Bridle with this horse. Luckily I have always been more compelled to draw reasonable conclusions based on objective information than to follow all of the "experts". The horse is happier, safer, and will be healthier. I think it is impossible to read "Metal In The Mouth" and not feel as if you are abusing a horse every time you put a bit in the horses mouth. It is amazing when I see all of the people on their "soapboxes" advocating kindness to horses, gentle training methods, while at the same time shoving steel into horses' mouths and driving nails into their feet. (Sorry, shoeless is another topic for another day.)

Thanks for the help.

Lisa, 6/22/04:

I have to say, I have had an excellent response to using your "Bitless Bridle"! This bridle works better for my horse than a bit by far. My horse learned the "trick" of tucking under the bit to avoid contact to slow down. With the Bitless Bridle, he cannot do this and responds as he should with no negative behavior!

He took to this bridle right away and I have total control of him at all times. I should tell you that I have natural horsemanship training and ride with cues and my body more than with my hands. This bridle allows my horse to pay attention to my cues and the bridle is used as a secondary measure.

I have a Tennessee Walker so direct contact is necessary for a good gait. This bridle allows this to happen and I have no problems getting him collected without a bit in his mouth!

I am extremely pleased with the results I received and have recommended this to my riding buddies who have also purchased your "Bitless Bridle" and have seen similar results. (they have a Tennessee Walker and a Paso Fino). Thank you so much for your research!

Bonnie, 6/25/04:

Positively wonderful! The thing I like best is hearing the small snort of clean deep breaths being taken at a strong walk. Awesome equipment!

I have a stubborn, barn sour gelding I am working with. He is unable to push me around without the bit, while I am using this Bitless Bridle. I am happy, and he is learning!

Thanks so much!

Alison, Anne de Prescott, Ontario, 6/28/04:

Subject: petitions for show acceptance of the BB

I bought one years ago for my spooky, headstrong, bolting Quarter/Arab cross. It was a wonder! He is dream now with a bit (for shows) or without a bit (home). His issues are gone and I use it always when starting new riders who don't have their hands yet. I will be ordering a smaller new one for my full arab, open mouth, head tosser next!

These are just so awesome and every discipline should be allowing them in competition. Why on earth not!???????? One good reason???????? Please add me to any list or all of them. I do breed shows (arab), open shows (who all usually accept them) and eventing.

Kathy, 6/30/04:

Thank you so much for putting the Bitless Bridle on the market. My horse, HEAVEN, an 11-year-old Quarter horse mix mare, has made a complete change. Before the Bitless Bridle she would rear, buck, refuse all commands and just be plain nasty to ride. In fact I did not ride her much for the last 10 months because of the way she was. I doubted that the Bitless Bridle would make much change since I have bought any and all gadgets to help her and nothing worked.

I have ridden her in the Bitless Bridle for about 2 weeks now and she is behaving like a perfect horse. No more bucking or rearing. She follows my command to walk and trot, although I have not tried canter with her yet. She goes where I want her to and she is calm the whole time. Thank you again. This has made my relationship with HEAVEN a whole lot better.

Connie, Rochester, WA, 7/8/04:

Subject: USEF Petition

Please add me to your petition -- I have used your product for nearly 5 years with great success, even on my stubborn Appy. What has been even better than any of your statements on your site is the benefit of using The Bitless Bridle by children or new riders with noisy hands. My horses have shown a great reduction in fussiness when ridden by our young pony clubbers (USPC) because the clubbers are able to learn to ride properly without "messaging in their mouths" all the time as they do when being ridden in a bit.

What makes this very frustrating is that USPC encourages all of the clubbers to start showing and rallying as early as possible, but in order to do this they have to use a bit for the shows. That is very frustrating for us as adults and the horses.

When the recognizing authority permits the use of The Bitless Bridle, I have been told that USPC will as well.

It is so frustrating to hear that "we can't judge whether the horse is 'on the bit' if there isn't one." Geez, the purpose of the tests is not for the horse to literally be on the bit, it is to

gauge whether the horse performs the movements as requested with the appropriate amount of collection (or being engaged) -- this is judged by the horse not the bit. At this time we are interested in Intro, and Training levels.

So, please add me to your petition.

Patricia, AIC, AMS 7/12/04:

We just tried your bitless bridle (beta model) on our Sel Francais mare this morning. What a difference! My daughter was exceptionally pleased with the response and transitions she received from this "very fast" mare. We are absolutely thrilled. You have professional rider Claudia Garner to thank for her knowledge of this bridle. She is a professional trainer in SC and teaches once a month at Moss Creek Riding Stable in Hilton Head Island, SC. We just ordered another one today. Could you please rush this to us? We are anxious to keep our mare happy!

Sarina, 7/15/04:

I have a bitless that I use for both my horses. Eventually I will have to get another one so they don't have to share, haha! I guess I can only ride one at a time, so it hasn't been an issue, but I wanted to let you know how well my horse is doing. He had some problems before, but it turned out to be a training issue. I got him a better trainer. He's a better horse, and even though his trainer uses a snaffle, I can use the bitless on him when I ride, and he really likes it. Before he would rear and stuff, and everyone said, "get him out of that bitless and put a harsher bit on him." Yikes. Well, he doesn't rear now, and he's still wearing his bitless, and he's a lot happier. So for those that say 'you can't control them in a bitless, they need a bit' well, that's wrong, wrong, wrong. They need a new trainer.

Jenn, 7/18/04:

Subject: I have the fervor of a convert

I just wanted to write and thank you so much for the bridle. I have been using it on my horse for four months now and we have never been happier. My horse, NIK, is a 15 year old, 17.1 hand TB, and we do low-level eventing together. I have jumped him and run him cross-country in the bridle and have never felt safer and more in tune with him. Much of the behavior you cite as symptomatic has disappeared and day-by-day he seems happier and more willing to do his work.

We have had to buck a lot of criticism from "pros" and amateurs alike, but the proof is really in the pudding and no one can fault how improved he is. I will never switch back.

The only trouble I have run into is that we are required to compete in a bit for the dressage phase and it has become very traumatic for him to go back to the bit. I would like to know what I can do to help lobby for a rule change that would allow me to compete in dressage in the bridle. And in the meantime, are there any biting options that you can suggest that would be the easiest for him to tolerate. It has become such a moral issue for me that I am seriously considering competing HC, but I have worked very hard at my sport and really, would like to be able to compete in the same field as everybody else.

Thanks you so much, again, for your research and commitment. Nik and I are forever grateful.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Thank you so much for your enthusiastic support. I hope we may add your e-mail to our fast growing collection of testimonials on the website?

This is one thing you can do for the BB. But the other thing is to allow me to add your name to a list of petitioners for a rule change. The list is growing and before long I shall submit it to the USEF with the necessary covering note. They will probably view my submission with a jaundiced eye, arguing that I simply have a commercial ax to grind. So what I would really like is for other people to submit a formal request or a rule change. Perhaps I could help by drafting a generic request for others to sign. I will think about this. One request only, so far has been submitted. This was accepted by the veterinary committee but rejected by the general committee. Perhaps this process simply has to be repeated until they get tired of the clamor. How about filing a proposal yourself?

In the meantime, I would love to see more people competing HC. This will surely draw the judges attention to the anomalous situation, as the HC competitors will be getting the highest scores. This has already happened more than once. Only recently, someone got the very highest score but no ribbon. Such an award is more honorable than any other in my opinion! Your horse would also approve, I am sure. What do you think? - Bob]

Jenn, 7/26/04:

I would be more than happy for you to add my comments to the website, sign a group petition AND send a formal request myself. I like the idea of a generic form we can all submit, thus avalanching the unsuspecting USEF with a deluge, (especially as I am not sure how to word such a letter). In the meantime I have decided to compete HC, much to the astonishment and concern of my trainers.

Please keep me posted on the request proposal.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Thank you for all the 'go-aheads' and congratulations on your decision to go HC. If people do this it is bound to have an impact. Please keep me in touch and tell me how you get scored. I will start giving some thought now to a generic proposal for a rule change.]

Ben and Jeane, 7/18/04:

I just received my Bitless Bridle last week. I have only used it once on my three-year-old mare-in training. She responded wonderfully. I love it! NO MORE BITS! She was not confused in the least by what to do and I don't consider her fully started yet. She has always stopped very well, but now she is even better. Now I need to order one for my gelding. I tried it on him and he responded well too, but I have to get him a different size. Thank you!

The following item is reproduced here by permission from Dr. Jessica Jahiel's Newsletter:

From: Kathy

Subject: Bitless Bridle and war bridle

First I want to say how wonderful your archives are. I've just finished subscribing to your newsletter.

I have been using Dr. Cook's Bitless Bridle on a number of horses for over two years now. I have been happy with the results and feel that the horses are happy with the bridle.

However, on a ride last week with a trainer, she told the instructor that works with me that the Bitless Bridle is very severe and operates like a war bridle. She said that my friend's horse would never totally relax its neck and would not be able to learn to pick up a soft feel. Do you feel Dr. Cook's bridle is another version of a war bridle?

Jessica Jahiel, 7/19/04:

Hi Kathy - thanks for the kind words!

The quick answer to your question is NO, the Bitless Bridle is certainly not another version of a war bridle - unless there is a new and very different model that Bob hasn't shown me yet. ;-)

The Bitless Bridle is a bridle without a bit. It's a horse-friendly steering device, and the first word that should come to mind when you think of the Bitless Bridle is "gentle". Like any bridle, the Bitless Bridle is meant to facilitate rider control and horse-rider communication during riding and driving. **UNLIKE** any other bridle without a bit - sidepull, mechanical hackamore, bosal, etc - the Bitless Bridle offers lateral control - something that normally requires a bit.

A war bridle, on the other hand, has nothing to do with riding or with two-way communication between horse and rider. The term "bridle" is misleading; a war bridle (AKA "gum line") is a fairly brutal restraining device. The purpose of a war bridle is to immobilize a horse that is considered to be dangerous; say a horse that **MUST** be given treatment by a vet or farrier, and that has already demonstrated its propensity to buck, rear, kick, and bite when being handled. I've seen a war bridle used by a farrier and a vet whose only other choice would have been to leave the property without giving the horse a badly-needed trimming and treatment. It's not a device that educates the horse or trains the horse or helps a rider or trainer to communicate with the horse; it's simply a way to make the horse stand still.

If we were talking about communicating with vs. restraining **HUMANS**, you could probably compare the Bitless Bridle to a telephone - something that doesn't cause pain, but enables communication. The war bridle, on the other hand, would be roughly similar to grabbing and twisting someone's ear to make them stand in one place and not attempt to move. If another person did this to you, that person could quickly teach you to stand like a statue **AS LONG AS HE HAD YOUR EAR BETWEEN HIS FINGERS**. You would **NOT** learn to stand still at other times, and you would probably be unwilling to let that person get anywhere near you, ever again, but... for as long as your ear was being held, you would stand quietly.

The only similarity I can see between the two items is that both are used on horses' heads. I think that the trainer who spoke to your instructor was either confused, ignorant, or both. You can certainly assume that she was not familiar with either item. People sometimes jump to amazing conclusions about equipment they don't understand - think of all the people who see a horse in a fly mask and ask the owner why the horse has been blindfolded! ;-)

If you'd like to see how a war bridle works, the Stableizer (a one-person twitch) is a restraint device that's basically a fancied-up war bridle. There are various ways to adjust a war bridle, but the basic elements are a thin cord and a small pulley, and the purpose is the same: to enable the handler to effectively immobilize a horse by putting pressure on a cord that runs under the horse's upper lip and lies against its gums. Pressure causes the cord to bite into the horse's gums.

I suppose it might be possible to put too much pressure on a Bitless Bridle, but only if the rider has extremely harsh, heavy hands, and is effectively water-skiing on the reins. This is something I've seen bad riders do - and I'm sure you've seen it as well - in any number of different types of bridles. It's regrettable, and in a perfect world, riders would not even be permitted to handle reins until they had already achieved good balance and an independent seat on horseback. But the reality is that the world is full of unbalanced, novice riders who hang on the reins, and under those conditions, the horse would still be better off in the Bitless Bridle than it would be in a conventional bridle, because pressure caused by leather straps acting on its poll and cheeks will be less painful than pressure from metal acting on its tongue, bars, and lips.

If a horse doesn't relax in a properly-adjusted Bitless Bridle, and continues to be tense, it's likely that one of two things is going on. One possibility: the horse does not trust the rider AT ALL and can never truly relax, regardless of the type of tack. Another possibility: the horse has sharp edges on its molars and is experiencing pain when the straps put pressure on the side of its cheeks. I have several friends who are good equine vets and dentists, and I have referred a good many horses to them for one reason or another. Quite often, a horse that gets "regular floating" from a not-very-expert veterinarian (or, heaven forbid, from an over-ambitious and over-enthusiastic barn owner) will have its lower teeth seen to every few months, and never have its upper teeth seen to AT ALL. Some people appear to have no idea just how high up the teeth GO in a horse's mouth - they imagine that the teeth stop just after the lips, and that there are no teeth in the area above the cavesson ... so of course their horses can develop horrible, flesh-lacerating sharp edges that will cut the insides of their cheeks when any pressure is applied.

As for the question of whether your friend's horse would ever be able to relax its neck and learn to pick up a soft feel, it's my experience that horses do these things very easily - it's the humans on their backs who cause them to become tense, because the HUMANS have no idea of what a "soft feel" involves. Ask yourself whether your friend's horse relaxes his neck and takes a soft feel of his bit NOW. If he doesn't, the problem may lie with his bit, or it may lie elsewhere, and whether your friend's goal is to ride the horse with a bit or without one, using the Bitless Bridle as a diagnostic tool can be the first step towards figuring out the real problem.

I expect that your friend's horse will probably react like all of the other horses I've watched when they are first put into the Bitless Bridle: there's a moment of anxiety ("This is something new!") followed by a moment of curiosity as the rider uses the reins to ask the horse to bend its neck to the left and to the right, followed immediately by a moment of visible relaxation as the horse seems to say "Oh, yes, of course! I understand this!" I've only seen one horse that didn't relax visibly and remain much more relaxed, and that one was being ridden by an extremely nervous person who was terrified that without a bit, she would "lose control" of the horse. After two steps of walk, she was so afraid that she wrapped the reins around her fists and pulled both of them as hard as she could. Her horse was NOT relaxed - having its head pulled to its chest by a tense rider couldn't possibly be comfortable, even without a bit - but at least it DID just stand there looking worried instead of rearing or falling over... both of which are reactions I've seen when a rider pulls that hard WITH a bit. Instead of believing the trainer who criticized you and your instructor, believe what you know to be true. You have two years of experience using this bridle on a number of horses. How did you know that they liked it? You watched them, rode them, noted their reactions and believed them. In this case, once again, I suggest that you believe the HORSE.

Try one of your Bitless Bridles on your friend's horse and see what happens. Horses are truthful animals. If your friend's horse makes it clear that he is relaxed and happy, believe him. If he makes it clear that he is tense and worried, believe him. If he is tense and worried all the time - if "tense and worried" describes his typical state of mind - and he doesn't relax in the Bitless Bridle, use that information as a diagnostic tool. Check his teeth (ALL the way up, please) to find out whether he could be experiencing pain. If you find sharp edges, have something done about them as soon as possible. If you find no problems in the horse's mouth, start investigating other likely causes of pain, such as the fit and position of his saddle, and the condition of his back. At the very worst, you'll be able to eliminate mouth pain as a cause of his concern, and that will allow you to focus your attention elsewhere.

Good luck, and please let me know the results. I'll be interested.

HORSE-SENSE is a subscriber-supported newsletter. If you would like to help support HORSE-SENSE, please visit the website for information. Thank you!

=====

Jessica Jahiel's HORSE-SENSE Newsletter

<http://www.horse-sense.org/>

Copyright © 1996-2004. Jessica Jahiel, Holistic Horsemanship/Æ

=====

Materials from Jessica Jahiel's HORSE-SENSE Newsletter may be distributed and copied for personal, non-commercial use provided that all authorship and copyright information, including this notice, is retained. Materials may not be republished in any form without express permission of the author.

=====

Cindy, 7/26/04:

First, let me say that I love this bridle! I'm currently training (with the help of a trainer) my 3 yr. old Morab filly. The trainer uses a full cheek snaffle bit with her and although I would like for him to use this bridle, his philosophy is that, when training a new horse, he at least wants to be using familiar tack ... so I respect his preference. However, I have been amazed that, with every new skill he teaches her with the snaffle bit, I can put the Bitless Bridle on her and get the correct response just as easily! :) In fact, she does better in some ways.

We recently purchased another mare...a 16 h, 5 yr. TW/QH. Without having any tack for her yet, my husband decided to ride bareback, but needed a bridle. So we pulled out the Bitless Bridle and within minutes, he was riding all around the boarding facility. To put this into perspective...this was the FIRST time he had ever ridden bareback, the first time riding this mare, and in fact, only the 3rd or 4th time he's ever ridden a horse. :D To have her responding so willingly to this bridle was terrific!

Thanks!

Patty, Bluffton, SC, 7/27/04:

By now, I suspect you have had numerous calls from the Hilton Head and Bluffton, SC area. After an initial failure on my part and then a retry with the assistance of my trainer, I have managed to introduce my students to the Bitless Bridle with great success. I have seen such wonderful transformations in the horses! Additionally, they (and even I) have had "light bulbs"

go off on how to ride our horses "from the authority of your seat, not your hands" -- my favorite quote by a rather famous classical dressage trainer Charles DeKunffy. Many thanks from our horses and ourselves.

Tina, 7/30/04:

I am amazed. I rescued a TB mare, we brought her home the end of May. She was a wonderful horse with no ground manners, did not respect people, and was in no way rideable for an inexperienced rider. I did not know what to do. I worked with her everyday, taking small steps. She was under weight, and full of sores from what I am not sure. When I finally tacked her up she was OK but nothing liked I had hoped. I was dumped on a couple of occasions. She walked on my feet nonstop and pushed me around a whole lot. So I got a different saddle, which helped tremendously. I figured that maybe my old saddle was pinching her. Since we did not know anything about what kind of life this horse had prior to me, I was very careful in what I did around her. I did not know how she was trained before. When I would try to ride her, (kicking was something I do not like to do) I could never get her to go if she did not want to. My trainer would tell me to kick her as hard as I could. I always felt horrible. It still did not work. Then I received my Bitless Bridle.

It was amazing I had a completely different horse. The first 5 minutes I found that she is all leg pressure controlled. Now I can get her to go anywhere, sometimes with a few nice words to reassure her but she does not fight.

The only thing I am not sure about is she will throw her head to the ground, as if to eat, I am not sure if this is a normal response, or she just does not want to do what I want her to do. I pull straight up and ask her to do something like a couple circles or figure eights. I have noticed she has done this quite a few times this last week. We got the bridle two weeks ago. So is there something I should look for or may not have tightened correctly? I keep reading the directions thinking I did not do something correctly, any information you can give me would be greatly appreciated...

Julia, 8/5/04:

Subject: First use of the bridle

I've long been interested in trying a Bitless Bridle, but only recently had a strong enough incentive: I just purchased a lovely imported Dutch Warmblood mare who for the past three years had been competing in the jumpers. I was able to afford her because she came up lame and had been laid up for 9 months. She is sound now, and I've been working her for almost three months.

The problem has been her need to rush dramatically at jumps--even small crossbars. While I can get her to approach calmly in trot much of the time, she gallops off in a minor panic afterward. In canter, she loses control and throws herself at the base of the fence, then snaps up her legs and makes it over just fine, and gallops away afterwards, leaning on the bit. I hadn't attempted a course yet, or even a line, because it feels dangerous. And although she moves beautifully, her flatwork has been marked by fussiness, inconsistent head carriage, rushing, open mouth and other issues.

So I tried my new Bitless Bridle for the first time this morning ... **TOTALLY DIFFERENT HORSE.** She was calm on the flat, no fussing, no rushing, yet held a beautiful, consistent frame--and no open mouth, of course. **AND** I felt I had total control, no problems "ho-ing" without a

bit. Her canter was totally relaxed, and for the first time we got a flying change without any rushing.

Then I trotted her over a crossbar--and she just kept trotting (up until today, she always galloped off). I went up a 4-jump gymnastic with one stride between each fence--perfect! The last time I tried that, she "bounced" the last one (yup, bounced a 22-foot gap to a 3' fence) and careened around the corner like a maniac. I cantered her over a 3' wall, and no panic, no running, no rushing, perfect control. Then I quit before I got carried away.....I'm so excited I can barely stand it. I can't wait to get back on her tomorrow; I feel so much better about her comfort level. Thanks for designing this!

[Dr. Cook responds:

Congratulations!

And thanks for sharing your excitement. I am delighted with your comments. If I may add them to our 'jumping' collection, I am sure they will encourage more riders to dispense with the problem-inciting bit. Curiously, show jumpers, as a group, have been slow to take advantage of this advance. This is doubly mystifying in view of the absence of any regulation that obliges them to use a bit.

As the next few weeks pass by, you will recognize many other improvements in your horse. Perhaps you would like to document these for both our benefits? In the hope that you will enjoy checking off one problem after another, I am attaching the third part of an article that includes a questionnaire. Read it through, perhaps keep some notes, then in a month's time enter up your findings. I think you will find this an interesting exercise.]

Julia, 8/7/04:

Happy jumping!

Just a quick update: Yesterday my mare flatted beautifully, and I compared some film of her in a bit to how she's going now--it's amazing. She used to sling froth everywhere; now nothing comes out of her mouth; her head was all over the place, now it's soft and consistent. Today we jumped our first course (except for a gymnastic line, I'd never taken her over more than one fence without stopping in between because her rushing felt so dangerous). First we did it at 2'6" to 3" and then raised the fences to 3'6" to 3'9". She was fabulous, clearly having fun, and totally under control. We still need to do a little work on quick turns for jumpers, and getting her front end up a bit after the fence, but the transformation has been awesome. We're planning on doing our first AA jumper course next month at an "A" rated show. I wonder how many questions we'll get about the bridle?

Thanks again!

Sarah, 8/5/04:

I have been having a good experience with my 8 year-old Arabian, ZAPPER and the Bitless Bridle. He was used as a hack horse and was very high headed. Initially, I did not get a nice head carriage with the Bitless Bridle, but after adjusting it, I did.

I also got a new horse, named Chilly, who had not been used for two years, and he was so fast on the longe line, trying to get away, that I was afraid to use the Bitless Bridle. After using a snaffle, the very next time I went to get him, he turned away, and each time after that. He then settled down on the longe, and I tried the Bitless Bridle. The next time getting him, he did not turn away but was eager to go to work. He has been light on the longe line, and

obedient. His head carriage is more relaxed. The only difficulty with using it on the longe is that it twists a bit and moves up towards his eye. I think I will experiment with clipping the longe to the Bitless Bridle in different ways. Chilly clearly showed me, however, what he thought of it!! Thank you for such a great product, I have ordered a beta for him so they can go out together, and I can't wait.

Sarah, 8/6/04:

Thank you. I actually used the nylon one in my dressage lesson today. The instructor was quite open to it. I thought you might want to hear how it went.

The horse is a 17 hand Holsteiner /TB cross, an ex-event horse, 15 years old, who went as high as he could in the event world, and is now a school horse at a very nice rather big barn. He knows dressage, and lateral movements, but has not done much dressage recently. He grinds his teeth, and is an overachieving, slightly anxious sort when challenged. He is girthy, and sinks when you get on him at first. But for all that, with a bit of work, he offers some nice movements.

The first thing I noticed was a slightly lower head carriage, and the instructor liked that, as she said although he isn't in as round a frame, he is using working through his back more. We noticed an absence of teeth grinding, which he usually does, and in fact there were only one or two times that he ground his teeth in the whole lesson. He did not seem to have any difficulty getting used to the Bitless Bridle. He was harder to get really round, but the instructor seemed to think it was a good thing, as we were forced to get him round in other ways, such as serpentines, spiraling in exercise, etc, and by the end of the lesson he was beautifully round. And all that with the bridle being slightly small, when the larger size comes in I think he will do wonderfully. The interesting thing is, he was much more relaxed, and did not sweat at all, even after an hour of hard work, even under the saddle!!

The instructor was impressed and she is going to look into getting one for her mare. The other thing I noticed was him really relaxing and breathing and snorting right off, which he had not done before. I was really happy to know first hand that yes, you can do dressage without a bit!

Sarah, 8/16/04:

Just a few other observations: rode again in a lesson, with the crossover straps longer this time. I had not thought it would make a difference in the height of the noseband, but in fact, it did seem to make a difference, being that the horse was really nice and round straight away. Had a wonderful lesson again with him really stretching through the back and offering some extended trot with floating moments. The instructor, who has known him since age three, said it was some of the nicest work she had seen him do, and that before today she would have said he was a horse that did not enjoy flatwork. . . thanks from BARON and myself!

Cindy, 8/10/04:

Thank you so much for answering my question! As I think you probably know through my orders, we own 2 horses...and 2 Bitless Bridles. No bitted bridles. In fact, on some discussion boards that have been asking about the Bitless Bridle, and putting forth that same "argument," I've been saying pretty much what you said here. :) I just don't feel like I have the experience to "back it up."

But here's, for me, a situation that shows why I'm using the Bitless Bridle. A few days ago, I was riding my very green Morab filly around the barn. She's been under saddle maybe 6 or 7 times...and always in a round pen or riding arena. I was riding her bareback in an open area, so she was a bit spooky about everything. In other words, I had only enough control to stop her from running rampant. :) She would turn and stop, but was very skittish.

Now, many people would say that IF I had had a bit in her mouth, I would have more control. But only to the extent that I could have caused her pain. Yes, that would have gotten her attention, but it could also have caused her to spook more! The fault was NOT in the bridle, but in the lack (so far) of training. I was also very reassured that, if I needed to really check her forward motion, that I could do so painlessly.

Now, as for the trainer, I had said, repeatedly, that she is welcome to borrow our bridles at any time. I wish that she WOULD try it...I would love to hear her opinion. For us, we're using them on an untrained filly and a 5 yr. old mare that we've had less a month. The 5 yr. old came to us with some "issues," as in, she's used to being able to go in the direction SHE wants to go in ... a habit I'm sure she would try in a bit, too. So again, we will work on the training issues without fear of inflicting pain.

Oh, one last comment (can you tell I'm "sold" on these bridles? <G>)...I LOVE the fact that I can work with my horses and there's no "mouthing," slobbering, chomping, etc. I actually think they pay BETTER attention because they're not distracted by a hunk of metal in their mouth.

Jocelyn, Sumerel Training & Therapy, 8/11/04:

We had a fantastic workshop at a farm here in VA. this past weekend. I am so glad to tell you that many children were in the class and after the workshop was over on Sunday, we had the entire group of kids riding their horses BAREBACK in BITLESS BRIDLES!!! The horses were so very happy... all of them behaved so wonderfully.... all of their so called obnoxious habits disappeared like magic... no head tossing or bucking, or gaping mouths---just happy horses with happy kids riding them.

The parents were just incredulous, and their trainer was so thrilled that she bought three Bitless Bridles. I made Dan film the whole thing, and we are going to have our video man set it to music, and show it in the booth at Expos and Clinics. The kids were so very tickled to have their horses behave so well. They had always been told to hit their horses when they exhibited behavior which was considered " bad ". It was so wonderful to talk to the kids and touch them in such a way that they understood how detrimental the bit is to horses. What a wonderful way to make a difference in the horses' lives and to shape a "new" way of thinking for the children--our future horsemen and women.

Jocelyn, Sumerel Training and Therapy, 8/13/04:

Of course you may use my recount of the wonderful experience we had with the Bitless Bridle this past weekend in our Clinic.

It was truly awe inspiring, and it just validates how so many problems with horses can be directly traced to what WE, as HUMANS, impose upon them. We recently had a gorgeous little filly born to my beloved mare, and I have promised her she will never, ever feel a bit in her mouth, a shoe on her foot, or a spur in her side. There simply is no necessity for it, and as you have proven, it is detrimental to the horse's well being, both emotionally and physically. I

ALWAYS felt that in my heart, since I was a small child awed by the magnificence and grace of the equine. I am now so proud to be associated with those who believe the same as I do.

So, yes, you may use my recount on your website, or wherever you need it. I must thank YOU for giving us the ability to make so many more people aware of what the bit is doing to their horses, and for allowing us to offer them a very humane alternative. I know how much happier my mare is since she has been in your Bitless Bridle.

As soon as we can get the video done up professionally, I promise you that we will get a copy to you.

I truly look forward to someday meeting you in person and hugging you for what you have done for so many of the wonderful creatures whom I have adored since I was a child.

In answer to a question about subtle communication with the Bitless Bridle:

[Dr. Cook responds:

Carole has asked me to respond to your interesting question.

First, let me say that I fully understand the feelings of your trainer. Similar reservations have been frequently made about the ability of the Bitless Bridle to communicate subtle messages. But with all due respect, such doubts are unfounded. Please ask your trainer, if she has any doubts, to spend a while browsing through the Users' Comments on our website. Your trainer can best refute her own argument by using the bridle herself. She will then discover, for herself, that by focusing on seat and leg (a principle that I feel sure she upholds) and using minimal 'hands' that her horses will respond very happily to the cues. She will be able to communicate the most subtle of signals, yet without the risk of triggering resistance. Metal aids are unnecessary.

Yes, the skin at the corner of the lips is more sensitive than the skin in other parts of the head. Nevertheless, when gentle pressure is applied to the skin over one half of the whole head (steering) or to the skin over the whole head (stopping) there is no shortage of signal. Recall that any part of the skin is sensitive enough to feel a fly landing. So a whole-head-hug or a half-head-nudge gives more than an ample signal.

Furthermore, with a bit in a horse's mouth, I would have to disagree that it is possible to be selective about which part of the mouth anatomy even the most skilful rider is stimulating. The bit is too crude an instrument to permit such finesse. The gentlest squeeze of the finger will put pressure on bone, tongue and skin. It is not possible to signal one without the others. And the final result as to which tissues are most affected, will in any case depend a great deal on how the horse reacts to the pressure, whether \neq for example - he retracts his tongue or places it over the bit. The hope that a gentle squeeze of the fingers is transmitted only to the corners of the lips and not to the rest of the mouth is a myth and not based on reality.

The only contraindication for using the Bitless Bridle is nothing to do with whether or not it is a sufficiently sensitive method (it undoubtedly is) but the purely practical reason that it is not possible to use it for competition work under the current FEI regulations. Dr. Jessica Jahiel has even put forward her own opinion to the effect that the only reason for using a bit is as a means of testing the rider's hands. If a rider can use a bit without upsetting any horse, under any circumstances, in any of a hundred different ways, she can claim to have 'quiet hands.' But this is rather like requiring every barber to use a cut-throat razor when an electric razor gives a perfectly good shave and is so much safer for both barber and customer.

The Bitless Bridle is a pain-free method of communication. The same cannot be said of the bit, no matter how skillfully employed. I am sure that your trainer would not choose to use a method of

communication that inflicts pain or the threat of pain when a more humane alternative is available that is actually a more effective method of communication. So please ask your trainer ... has she actually tried the bridle? And has she used it long enough, on a range of horses, to become familiar with what it has to offer both rider and horse? Even one ride may be a revelation and could change her life.

Please let me know. - Robert Cook]

Diane, Irwin, PA, 8/25/04:

I just tried the Bitless Bridle on my 21-year-old appendix quarter horse. She is a fussy mare that hates a bit as much as I do. I have a collection of snaffle bits and she would literally gag and chew on them, wrinkle her nose, pull on the reins, and over-flex. You name it, MISSY did it. I always felt like she was so concerned with the bit that she paid no attention to me.

I came across your site and thought I had nothing to lose by purchasing the bridle. Well, here are the results. The very first time she had the bridle on she was much more relaxed, walked, trotted, listened, and didn't run off. She did circles, so bending was not a problem. She turned right and left, halted when asked and even backed-up, which she would refuse to do with a bit. Her overall demeanor was much better. Her ears were forward and said she was happy. When my horse is happy, I am happy.

I know this weekend all of my friends will want to try the bridle on their horses. Thank you so much and MISSY thanks you too.

Julie, 8/26/04:

I just wanted you to know that the Bitless Bridle arrived yesterday. My husband and I put it on Gandalf and adjusted it per your instructions. It works wonderfully!

In the past three weeks, Gandalf has purposely invaded my space to the point of crossing his front legs in order to step on my foot and then, knock me over while standing on my foot. My right foot has been stepped on twice, my left foot once, and I have a bruised spine and a mild concussion. Not because he is a "bad" horse. He is just so enamored with me, I can't keep him at a decent distance, even though he is gelded (I'm positive he was gelded. I watched the surgery.) Plus, he is my only horse and I think he just wants to play, also.

But not any more!!! With just the lightest correction with his lead rope, he responded beautifully. I am so happy. I haven't tried lunging him, yet; but I'm sure that he will do much, much, better, now. He is a very smart boy. He does know voice commands very well. He is just a little unpredictable sometimes. He climbs ladders, gates, gets into his water trough, plays in the hose. He is very funny. Sometimes "funny" can hurt and the Bitless Bridle will help greatly with that.

Dr. Cook, you are an angel for sending me the Bitless Bridle. I will send you pictures, in the near future. Thank you, thank you, thank you!!!

Julie, 10/25/04:

The Bitless Bridle that you sent me, for GANDALF, is working very well. I just started him with driving lessons and he did pretty good. Much better than I expected.

Thea, Limon, CO, 9/1/04:

I received my bridle in the mail and tried it for the first time on Sunday. I have to admit to being a little nervous - it has always been drilled into me that without the bit you have no control. I even took a ruler out with me to make sure I had the bridle adjusted just as the manual advised. My horse, CIMARRON, seemed comfortable enough after I had it all done so it was time to try it out.

As is usual for him, as soon as I was in the saddle and picked up the reins, Cimarron threw up his head which is usually followed by constant chewing on the bit and almost constant fidgeting with his head. This time he paused and dropped his head. I asked him to do a couple of turns and to stop (including a verbal "whoa"). He seemed a little hesitant at first, but then relaxed and responded well. So, we hit the road.

Cimarron was mainly used as a show horse and had only one home before me so his experience with the great outdoors, especially in this area, was limited. He tends to be a bit spooky (so many new things) which I think had a lot to do with him being so uncomfortable and distracted with what was on his head. On this ride he was MUCH calmer, still a little nervous with new things - but no whirling away or feeling always ready to jump. He would tense up a bit and I would talk to him and bring his focus back on me by giving him a cue and he would just look at the spooky thing and walk right on by. It was great! He also seemed so much more comfortable and confident - his tail was very relaxed, he had a good head movement and no more constant mouthing and lipping at the reins and at the bit.

When stopping to visit with a neighbor, Cimarron starting mouthing at the reins - almost like a bad habit when bored - but nothing compared to the previous rides we had.

He has never been hard to handle and his gaits were lovely, but I could tell he was uncomfortable with the bit or hackamore I was using no matter how gentle I was. And his constant messing with his bit and reins was annoying to me. With your product, we can both enjoy our rides together.

He was a good 80% better on this last ride and I am looking forward to see how he does on our next ride. He is still responding well to cues for his gaits and responds better to his sidepass cues with this bridle.

I was a bit skeptical about the claims on your web site, but I wanted it so much to work. I am so happy to say that just by our first ride, I feel your bridle is everything it claims to be.

It is too bad that I had not heard of this product before. Have there been any articles or advertisements in equine catalogs or magazines? I don't remember seeing it. Everyone I spoke to out here had never heard of it either. Have you considered advertising or having a booth at shows like Denver's National Western Stock Show which is held in January?? I'm telling everyone I know, but every horsemen, beginner to advanced, should know about your product and what it does for the horse and rider.

Thank you again!!

Alicia, 9/1/04:

I actually just started taking dressage lessons a month and a half ago (up until this point I have always ridden exclusively in hunters) on my QH/TB gelding and did my most recent one in my Bitless Bridle. JON (my gelding) was fabulous and was doing leg yields, half passes, collecting nicely, and even had some suspension in his trot! My instructor, who is a huge dressage force here in York, really wants a bridle for herself now! I was so excited to tell her all about it and especially to have her see my guy go so well without a bit! I was also in a treeless Ansur saddle and definitely had a very happy horse.

Christina, 9/11/04:

The Bitless Bridle has been the answer to better communication between my Quarter Horse gelding and I. He had previously seemed to fret with both the snaffle and the reining bit. After introducing the Bitless Bridle to him over several outings he began to respond willingly to slight touches of the reins. He will (now) drop his head to waist level to wear the new bridle. When I used a bit bridle he seemed reluctant to open his mouth to accept the bit.

We are now trail riding with no apparent problems.

Thank-you from LEGACY SIR CHANCELOT and myself..

Denaze, 9/12/04:

Subject: My horse thanks you!

I purchased my first horse, a 7 y/o Belgian/Quarter horse mare last month. I am a 46 y/o mother of three children and an animal lover all around, so I chose to pursue a natural approach with my new mare.

I am schooled in Pat Parelli's program and the Bitless Bridle just made sense to me. I have been riding WILLOW, my mare, in a loose ring French snaffle bit during lessons and a Parelli rope halter with a Parelli lead rope for hacking and practice. Well, she responds SO much better in the halter that I decided it was time to "try" your bridle! I have been wanting to buy one of your bridles for months but met with opposition from other "uneducated" equestrians, who said I would be wasting my money ... that I just needed to be more authoritative with my mounts. I got my order from you all this morning and rode Willow soon after-

WOW, she was SOOOOO relaxed and responsive that I was teary-eyed the whole time riding-out of pure joy!!!!!! I will NEVER put her in another bridle. Willow is a VERY responsive mare and is extremely well trained, but I just knew she was uncomfortable in the different bits I have tried her in. I even had the equine dentist float her teeth to make sure that was not the problem ... it wasn't. I was right about my initial inclination to use your bridle and now I can proudly let others see they were wrong!!!!

The only thing I regret is I didn't buy the leather padded Bitless Bridle (I bought the Beta) to start out! I will be ordering it in the near future though. I love leather, the smell, the feel...!

I have two teenagers who also ride and they can't wait to ride Willow in the new Bitless Bridle!!!

Thank you for making such a wonderful product! I am going to recommend Pat Parelli endorse your bridles ... they are truly wonderful!

Kim, 9/15/04:

You probably don't remember me, but I bought my Bitless Bridle from you sometime back in 2002. I have had my Morgan horse who I bought since 12/01. I think I bought the bridle sometime in the late spring early summer of 2002. I had written to you after having a harrowing experience with FINNEGAN and him spooking, with me unable to stop him.

I was a new horse owner and believed others opinion that he needed to be ridden in a bit. I did for a brief time put him back into a bit but it just made me so upset. In the interim I pulled his shoes and put him in a treeless saddle and "LEARNED" how to ride. In Sept of 2003 I put his Bitless Bridle back in and have never looked back. Anyway, this past Sunday I competed in the Bedford, NY Hunter Pace held on Sept 12, 2004 and although we didn't win, we did it in awesome fashion, Barefoot, Bitless and Treeless. Just wanted to let you know that as I crossed the finish line a woman BLURTED out "Hey You Have No Bit in Your Horses Mouth." I said, "Of course not, nor do I have shoes or a tree in my saddle." Many people came up to find out how I stop my horse without a bit. I explained that bits don't stop horses. Anyway, just wanted to say THANKS.

Connie, 9/15/04:

I bought a Bitless Bridle a couple of months ago and have been delinquent in sending you my horse's response, sorry. She is a 12-year-old Tennessee Walking horse, used for just pleasure riding.

She has overall behaved very well, but she would always "test" me after about a half hour of riding. She would often refuse to turn to the left. I had the horse dentist come out and balance her teeth, he said that she must have never had her teeth looked at before (I have only had her about 6 months). She still had her wolf teeth and some irregularities with her teeth, which he fixed, but suspected caused problems with the bit. She would also show reluctance when tacking her up, a very definite lack of enthusiasm.

FIRE does really great with the Bitless Bridle, she took to it immediately and now stands still while being mounted, tests me less, and turns more readily in both directions, she will also back up in a straight line, where with the regular bridle she will not back at all.

I did retry the regular bridle after the dentist worked on her teeth and now she does do better in that, but overall she just does better with the the Bitless Bridle. And also I certainly prefer the idea of it.

Thanks.

Terri, 9/24/04:

I have just received the Bitless Bridle and have read, with great interest your articles on breathing and bleeding. I have a short Quarter mare who barrel races and does gymkhana at the top level. Immediately upon beginning the canter or gallop-in training, or all out at the shows, she roars and exhibits very loud labored breathing. She has also bled from the nostrils several times.

She was scoped and no abnormalities were found, previously leading me to believe that the vet's assessment was incorrect. Of course after reading your articles I'm hoping the problem is as simple as just the bit. I used lasix once and it did seem to help.

Are you still practicing and, if so, are you in my area-Southern California? I really need an expert's opinion. The mare is a fabulous competitor but I feel it is dangerous to continue for her sake and mine. I feel like she will "drop dead" in action. She is only 6yr. so not age related.

I also do endurance and will be anxious to try the bridle on my Arab who hates the bit. Thank you.

[Dr. Cook responds:

As you know, I am especially interested in the cause of bleeding and so found your e-mail of particular fascination. I am now 73 and live on the East coast (Maryland). I am no longer practicing but I am still very much involved in research and happy to give you some comments from a distance. Hopefully, we can both learn something of value and help your horse at the same time.

From what you say, I assume that the roaring noise is made during inspiration, not expiration. But please confirm that this is so. What sort of head carriage does your horse adopt with a bit in its mouth? Is it one of extreme poll flexion?

If on scoping, your veterinarian found no structural abnormality (tumors etc.) and no evidence of laryngeal paralysis, it is reasonable to assume that the roaring noise may be caused by your horse retracting its tongue away from the bit and blocking its own throat. Obviously, this theory can be very simply tested by removing the bit. You don't need me to travel to California before you can give this idea a trial, now that you already own a Bitless Bridle. I shall be most interested to hear the outcome of the trial.

If the noise disappears when the bit is removed (and your horse is no longer over-flexed) you do not need to worry about your horse dropping dead under you. If the noise persists, take care and let's think again.

I await your further comments but, as a further aid in long-distance diagnosis, you could complete the attached questionnaire. This will give me additional information about your problem. Bob, 11/25/04]

Terri, 9/26/04:

I rode Rio in a gymkhana and she took first in barrels out to 87 horses with the Bitless Bridle. She did not bleed as with the previous gymkhana. Her breathing seemed improved although I was too involved in riding the event to notice fully. I will be able to tell when I run her on trail. Just weaned her filly who is 4 months and, although I've been working her for three months, she is not fully in shape.

I love the Bitless Bridle and raved about it at the show. Several people should be calling you. I'm trying it on my endurance Arab later today, and will probably order one for each of my horses if I meet with the success I had yesterday. I will be so thrilled if this solves the problem with Rio. In Endurance it should be advantageous also because the horse will be able to drink much more easily than with a bit.

I'm 53 and still outdoing the 20 yr. olds. I'm happy to see that you are still active too. By the way, you don't have any research about Navicular do you? My best 7 yr. old paint has an advanced case.

[Dr. Cook responds:

CONGRATULATIONS! First out of 87 horses ... wonderful. Please continue to keep me in touch. I do not have much feedback on barrel racing, as you probably know.

I have not done any original research on Navicular Disease myself but I have studied the research of Dr. Hiltrud Strasser and I strongly recommend her approach to this problem. It is a barefoot management program and it works extremely well. Visit www.thehorseshoof.com and study her recommendations. There may be a certified Strasser Hoofcare Specialist somewhere close to you.

I look forward to hearing from you again.

Since answering as above, the additional thought occurs to me. This mare has foaled only recently, and the owner admits that she is not yet full fit. It may be that she is still carrying too much weight. Unfitness together with fat deposits around the throat could also be an explanation for the roaring noise. - Bob, 9/26/04]

Karen, Norway, 10/1/04:

I have just tried one of your bridles, and I must say I am really impressed! The first ten minutes were hard because I was no longer able to cheat by moving my fingers and pulling the reins. But then, when I relaxed and used my body to ride (as in real riding) my horse relaxed too. He was lowering his neck and lengthening his stride. I have never felt him better!

I have different problems with my horse. He is curling his neck, chewing the bit constantly, short stride, unwilling to canter, unwilling to enter the riding hall...and so on. But I know it's all depending on me, and with this bridle I can no longer take "shortcuts" in my riding! You are a genius! When I read your website, about all the problems this can solve, I instantly knew that this was worth a try! It's too bad this kind of bridle is not allowed in competitions here in Norway. We have to use ordinary bridles, with terrible nosebands and all. You should write or mail the Norwegian Riding Federation and tell them about your research! They probably already know, but they won't admit that they have been wrong for so long.

Thank you for the Bitless Bridle, and your very good website! I will speak well of it in my stable, and wherever I meet horse friends!!

med vennlig hilsen (kind greetings)

Nancy, Season Song Farm 10/3/04:

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Nancy Moras and I am a combined training instructor, certified through the American Riding Instructors Assoc. I am located in Bangor, PA.

In August of this year, I began working with a new student by the name of Lila Erb. Lila asked me if I would object to instructing her while she used her Bitless Bridle. I was more than delighted to and very intrigued by this bridle. Being an intelligent person, it took me less than 10 seconds to understand the mechanics of this wonderful device.

I proceeded to borrow Lila's bridle and hustled home to experiment with my two horses--a 16.2 hand QH gelding and a 16.2 hand TB gelding. Both of my horses are well schooled in the lower levels of dressage in the TRUE classical manner. I have NEVER used draw reins, side reins or any other gadget designed to get a "frame." I was thrilled with the performance of both of my horses and immediately bought your bridle. This bridle will allow me to take my horses further in their training programs because I can now ride with a guilt-free contact. For years I have fought with my conscience about putting an object in a horse's mouth that, no matter how mild, will cause a certain amount of discomfort. Bosals and hackamores are also "pain-based" in my opinion.

The word "dressage," as I am sure you know, means training, but training for whom? The horse or RIDER?! Horses are born with the ability to perform all the moves that we ask of them without riders on their backs. Isn't it strange that when we introduce the weight of a rider to their sensitive backs that problems inevitably develop that are attributed to the horse!!!! Hence, the gadgets that are sold to "fix" the horse.

It is very, very sad that such a lack of true understanding of dressage is prevalent in the horse world. I find many horse people, including those competing on the international scene, incredibly stupid. For example, why do humans continue to keep breeding larger and larger horses in the name of dressage? A pony can go Grand Prix! Now, in our infinite wisdom, we are asking 17-18 hand horses to work in the traditional dressage arena where the width has remained 20 meters and has not increased to accommodate these huge horses. Hence, these

poor animals are now being forced to "shorten their wheel bases" (collect) as soon as they are under saddle in order to handle a twenty meter circle somewhat balanced. Is it any wonder that they have joint problems early in their saddle years?

The ignorance continues. Because these big horses are naturally more powerful than an average size horse, very few people can ride them correctly. Riders are relying more and more on the action of the bit to keep these unfortunate animals under control. I find it barbaric that double-bitted bridles, complete with curb chains, are used on the so-called well-trained horses that appear in the Olympic dressage arena. AND, why in God's name is dressage associated only with the ubiquitous 20 meter circle?! Does not every horse, be it western, hunt seat or, whatever deserved to be ridden by a truly balanced rider? There is only one correct seat- **BALANCED**- regardless of saddle type. I find it appalling that equitation riders ride constantly with their center of balance forward of the movement of the horse and that so many western pleasure riders artificially shorten the strides of their horses with horrendous training techniques in order to never have to sit a **TRUE** trot correctly. Once again, the action of a nasty bit enables these uneducated riders to continue on their merry way and get rewarded in the show ring.

Yesterday, I gave Lila a lesson and she mentioned to me that you had asked her about such concepts as half-halts and inside leg to outside hand and how they would apply to the Bitless Bridle. We were wondering if you were being asked by people if these concepts could be used with the Bitless Bridle? That is the reason I am emailing you. Lila suggested that perhaps as a rider **AND** trainer I could answer some of your questions.

While riding my horses in the Bitless Bridle (a bit will never again go in one of their mouths), I have been mentally working on what changes I will be making in my explanations to my students about half-halts, etc. This has not been difficult for me because my instruction has always been based on the rider's center of balance and not focused on the horse's head and mouth. By the way, my more intelligent and observant students have ordered the Bitless Bridle for their own horses. People that are critical thinkers understand that this bridle **DOES** give you the contact points on the front of the horse that are necessary for a rider to make a connection, via the horse's back, from the rear end to the front end, without causing discomfort to a horse's mouth. My horses perform lovely, energetic leg- yielding moves, 10 meter circles, lengthened gaits, etc. guided by my pelvic area and center of balance in your bridle!!

If I can help you in any way to promote this bridle or, answer any questions you may have concerning training techniques, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for removing that last piece of guilt, the bit, I was experiencing as a conscientious rider.

Jessie, Middletown, CT, 10/3/04:

I'm writing to add my name to the long list of converts to the Bitless Bridle phenomenon. It amazes me that someone didn't invent it sooner.

First, a little background:

My horse, **GEORGE**, is a 5-year-old, 16.3 Thoroughbred gelding. I bought him a year ago as a completely green prospect off the track. He's generally quiet, but has been known to throw bucking fits and take off unexpectedly. I had one quite bad fall in which he managed to run me over at a gallop. (He was very sorry.) Needless to say, these problems have led to quite a bit of fear and tension on my part, which translates into increased tension for George.

He has also had problems with stiffness, an unwillingness to move forward, inability to bend at all (especially to the right), and a high head and hollow back alternating with resistance to the bit in the form of leaning on it. Our rides would generally start out with thirty minutes of him being very resistant, stiff, and unhappy, and finish, once he was warmed up and more limber, with him leaning heavily on the reins and freight-training me around the ring on his forehand at a super-fast trot, ignoring any attempt at a half-halt. I have to confess with much shame that out of sheer frustration, I ended up being far too harsh with my hands.

All this had become frustrating to the point of despair. I was faced with the fact that my horse might in fact be too much for me, and that I might have to consider selling him. This of course made me very unhappy.

Then, an unfortunate accident led us to try your bridle. While leading George to the ring one Sunday, he happened to toss his head at a fly. The reins were pulled out of my hands and George stepped on them and then panicked. The resulting damage from the bit was a bleeding gash that required stitches on the bars of his mouth, extensive bruising of his tongue and gums, and a fractured tooth.

Obviously, I could not consider putting a bit back in his mouth for quite some time. In order to keep up his training, after a few days I decided to borrow a Bitless Bridle that belonged to one of the other riders at my barn. With this bridle, it's like riding a whole different horse. He warms up in ten minutes, rather than thirty, is much more willing to move forward from my leg, and is able to bend softly in both directions. He stays much straighter, and, wonder of wonders, he responds to my seat-and-leg half-halts with hardly any rein pressure. It's as though not having the bit in his mouth to distract him allows him to listen to my seat and leg aids. We can now even halt squarely from a canter.

Despite these benefits, I have to admit that I was worried about the potential for lack of control. If George bolted, would I be able to stop him? The ultimate test came after a week or so when we were working in the outdoor arena. Just as I asked for a right lead canter from the walk (a new learning experience for him, and one that he found to be difficult and stressful) a sudden noise from behind him caused him to buck and bolt. When I jerked on the reins accidentally as a result of my loss of balance, I was comforted by the knowledge that I hadn't added to his panic by a sudden jolt of pain in his mouth. I was able to regain my composure fairly quickly and bring my horse to a halt in about the same amount of time it would have taken with a bit.

After four weeks, with his mouth finally healed, my trainer suggested that we go back to working with a bit so that we could gain more flexion. In her opinion, without a bit George was able to "stick his nose out and run." I disagreed and was hesitant, but took her advice and went back to a bit. The stiff, lopsided, unbalanced freight train was back.

Today I ordered my own Bitless Bridle from your website. I'm happy to sacrifice a bit of poll flexion for the increased forwardness, straightness, calmness, obedience, and lightness provided by the Bitless Bridle. Thank you!

Candace, 10/3/04:

I have been using the Bitless Bridle on my horses for the past year and absolutely love it. I use it primarily on my endurance horse ROUGIE. At first I was worried that he would be too hot for me to handle at the beginning of a ride without a bit, so carried a bit with me just in case. Well, I never had to use it and stopped carrying it after two rides.

Leslie, 10/11/04:

We train foxtrotters professionally and also ride lipizzans. Quite a combination, huh!!!! We should have good info and comments from our vast experience forthcoming. I did move my noseband down to 1" for the lipizzan. He was not too responsive on the first ride. The change seemed to really work for him and I had a nicely responsive ride on the 2nd half of the second ride. But, I will also move it up to 1 1/2" later to see if it was just a matter of becoming acclimated to the new bridle. Do you have any suggestions or comment about what I just tried??

Also, I rode two foxtrotters in it and had immediate results that were more than satisfactory. I went on a rapid 4 hour trail ride on one and the bridle served as well and better than a bitted headstall. I have been using Myler bits and been satisfied with them more than other bits. So, the Bitless Bridle replaced a Myler.

What was really impressive is that I put novice riders on one foxtrotter and they got along very well with the Bitless Bridle. The horse also got along with them because of it, and there was no lack of control, if control had been necessary.

I will be starting one foxtrotter filly and on lipizzan colt this week. I will see how it works for groundwork, and first ride, etc.

I will keep experimenting and observing. It is a great idea!!!

Ginny, Wichita, KS, 10/12/04:

I had to send you a note about how much I love my Bitless Bridle. I purchased it 2-3 yrs ago & had put it in the tack room & then forgot I had it. I found it about a month ago & decided to try it on my current barrel horse who is an ex-race horse & "fidgeted" around with his mouth even with a simple snaffle in his mouth & me being very lighthanded with him.

I was a little concerned about having enough "control" as he is a big strapping horse with a 103 speed index. If you don't know how fast that means he is---it means he is very, very fast. He was our state's Champion Running Stallion as a 3 yr old. He is now a gelding & is very, very strong. He was trained by quiet, gentle methods & was soft mouthed & pretty easy to control.....BUT, when I tried the Bitless Bridle on him, it was like night & day as far as control was concerned!

I barely have to touch the reins to ask him to flex his head, neck & spine as we enter the "pocket" of the barrel. As we leave the barrel, I never have to worry about being "on his head" or "in his mouth" too much causing him to pause his forward momentum or have his head too high to effectively leave the barrel quickly.

My only real concern (& the concern of my friends) was----will he STOP well at the end of the arena after we cross the timer line. Many timer lines are close to the end of the arena & to win you must not slow your speed AT ALL until you cross that line, meaning you are headed into the fence with a tremendous amount of speed; & I seem to recall some law of physics that says: a certain amount of mass going a certain speed requires a certain length of space to stop in! Not only does he stop----he stops very well, hindquarters up under him-self, head broke at the poll, & very willing. Most (if not all) of barrel racing at the higher levels is done by direct rein. It is so true that the horse responds to the "push" of the opposite cheek to turn, rather than the "pull". That makes perfect sense, as horses interact with one another by "pushing" each other with looks, stares, physical pushes, etc. They do not "pull" one another. This bridle

uses a language a horse understands by nature---it does not have to be "taught"----I believe that is why it works so well.....

So, I just wanted to say THANK YOU for the BITLESS BRIDLE! And, my horse surely thanks you!

Barb in southern Illinois, 10/18/04:

Subject: Letter from thrilled user

In August of 2003, I was given a Third Level Danish Warmblood, ATIKUS. He had been abused (flipped by a trainer to assert dominance!), and had obvious spinal issues. He hadn't been ridden regularly in about two years. He also had grotesque ringbone and sidebone on his right front foot, which completely distorted the hoof capsule. The outside of the coronet band was probably 1.5" higher than the inside. He wasn't sound at the walk, trot or canter. Poor Atikus was only 11 at the time.

A good chiropractor; 24/7 turnout; herd lifestyle; an expert equine dentist (who found scar tissue from harsh bits); and the Strasser method of trimming started him down the path to recovery. I must confess that the first time I rode him my heart was in my throat, since he's 17 hh and 1400 pounds. I had no idea how he would feel about being "put back to work" again. Fortunately he's a very kind and sweet horse that didn't seem to mind. We've eased him back into having a job.

My trainer said it was obvious that he'd been driven into the bit, then held back. His movement is extremely large and powerful, and we felt that he'd been "dumbed down" to accommodate his riders. He was "crammed and jammed."

At the time I was riding him in a French link snaffle. I truly try to use seat and leg aids before using my hands. He seemed fine with his bit until January. Then he started tossing his head when I approached him with the bridle, and refusing to open his mouth.

I had the vet come out to do a complete check, and all he found was excessive flesh inside his mouth. He's got Mick Jagger lips! HA! He had no idea why Atikus would suddenly resist the bit.

Because I am 100% convinced that the barefoot/Strasser method is THE way to go, I found a link to your website. I ordered the Bitless Bridle in January. Our first ride was in our paddock, and Atikus gave me a bit of grief when I put it on him. I do believe he thought I'd shove a bit in his mouth again.

When I mounted him I could tell he was REALLY concentrating on what this new piece of equipment was. We did a right turn; a left turn; and then a soft halt. The second he stopped I leaned forward and gave him a treat to let him know that what he just did was PERFECT.

The look on his face was just incredulous. A light came on in his eyes, and I saw joy and happiness spread over his face. My husband was also watching closely, and unsolicited, said the same thing. "He is really focused on you and what you are asking, but he's so relaxed and happy," was his comment.

I did two more paddock rides before taking him out in the open. Our first ride was down to my neighbors, and my friend rode TULSA, my QH. Even though we had wind gusts up to 45 mph, Atikus was steady as a rock (same for Tulsa). He did exactly what I asked, and was calm, sane, and eager to go.

The fourth ride just brought tears to my eyes. I put on his saddle, and when I approached him with the Bitless Bridle, he actually TURNED HIS HEAD TOWARDS ME AND DROPPED IT!!!! He knew what was coming, and made it quite clear that it was acceptable.

For now we are trail riding and doing hunter paces. I've never felt out of control with him, and I've even started throwing some dressage into our rides. We did a beautiful half-pass in the parking lot at the county park the other day! Many people have asked me how I "trained" him to have that beautiful headset, especially at a trot. LOL!

When I tell them that I restored his feet to their natural, God-given state; allowed him to move his body with relaxation and freedom; took all the artificial junk off his face; and encouraged him to gain his pride and self-esteem back, they think I'm nuts.

Yeah, well. We just go our merry way, and with each step I feel Atikus's confidence, trust and spirit grow and thrive. I can't tell you how blessed I feel that I was privileged to witness that rebirth.

BTW, I'm ordering a medium for my QH, Tulsa. I'll need one for my Belgian draft, too. Is the "large" the biggest that you make? I think I have the large for Atikus, and I know it won't fit Mac, my Belgian. Thanks so much!

Feel free to put my email in my testimony if someone wants to contact me (RT66KIX@aol.com)

[Customer Service responds: We make a draft size, too.]

Doreen, Dallas Center, Iowa, 10/24/04:

I decided to purchase the Bitless Bridle after buying a new horse who is extremely orally fixated. She constantly was chewing, biting, and playing with the bit on rides no matter where we rode; round pen, pasture, trails or on the road. I found this to be extremely annoying to me to the extent that I was no longer really enjoying this horse, and we had begun to fight about her playing/chewing on the bit, which made the rides even worse. She would also toss her head quite a lot, which on occasion interfered with control.

I decided to purchase the bridle before things became too far gone to fix. I had had this mare for approximately 8 weeks. This past Friday the bridle came in and I tried it immediately on Saturday and Sunday.

The results have been wonderful. Although my mare is stilling playing with her tongue and chewing, because there is no bit, there has been an immediate relaxation on my part and I had two fantastic rides! On Saturday, it was cool, crisp and very windy--a good day for spooks, jumps and general feisty behavior. I decided to lounge her before starting and clipped the line to the O ring on the noseband. She did very well although was startled the first time she felt the pressure of the headstall when she tried to run on the longe line. We proceeded straight from the lounge work to a ride on roads and harvested fields.

There was basically no adjustment in style for either myself or my mare. Hand aids all remained the same, and I found, as others have, that it took less of a hand aid for a greater correction than with the bit. My mare seemed more relaxed by the second ride. Her head carriage was lower, and horizontal rather than vertical. Since she no longer had a bit to chomp and chew, and me to argue with about it, she was paying a lot more attention to her surroundings and therefore less spooking. She did spook twice, just enough for me to say, as others have as well, that it was easier to regain/maintain control at the time of a spook. There was a quicker settle time as well. I also had a much easier time getting a flat footed walk from this youngster at the beginning of our rides!!

I found the directions concise and easy to follow. Adjusting the bridle to my mare was easy, although I might suggest a few more holes for adjustment on the nosebands. My Arabian

mare does not have a classic head with a tiny muzzle and yet was on the last holes for the noseband and second to last holes for the crossover straps. A smaller head might have a problem fitting into the bridle. Knowing there was a guarantee helped me feel comfortable with the purchase, but I know after this weekend I will not be using it!!

Thanks for bringing the enjoyment back to my rides!!

Christine, 11/1/2004:

Just wanted to let you know that the medium bridle on our Thoroughbred works amazingly well! He's trotting and cantering and doing lead changes - no stumbling or tripping due to being heavy on the forehand - AND as silly as this sounds - he just looks happier! What an amazing product. Thank you. Once my quarter horse overcomes his "issues" - I'll be purchasing a BB for him as well. Thanks again for a wonderful product.

Tiffin, 11/02/04:

I ordered the Bitless Bridle as a last resort. My Paso Fino, CHICO was used as a Barrel horse before I bought him and he ran through all the bits I used on him. A mechanical hackamore fared no better. I read up on the Bitless Bridle, thinking it wouldn't work. But since there was a money back guarantee if it didn't work, what did I have to lose?!

When it arrived, I rushed to the barn to try it out. After adjusting the bridle to fit Chico, I tried him out in it, and, low and behold, he responded positively to it! I even let a friend of mine ride him without my being terrified of her ending up in the local hospital.

One day, she was riding him, and I was on my other Paso Fino, and Chico was not responding well to the Bitless Bridle at all. He was running through it, pulling my friend all the way back to the barn. I thought it wasn't going to work and took the bridle off. As I was taking it off, I realized the strap under his chin was too loose, and that's why it didn't work. It has to be tightened so that only one flat finger fits underneath it. After explaining to my friend what happened, she understood, and we haven't had a problem since then!

I definitely recommend the Bitless Bridle, even if it's not as a last resort!

Darlene and Prime Times Mister Ed. 11/9/04:

I received my new beta bridle and love it. Not only is it soft, its so easy to clean up....not that I have to, as there is no slimy bit to wipe off after each ride. I got my bridle several weeks ago and had to wait till the weather cleared to ride in it. I have a Tennessee Walker that loves to rack. I was having trouble with him tossing his head and/or dropping his head soooo low to avoid the bit. I do know how to ride and do not have heavy hands. I wanted my horse to enjoy his outings however, no matter what bit I tried, and I have bought enough to open a store of my own, nothing made him happy. The vet checked his mouth and had dental work done and still we had head tossing. Even when I raised/lowered or loosened his bridle, nothing worked.

So I was riding him with a halter, it was okay, but couldn't get him to gait. So, as a last resort, I saw your ad and called. The girl was so informative and we had a lot in common, we both owned walkers, as you can see her horse sporting his bitless in the ad. She said I could return it in 30 days if I needed to.

Well, it will not be going back. My horse LOVES IT!! The first day out, I rode him bareback, my fav way to ride. He didn't toss his head at all, even my hubby noticed it while we were out and about. It actually helped him accept his bit when I must show him. He is a lot lighter in the mouth and will give to the slightest pressure on the rein. He is so much more supple and I am using it between his training sessions with a bit. I really like the freedom I feel without the bit and I know he is happy. The first time I rode in it, he was a bit heavy in the front end and I had to use a little pressure, but after about 20 minutes, he was one happy horse! Now its great to just hop on and go. Oh yeah, he gaits up a storm and his head is not in the clouds or shoveling up the dirt...I can almost see him smile.

Thanks for such a wonderful product and I will be telling my friends about it.

Kathy, 11/9/2004:

Thank you, I am very impressed with the product. I used it on a stallion I just purchased. We went for our first ride in the woods yesterday and it was marvelous. The horse is a 2003 world champion pinto saddlebred and had only been ridden in bits and double reins. He took right off with it ... I'm sold!

Carole, 11/14/04:

I went on a nice long trial ride today. I was with my friend, Carole and her horse, MAGIC. Someone shot a gun off very close to the trail as we were passing. Both of our horses spooked badly and started to bolt. We got them under control within a few strides with our wonderful Bitless Bridles!

Angela, 7/6/04:

My bridle arrived one Friday morning and I decided to try it that night. It was FABULOUS!! It made the biggest difference in my mare, so much that I decided to show in it the next day.

I had already signed-up for a First Level Test IV class. I tried the bridle out in warm-up before actually committing to riding in it ... I sure didn't want to give the bridle a bad name. My mare has been hesitant about leg yields, but in warm-up even my trainer was astounded about the difference! So, I rode HC (my test didn't count) but I was still scored and my score was recorded on the score board with everyone else's score. My mare received a 71% with an 8 and 7 on my leg yields. The only reason my score was that low was because of rider errors (I can't seem to remember where those 15 meter circles go).

The judge had only wonderful things to say!! Everyone came up afterwards to ask why I rode HC (my score would have won the class). Of course, they didn't even notice the difference in bridles (even the judge didn't notice until I told her). I got so many comments about how nice my ride looked and "what a shame that you didn't ride in a bit". I proudly told them that my mare wouldn't have rode that nice if I was in a bit!!

The weekend before this weekend, we rode a qualifying ride with a 64%. What a difference in my mare!! I don't care that my scores are not counting. I just love showing everyone that a horse can compete NATURALLY and still come out on top, so I will continue

competing HC. We are trying to rig the bridle with a bit so I may LEGALLY show in it at the Regionals, as I have now fully qualified.

Now on to my problem. The bridle is shifting somewhat when I'm riding. It is shifting enough to create a wear on the side of my mare's chin. I BELIEVE that I have the strap tight enough. If I tighten it any further her face swells a bit above the straps. My mare has also been breathing louder. This bothers my trainer very much, so she says we DEFINITELY should not tighten the strap any further. My mare ACTS happier in the bridle, but the wear spot concerns me as it was bleeding some yesterday. I don't THINK that I am hanging on her. Granted I have to half-halt more on that side, but I don't think the bridle should be moving this much. Do you have any suggestions?

[Carole responds:

What wonderful news! I'm so glad that you are competing in The Bitless Bridle!

I've forwarded your email to Dr. Cook. Would you like to (perhaps you already have) add your name to our petition to get these rules changed? If so, send your name to drcook@bitlessbridle.com

In regard to the slippage problem. I've never had anyone tell me of this problem before (as long as the noseband is snug enough). I have had a couple of people tell me the buckle on the chin strap hit the bone under that jaw, so I did some web surfing to see if there was something out there to solve this problem. I found a great little product by Cashel called a 'cavesson/crown channel.' It's a thick piece of foam with a channel that your chin strap fits into. I ordered a bunch and have them here at the office. I paid \$7.95 ea. for them, but they're long enough to be cut in half to make two. If you're interested, I can mail you one for \$5.00 (includes shipping).

I believe you are hearing your horse's breathing more because she is able to breath more freely now. As long as the breaths are loud during the time your mare is breathing out (expiring), and not when breathing in (inspiring), it's probably a good thing. You may want to contact Dr. Cook about this as well, he is more knowledgeable about these things than I. - Carole]

Angela, 11/3/04:

This was the letter I originally sent to Jerri at USEF. Jerri told me that the change was on the floor. Until reading the proposal last night, I got the impression that the proposal was FOR the bridle not against it! Today, I have faxed a rule change submittal form with this letter. I have asked that this change be an "extraordinary" change as I realize that I am outside the normal time frame. My reason was that there was already a proposal on the floor to EXCLUDE the bridle from competition. I have proposed a change in the opposite direction- FOR the bridle. I sure hope this helps.

Angela Floyd, Member #4066863:

I am proposing a rule change to Chapter XIX, Article 1921 titled "Saddlery & Equipment". I would like for you to consider adding the Bitless Bridle, as shown at www.bitlessbridle.com, as a choice of bridling options. Your board has been just in adding bits that are less painful to the horse in the past including the Mylar bit. Now I would like for you to go just one step further and think in terms of no bit. Though I know this is not the correct way of going about getting a proposal on the floor, I would like to tell you exactly why I would like to see this change made.

My mare, Isabella, has never been an "easy" horse to ride. She has always shown some resistance to the bit even after countless numbers of dentists have looked in her mouth and determined that her mouth is not the reason for such resistance. I can attest to the fact that I

may hang when I get nervous at the shows, but this is not the only reason for her resistance. She is a Hanoverian/Paint cross, so while she has nice movement, she is built with a somewhat short thick neck. This did not keep us from winning the Training Level Regional Championships in 2002. In fact, we easily won out over much fancier horses. I attribute it to her overall willing attitude to do what I ask. It is because of this willingness that I began to search for a happier situation with her. My mare has been monthly massaged for over three years; she regularly sees the chiropractor, dentist (as already mentioned), vets, etc. Yet still something was causing resistance even with much better trainers than myself. This began my quest into researching tack and its effects on the horse's willingness to move and their overall health.

My researching led me to exploring saddling options and I finally settled on the wonderful saddle, the Ansur. My mare instantly moved better, but still seemed hesitant in going forward. After reading the Ansur group pages found on Yahoo, I noticed many people mentioning Dr. Cook's Bitless Bridle. I heard about this bridle from a friend as well who had used it on her horses and was promoting its use. I decided to try it out myself.

I was scheduled to show at two different shows in the month of April when I ordered the bridle. At the first show, I received 64% with comments like "tense", "resistant to bridle", "not forward" etc. My bridle arrived the following Thursday after the first show, two days before my next show. I decided to try it out. I rode in it Thursday and Friday and had such immediate results that I decided to ride H/C at the schooling show on Saturday. For the first time ever, I received two 8s on leg yields and received an overall 72% after making TWO errors (and getting marked down for them). My mare was loose, supple, bendable and HAPPY. She did not mind the work when it was not interfering with her way of moving. The judge could not believe it was the same horse from the weekend before. My lengthenings were only 7s with the comment that they were more like mediums.

I have found the reasons why my mare goes so much better in the Bitless Bridle on Dr. Cook's website, www.bitlessbridle.com. He discusses the bit and the way that a bit causes the opposite reaction in horses than what the rider is wishing. He discusses the problems associated with bits. I for one am a believer after noticing my mare has much more endurance with her Bitless Bridle. I would never think about going on a trail or jumping her in anything but this bridle. I would like to be able to say the same for my passion ... dressage. I love the thrill of showing, but feel guilty because I know my mare likes the Bitless Bridle. This is why I am asking for the change. I would like you to consider that I am not asking for a harsher bit to offer more control. Instead, I am asking for a kinder solution to communicate with my mare—one in which we both can be happy. I for one, think if USEF would pass this bridle, lesson horses would fare better. Fewer riders may be bucked off because of nervous hands getting in horses' mouths at shows. And there is no less control with this bridle; instead, horses react in a kinder way with kinder pressure/communication.

I propose that the words, "...or Dr. Cook's Bitless Bridle..." be added to the bridle attire. Please consider this change for the good of the horse. I know one horse that would personally thank you.

Angela, 11/9/04:

I am a believer in your bridle and have bought three of them for my horses. I ride/show dressage and began jumping my mare two months ago as well. I tried jumping her a while back and she was not happy when I "accidentally" bumped her with the bit. She has a STUNNING jump now. She doesn't mind teaching me with the Bitless Bridle.

I did have to exchange my leather bridle for a beta bridle as it would slide a bit when wet and wore a spot on the side of her face. Claudia Garner said she has had conversations with you about this. I personally love the ease of care of the beta and I am almost happy that the leather didn't work out!! Thank you for making such a wonderful bridle that makes my horses happy!! Now if we can just convince the rest of the world to allow us to make our own choices about tack...

Angela, 11/15/04:

I went to a Chiron clinic with Peter Speckmaier at Horrell Hill Dressage Center this past weekend and saw such HUGE differences in three of the horses there. Peter finally talked these guys into trying the Bitless Bridles on their "unstoppable" horses. Claudia Garner (a BB Associate Clinician) will be selling these people Bitless Bridles. Actually one of them went home with my extra bridle until she gets another ordered. It was immediately apparent to us all the change in the horses. One wouldn't jump and had a canter that wasn't going anywhere until the bit was removed. This little horse was jumping 2'3" BEAUTIFULLY after the bit was removed. We need your bridles for horses like this one! It gives the horse a chance to show what it can really do for a frustrated owner having some trouble controlling her hands. After seeing all the horses this weekend in the Bitless Bridles, I'd be willing to give up showing all together if USEF changes the rules to read no Bitless Bridles allowed. My horse's comfort has to be put first.

Carol, Iron Ridge, WI, 11/16/04:

I have used the beta Bitless Bridle on my green-broke 7-year-old Tennessee Walker mare for two weeks now and I can definitely see an improvement in her attitude. I have been having trouble moving beyond the green-broke stage with BELLE because of my lack of experience and her spooky, high strung, head strong nature. I've been ground training and riding her using natural horsemanship. She had thirty days of traditional Walking Horse training when I bought her but I never used a Walking Horse bit on her. I was using a pinchless snaffle but it seemed that we were always in a tug of war. She never seemed to go where I wanted to go. I had a better response in a sidepull and I was getting more lightness from her than with a bit. But the sidepull is a rather unattractive looking device.

I saw an ad for the Bitless Bridle and looked at the website and read most of the users' comments. It didn't seem that I had anything to lose in ordering one and I am very glad I did.

I was beginning to despair that I would never be able to use Belle for what I wanted: trail riding and living history events. She is so spooky and hard to control outside of her comfort zone and I was losing confidence. I've had a couple of falls off of her outside of the pasture when she has spun away and bolted from something that scared her.

After two weeks of using the Bitless Bridle I feel that she has more confidence and so do I. She had always held a lot of tension in her mouth and I can tell she is more relaxed there. She backs better and although she has a lot of energy, she seems to be less nervous or anxious. I feel that I have control and she is gaiting beautifully. She has not spooked, not even shied, in over a week and I have deliberately ridden her on windy days and in other spook-causing conditions. I feel she is getting better with every ride.

I am enthusiastically promoting the Bitless Bridle to all of my horse-owning friends. Thank You.

Linda, 11/21/04:

I just wanted to let you know how very pleased I am with the Bitless Bridle I purchased from you. I am an animal trainer, specializing in temperament rehabilitation, with over 25 years of experience. Having said that, I will admit that I am now training my very first horse, a 3-year-old Missouri Fox Trotter, gelding. I spent a great deal of time teaching Joshua ground work and building a very trusting relationship based on positive reinforcement. I believe very strongly that teaching, communication, should always work to empower the student and strengthen the relationship. It is not just what you teach, but HOW you teach that renders the end results. Trust is paramount!

Well you can imagine my concern when it came to teaching JOSHUA how to except and respond to tack ... especially on his head. He has such trust in me and loves to learn. I was having anxiety attacks about having to put a bit in his mouth, and resisted for quite some time. Instead I used a rope halter and lead rope.

After viewing your web site I decided to give the Bitless Bridle a go. Joshua is a very trusting and easy-going guy. So He had no problem with me putting it on his head and making the adjustments. I spent some time on the ground teaching him how to give to the pressure. I am not sure if it was all the previous work that I had done reinforcing Joshua for being sensitive to the lightest pressure, or if the bridle is just that easy to use. But Joshua got it in moments. I was thrilled to see how well he responded to it as I mounted and rode him.

This afternoon as I came back into the barn after a training session, I came upon another horse woman who had just spent an hour trying to get her horse to take the bit. She was in dismay at how much her horse hates the bit and avoids it. As I was just about to put Joshua out to graze I offered her the opportunity to try my Bitless Bridle. She was amazed how easily her horse accepted and learned to respond to it. I know that she will be contacting you.

I am so pleased with this product. To have a tool available that supports my positive and empowering attitude towards teaching is just wonderful. I will recommend this product to anyone who will listen. Just thought that you would like to hear some happy feed back.

P.S. Any thoughts on (English) general purpose or endurance saddles that are light-weight and comfortable for the horse? (:

Linda, 12/6/04:

I am sold on this bridle and have let several people try it. I received quite a bit of positive feed back today, from a girl who tried it on her Arabian/Walker X. She couldn't believe the difference in her horse's attitude. Thank you for such an excellent and positive product. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate having this available in my training.

Jennifer, Ontario, Canada, 11/24/04:

Subject: High praise for Bitless Bridle

Our coach recommended that a friend, S., and I try out Bitless Bridles to address some issues with our horses. We test-drove the Bitless Bridles once in a lesson, and right away what impressed me was that the bridles seemed to level out contact problems from one horse to the next: RIJAL, who has always avoided steady contact, suddenly was there at the other end of the reins, while CRECY, who typically hung on the reins waiting for the rider to put her in a frame, suddenly lightened and found her own, more natural and sustainable carriage. S. and I

liked the initial results enough to purchase Bitless Bridles right away. For the next ride, we planned to take the horses on a hack; this would be a true test of the Bitless Bridle for me.

All his life (long before I came along), Ri has been terrified of hacking. He is tense, huge-eyed, the tips of his ears almost touch, his neck jams into his shoulders and is vertical, and he is absolutely certain that a monster is about to pounce on him from behind a nearby bush or tree. He usually spooks at least once on the hack. If there is the slightest breeze, he may rear at the blowing leaves. Hacking on a windy day, trotting/cantering, and going without a companion are all out of the question. He is convinced that he needs all of his brainpower to concentrate on the monsters, so if I try to take a contact on the bit and get him thinking about something else, like laterals, he may rear or buck in order to tell me to back off. Even after we return to the barn and he is untacked, he is usually still tense. In short, he would far rather spend all his days schooling dressage in the indoor arena.

In addition, for the past few months, he had been fussy with his (very mild) bit and had been having TMJ-related problems, possibly due to a problem stemming from dental surgery. So, before the Bitless Bridle came along, I had already given up the bridle and bit in favor of an ordinary halter for schooling, although for security I still felt that I needed the bit for hacking.

So this was the scenario that would be the test for the Bitless Bridle: On a hack, would Ri be better, worse, or the same? For this hack, S on Crecy and I on Ri start out in our Bitless Bridles. Cres starts thinking about the bridle immediately, but Ri launches into his OMIGOD-OMIGOD mode. We go around the two lower fields (Ri half-attempts a spook once), then up the superhighway (a track up a steep, high hill). Once past the monsterful corner at the top, Ri suddenly changes. His neck grows three feet into a lovely stretch and the muscles on the side of his neck engage. His back comes up a foot. His mouth becomes loose, floppy, and foamy. He actually starts to breathe properly and snorts out the stuckedness. He maintains this elegant frame and pace all the way around the upper fields -with nary a concerned thought from him, despite a good breeze - and back down to the barn. On the way back, his walk becomes HUGE, but not the usual stiff "I've-gotta-get-home" fast walk, but a flowing, flexible power stride that I've never felt before.

When we stop outside the barn, I reach forward to scratch his neck and realize that the topline of his neck is completely wibbly. So long as I've known him, Ri has never relaxed his neck, even in schooling, enough for it to be even slightly wibbly! And when I get off to untack him, he's so relaxed that he is hanging loose.

I am really sold now. Wow!

Dr. Mette Tranter, Scotland 11/24/04:

I have one of your bridles for a Dales pony of mine who found it very difficult to tolerate a bit in his mouth. He goes very well in it and the bridle provides very good lateral control as well as being able to stop :)

Sarah, UK, 11/24/04:

I purchased one of your bridles for my TB mare at the beginning of the year and have to say that she loves it! I am doing endurance riding with her and, being an ex race mare, she was never really comfortable in a bit. But I have found the Bitless Bridle invaluable and now have a very happy mare!

Kate, Hong Kong, 11/29/04:

I've got the bridle yesterday and gave it a try this morning. The bridle fits perfect and it's just wonderful! My horse took to it instantly and it's as if it's meant to be. I'm probably the first and only one to use the Bitless Bridle here in Hong Kong and when my friends asked, I could only say "fantastic!" One of them was skeptical, saying you have no control but basically, if the horse just takes off, no matter what there's nothing you can do really. He responded to the bridle like he did with the bit and so far I am very pleased with this bridle. I'll use it for the lesson and I'm going to use it on hacking as well. Can't wait to ride again tomorrow. My horse deserves it and so do other horses, I think.

Your bridle made my day.

Lynn, 12/1/04:

Thanks for all the help with my question. Not only do you sell a wonderful product but I've never seen better customer support!!!!

Remona, 12/2/04:

Man, you've got something here but I'm sure I don't need to tell you this. I bought one of your bridles simply because I have this theory that if God intended for horses to have metal in their mouth, they would have been born with it. Anyway, I have seen a tremendous difference in my JAKE. I admit I was "trying" to use a snaffle with him and he would throw his head up when he was stopping and backing was not something he was eager to do. However, with the Bitless Bridle, he stops on a dime and he backs up without hesitation and he's much happier when he's working. Great job Doc!! I hope I see a whole lot more people coming to their senses on the well-being and happiness of their horses. I will vouch for this bridle 100%!!

Tricia, Naples FL , 12/7/04:

We purchased this bridle and I have been working with my 2-year old. He is a very sensitive Walkaloosa. He just turned 2-years of age. He is doing wonderful with this bridle. After two weeks, three times a week, he is getting the idea, and is even stopping on both commands, that being reins and voice!!! I did find out that he HATES a saddle. So his weekend while working with him. I took his cue and removed the saddle, jumped on his back and took him for a test ride down the dirt road we live on. He did GREAT, the only thing that happened was he saw a rattlesnake in the road and I did not. He stopped and we waited for the rattler to pass.

I have recommended this item to all of my friends. Thanks...for understanding the sensitive horse. I am so proud of my boy and his progress. Now what about a kinder gentler saddle? LOL Though I prefer bareback myself. I feel more in touch with my horse's body.

Sarina, 12/8/04:

I have an Appaloosa that doesn't like to have his face touched. I tried using the bitless on him. He doesn't seem to like it, because of all the pressures around his head. It seems to

annoy him. So I decided to put him back in a bit, which he doesn't like either. He's very mouthy with it and was drooling a lot. I really would rather ride him in the bitless, but I'm not sure what to do, since he is touchy about his face. I thought I would ask you about it. He also tends to look for the bit. I had him in the bit yesterday with the trainer, and he's always running to get it so he can catch it and run through it. We worked him yesterday on a loose rein, and he was starting to get it. I thought maybe that was another reason he's annoyed with the bitless, there's no bit to look for?

My TB LOVES his bitless. If I show him a bitted bridle, he will turn and run. I told him he won't have to wear one ever again. He goes so much better in the bitless, he doesn't have to worry about his mouth, and it's made a big difference in him.

Anyway, I had such luck with the TB, please help me get this Appy in the bitless. Any advice you have about the situation would be greatly appreciated, and if you need more information, please let me know.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Occasionally, a horse with a sensitive face from previous use of the bit (i.e. facial neuralgia) will continue to show discomfort with the Bitless Bridle when the noseband is placed at the recommended low position. If this occurs, first try using less rein pressure. Secondly, try moving the noseband up a little. The strength of the signal wanes as the noseband is raised but this may be just what the horse needs.

I don't think your horse is disappointed at not finding a bit. The problem is that the previous use of the bit has left him with a hypersensitivity in his face (facial pain). In time, most horses recover from this but you may have to be patient with him for several weeks until the pain regresses.

If you cared to complete the attached questionnaire on your Appaloosa, I may be able to make some further suggestions.]

Chloe, New Zealand 12/14/04:

Well I rode in my new bridle yesterday, he went really well.

When I use a bitted bridle he cannot stop chewing on the bit, throwing his head around, pulling, it is like he is trying to get it out of his mouth. He just becomes more and more frustrated. With the Bitless Bridle he was much more relaxed, he did not pull or throw his head around. He carried himself much better. We still have a bit of a problem on the left rein but I think he is kind of one sided maybe, he carries his head and neck to the outside. I think that will just take some extra work on the left rein. If you have any ideas on what may fix this problem I would appreciate that very much.

My horse is a show jumper so next I will try jumping in the bridle.

Is it ok to use a shadow roll or something similar on the noseband for some extra padding?

Thank you!!=o)

[Carole responds:

Thanks for the update! I'm glad to hear that you and your horse are developing a much better relationship :-) You hit the nail on the head with your comment regarding your horse trying to get the bit out of his mouth. I believe this is exactly what he was trying to do. Was your horse 'one sided' with the bitted bridle? If so, he may just need some time to get out of this habit. Yes, it would be fine to add a shadow roll or some other type of padding to the noseband. - Carole Iverson]

Chloe! =o), New Zealand:

I can't get over how much more relaxed he is with no bit. It's crazy. He has always been funny with his head on the left rein. I think because I am right handed I ride on the right rein more than the left. I am sure we can fix that though.

We did some jumping and he was really good. I always do a few jumps then let him walk. He will tug and tug on my reins throw his head around and will not relax. With the Bitless Bridle he was perfect; he was relaxed. I don't think he knew what to do with his mouth. I never really thought the bit was hurting him I just thought he was being a bit naughty but after having no bit it had to of been hurting.

I am going to try it on my mare when the rain stops. If it works well with her then I will surely buy another one. I haven't seen anyone in New Zealand riding in a Bitless Bridle, everyone sort of freaks out at the thought of no bit but I found you have more control with out it and it is so much kinder. I know a few who could benefit from this bridle but it is so hard to introduce people to new things.

Anyway I have a competition this weekend I will definitely be riding in my new bridle I will let you know how he goes. (I hope they will let me ride in it!?)

Thank you Carole!

The following testimonial was shared with us by our BB Associate Clinician in the United Kingdom, Sheila Lee Thompson (see her website at bitlessbridle.co.uk for further testimonials)
Becky, 12/15/04:

I jumped 1m and odd with KIWI Bitless LOVE HER! But even better:

Please read! Let me tell you a story...

A horse, which HATES jumping and has NEVER, jumped more than a meter, once had a girl that LOVES him MORE than ANYTHING on his back, with a normal bridle. She had him for a competition, just a little club one, and beat a few of the REALLY good horses by finishing 4th and 6th. She loved him MORE. She had him for a 3-day ride. He was perfect and that same girl loved him MORE.

One day that girl decided she wanted to try jumping with him again, and because she had her Bitless Bridle she rode him without a bit. It had been a while she had not had him, and her instructor, Katia, decided they would jump higher and higher until there was one rider left. So, the same girl, that had only jumped 80cm with him before, decided she would jump until she was disqualified (they only had 2 chances each). 80cm one bar; the second time she did it. 1 metre; good, she could NOT believe it! 1m15; she didn't think she would pass and she DID! (The horse never went to jump BUT this time she didn't have to ask for gallop, he did it on his own, UNBELIEVABLE!!!). 1m20; she did it and Katia said "PERFECT"! 1m30; she was one of the three left, the two other horses were born jumpers, so she thought she was dreaming, AND SHE JUMPED 1M30 AND SHE WOULD DIE FOR THAT HORSE!!!

Guess who the girl was... ME!!!

Sheila you can't imagine what you have done for me... I don't how to thank you! You have given me and my mum an Olympic horse AND I LOVE even MORE my favorite horse at my other riding club!

Thank you again...

Maureen, 12/15/04:

Subject: HELP!!

I have an unusual problem ... I have a horse who is so sweet but remarkably a mystery to me...

He has only 2 bad habits, hard to catch (sometimes, sometimes not) and RUNNING off when I ride him. He is a great horse and I have ridden him for a few years, 3-4 times a week for 1-3 hours each time. He ONCE IN AWHILE decides to run for no reason and there is no stopping him. NOTHING stops him except when I fall off (goes so fast I cannot hold on that long) and when he does see me fall off he stops and looks at me. It seems he is either scared and of what I cannot imagine...or just being defiant. I can see nothing that scares him on these occasions. I probably should give him up, yet, I love him and he is my best friend. He is a thoroughbred quarterhorse. And when he goes, I mean, he goes!!! I have broken my nose 3 times and last weekend almost had my ear cut off by a fence he ran through. (Yes, he was running and never saw the fence although he knows it is there, it is on my property where he grazes daily. I have broken my ribs and almost killed myself several times.

He has a tongue that was half cut off (years ago) by a previous owner beating him so severely with a metal bit in his mouth, the horse tried to break away. So the tongue is intact, but I do not really know how much pressure there is in it, if any. I use a broken tongue bit on him now, very thick and flat, and it is the only one that has worked for me. Any other type is useless and he is uncontrollable, I was told this bit is very comfortable for him although it does not look so comfortable and he seems to like it and only IT. Anything else, he is crazy.

So I wondered if you think your Bitless Bridle will work? Anyone ever confront you with this problem? He makes no sounds or funny noises or has any trouble swallowing or eating, so I just wondered if you think this Bitless Bridle will help my problem, I will try anything but just do not want to send for it if it is not used for the problem I am having.

Thank you for your time...

[Dr. Cook responds:

I don't think there is any mystery about your horse. He has obviously suffered serious trauma in the past from a bit and now, from time to time, he remembers the pain or receives some lesser pain that reminds him of the past and bolts because he is frightened.

I am attaching a three-part article that explains all this and also includes a questionnaire that you might like to complete and return to me. The process of completing it will tell you a good deal more about your horse and what the bit is doing to him.

I think you are very brave and very loving to continue riding this frightened horse but PLEASE get that bit out of his mouth immediately before you come to serious harm yourself.

I think your horse will love the Bitless Bridle. I would be very surprised if it did not solve the problems that both of you have. But it comes with a 30-day warranty so you can return it for a full refund if you are not happy. You have nothing to lose and a great deal to gain. Please let me know how you get on. - Robert Cook]

Bitless Bridle User Comments, 2003

Mary, Gloucester, MA, 1/6/03:

We recently purchased the Bitless Bridle at Equine Affaire in Springfield, MA. Best thing since sliced bread. No more martingale and one very happy camper, as the enclosed pictures show. Our horse, GUY, is twenty-three years old and he says this is the best thing he has ever used. He's not the only one. We let someone else in the barn try one on her horse. Her horse loved it also. This horse is well known as a strong-headed, impossible mare that after you ride her your arms hurt from trying to hold her back. Well she is a pleasure to ride with the Bitless Bridle, no more pulling, fighting and runaways. Her owner, needless to say, is sending for one. We all thank you, especially our horses.

Harmon, DVM 1/8/03:

Want to report on the Bitless Bridle. My old TB "FLOYD" 26 years of age, is a great horse. For about 4 months, after riding, I noticed drooling and salivation on the left side of his mouth. Examination showed no lesion. I have used a simple broken snaffle bit for most of his 23 years of riding. This last month I have used the Bitless Bridle I ordered. No more salivation or drooling. Both Floyd and I are very happy with your bridle.

Thanks.

Eva, Sweden, 1/13/03:

Subject: Feedback from Sweden

I want to tell you that we are happy with the Bitless Bridle. It's better than we expected. We have no problems with the "brakes." She (the mare, a hot one) stops better than with the regular one. But she tends to go with her head too high. Sometimes she responds well to lower her head but that is when we slow down. Trotting on long reins is still a problem, she seems to think "faster ahead". Maybe it is all about training a little more. We want to see results NOW.

My Icelandic horse seems to be born with this bridle. He was calm before but he has loosened up even more. I have no problems (yet). His tolt has improved. A third person who has racehorses (trotting) rides her two horses instead of just drive them all the time. She is also happy with the bridle.

We tell our friends about the bridle whenever we can. It would be nice to know if you have sold more bridles in Sweden.

Lauren and GENIO, Wilson, NC 1/16/03:

First and foremost, the BB is a God-send. I bought the biothane version about six months ago so here's an update:

I first started using it, it was great. I had much more control than with the bit I was using. GENIO seems very nervous by nature and has had problems with popping up off his front feet, bolting, rushing and simply refusing to walk. Everything went great with the BB for a while but then we had an incident. For no apparent reason, (except perhaps he was ready to go home when he saw the barn) he started bolting and running blindly until he hit an electric fence that lead to the pasture. We made it safely over but it really scared me.

So I hung up my bridle and went back to complete re-schooling with a simple copper mouth D-ring snaffle. After about 3 months with some success I decided to try the BB again to

try and get him to WALK and not prance constantly. After some re-adjustments (I think the problem of not having sufficient brakes was that I had it too high) we went off for another trial. ABSOLUTE GENTLEMAN! Completely different horse. He walked, and stood for mounting and stop when I asked. It was the best ride I've had in a while.

Due to weather, I could only ride for an hour but plan to go out again tomorrow afternoon. I'm so happy I gave the BB another shot. This time, I think we may have the hang of it. I just wanted to thank you so much because now I think Genio and I might actually have a chance to compete in Competitive Trial in March. I was beginning to doubt that we'd ever be able to.

Just one question: When tightening the chin strap he always flinches even though I tighten to the recommended 'one flat finger'. Is it possible that I'm causing him pain of the underside of his jaw? If so, if I loosen it a hole, will I still have sufficient brakes?

Thanks for your time.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Congratulations on persevering. I am glad you gave the bridle a second chance. Yes, you will lose some degree of control if the noseband is not low and snug as recommended in the manual. Please adhere closely to the recommendations. The most common mistake in fitting is for the noseband to be placed at the same height that everyone has become accustomed to with a bitted bridle.

If the chinstrap is not snug, the noseband will rise up GENIO'S head when rein pressure is applied, and this will have the same effect as the above. So do not be afraid to cinch it up properly. At the correct snugness you cannot cause any pain. Perhaps Genio remembers some pain from past years with a bit or curb chain? Alternatively, he could have some residual bit-induced neuralgia that will take some further time to resolve. I am attaching a questionnaire in the hope that you may wish to complete it. This will also give me a better idea of Genio's problems if any persist. - Bob Cook, 1/29/03]

Pamela, 1/17/03:

I am interested in writing an article on the Bitless Bridle for The Brayer, the official publication of the American Donkey and Mule Society, based on my positive experiences with this bridle on my mule Madeleine. I wondered if I could get permission to use a picture and some text from your website, specifically what appears on the home page that explains how the bridle works. I have a picture of Madeleine wearing her (custom-made) bridle to show how it would appear on the animal. If there is any information you would particularly like me to include in this article, please let me know, I'll be happy to help. If you wish I can also e-mail you a copy of the finished piece before I send it to The Brayer so you can check it over for accuracy and suitability. Don't worry, I have only good things to say about this bridle, it has made a world of difference in my mule and I think every animal should have the chance to work in one, which is why I want to tell all the readers of The Brayer about it! I am thinking of titling the article "Better Than a Bit? You Bet!" Thanks a million for all your help.

[Ed: Pamela was as good as her word. The reference for her article is: Conley, Pamela: "Better than a Bit? You Bet!" Brayer 2003]

Katrina, 1/17/03:

Hi ... just wanted to say that I love this bridle. I have had had no problems with a snaffle, but loved the idea of your bridle. My horse who is a flighty Arab, loves it. He has never been more relaxed. Great invention!!!! A++++++

George, 1/17/03:

Hi Dr. Cook,

I recently purchased a couple of Bitless Bridles and wanted you to know they are worked out great. I have one Arabian gelding who fought getting the bit in his mouth and fought the bit all during rides. He was very difficult to get to back with a bit, but the Bitless Bridle is terrific. He responds to every cue and backs up with no problem whatsoever. I have several young horses who are just starting under saddle, now I don't have to have their wolf teeth pulled.

I thought you may like to know there are positive comments about your bridles at this thread: <http://www.horseadvice.com/cgi-bin/advisor/show.cgi?7/11573>

Carol, 1/20/03:

Subject: excessive salivation

My 21 year old Morgan mare has been diagnosed with Cushings, but doing well on meds and feed modification. However, she salivates and foams excessively when eating or being ridden. My vet can make no connection between the Cushings and the saliva. I had her teeth floated. I then began using your Bitless Bridle hoping that the salivation would stop. (I thought the copper snaffle she had always worn might be part of the problem.) Although she responded BEAUTIFULLY to the Bitless Bridle, the salivation/foaming was still there -- maybe a little less than with the conventional bit -- but still excessive. Any thoughts or recommendations on this?

Also when neck reining with the Bitless Bridle, should the reins be as loose as when using a bit? Thank you for your help ... and thanks for your great bridle!

[Dr. Cook replies:

I don't know how recently you have switched to the Bitless Bridle but it may be that, if it is very recent, the salivation may regress in the passage of time. Perhaps your mare is responding still in a Pavlovian manner to a learned reflex with regard to the bit. It is of course normal for a horse to salivate when eating, so I do not think there is any need for you to be concerned on this account, even though the salivation you describe is rather excessive. Perhaps this too will regress in time, as the salivary glands become a little less active? Please let me know, as this is an interesting question.

If you are riding Western style, the reins can be slack to neck rein. However, the direct rein turn signal with the Bitless Bridle is akin to head reining, so you can use both methods and still be 'Western' mode. - Robert Cook]

Carol, 1/23/03:

Thank you for your prompt reply! Your comment re a Pavlovian response is interesting in that she has also continued to move her mouth and tongue as though she still had metal in her mouth. (That constant chewing and playing with the bit was one of the reasons I tried your

bridle.). I started using the bit only this week - the day before I wrote to you - so perhaps things will change as the weeks go on. Unfortunately we have been hit with bitter, bitter cold here in the Northeast, so our rides have been quite short each day. But I will say that even though she still "slobbers", she is a lot happier in your bridle. I will keep you posted ... thanks for your interest!

Liz, Mayfield East, NSW Australia, 2/1/03:

I'd just like to let you know that ordered your Bitless Bridle last year, and have been using it successfully ever since. I've been using it on two horses, both Arabs, one of which is an extremely keen horse, who pulls like a train and is virtually impossible to stop once he gets going. This horse has been very responsive to the Bitless Bridle, and I believe is actually pulling less than before.

The other horse that I have been using the Bitless Bridle on is a 4-year-old Arab gelding. I have been breaking him in, and he has only been worked in the bitless. Now that I have used the Bitless Bridle, I don't think that I will ever go back to using a bit. I feel that using the Bitless Bridle is a far more humane method of control, but which does not compromise rider safety as riding in a rope halter can.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Thank you for taking the trouble to let us know how you were liking the new method of communication. I am very happy to read of your success with your two Arabians. If horse number one is still only "pulling less" please check that you have the noseband low enough. The bottom edge of the noseband should be only 1.5 inches above the corner of your horse's mouth. If it is higher than this you lose a degree of control and have to work harder than you need. - Bob Cook]

Liz:

Thanks for the reply. I'll have to check to make sure that I have the noseband low enough - that being said though, he is a very keen horse and needs a lot more work to get him working more calmly. Feel free to put my comment on your website - I think that only by reading other people's comments and experiences can you gain an idea if something might work for your horse.

Robert, 2/21/03:

I received the bridles today. I tried one on my showjumper and he took to it straight away, within a half hour we were jumping 3' 6" practice fences. He does not throw his head around as he used to in a bit or hackamore. I will keep you updated. Thanks.

Anette, My Boy, Toggi, Isak & Fr  kinn, Norway, 2/17/03:

Wow, bitless bridle is taking the world! All thanks to you! It's very hot news in Norway!!!! I've got a friend named Nikki and we "fight" for bitless bridle!!!!!! It is a lot of people that likes bitless bridle! There was a ad in HesteSport about it, and a woman who had a stable and all her horses worked on bitless bridles, all about how she never used bits... well, neither do I! I am convincing my friends to try it... its having TOTALLY success with this other pony at

the stable, (ÿsternBrugA\S) and they are delighted! I think the woman uses Padded leather and Biothane...? I've tried it on my Icelandic horses! (Success)

Yeah, Bitless Bridle is stormin' the world!

Dr. Judy, Salem, VA Feb 26, 03:

Just wanted to say hello and let you know that all nine of my horses are sound and barefoot now for one year. I also wanted to let you know that I had the equine dentist out today, Dr. Rucker, who was quoting a lot of your articles and was very supportive of your Bridle. I have since obtained a browband for the leather bridle that you sent me that has a gold snaffle bit sewn onto the leather. We all thought that this location was the best place to have the bit on the bridle. Take care.

Dr. Judy, Salem VA, March 2003:

I haven't heard anything from the dressage folks but everyone who rides here gets introduced to the Bitless Bridle much to the dismay of my boarder who is an FEI dressage rider and trainer. I will be showing the horses this summer at exhibition rides (the one in Keswick, VA) but my only problem is which bitless, shoeless horse to ride!!!! All of my horses are doing so well. I have finally come up with my own training formula which includes:

24 hour turnout in groups with limited access to green grass, barefoot, Bitless Bridle, and positive reinforcement using a clicker. I have never had such fast progress as I am having now with my horses.....or as much fun. Take care

Kimberly, Soteria Massage, 3/2/03:

My name is Kimberly. I am an equine massage therapist in Ohio. I just found your site for the Bitless Bridle this evening, while hunting down different techniques for neck rein training my father's 21-year-old mare. I stumbled across your site since in the search it mentioned bridles ... thought I'd take a quick look. I was so surprised to find what I did and very relieved that someone loves these animals so much to finally produce an aid that would not hurt them. While in school for my equine training, I was taught about bits, their necessity, and the harm they did despite it and did not agree with it at all. Especially after I took my massage training and realized the horrible strain it put on their neck, among other areas of their body, simply by putting the flexion on the poll. What you have done, by designing such a great tool, is beyond words and I'm sure that any horse using it instead of a bit would thank you if they could. Thanks so much for your contribution to these wonderful creatures and may God bless you.

Sally, Australia. 03/03/03:

Just wanted to let you know how happy my horse and I are with our Bitless Bridle! He took about two minutes to get used to it and I took two rides!

I'm not the world's most experienced rider but I have felt confident using the bridle and my horse feels relaxed and responsive. No more head-shaking and teeth grinding. I have had no trouble stopping him or steering him and I hope that this continues when we are traveling a bit faster than a canter!

Sam is a standard bred ex pacer. He's only 4-years-old and I saved him from becoming dog food. His life just keeps on getting better! One day I hope to be able to afford to buy him a padded leather bridle! I'm spreading the word about the bridle and letting people try it out on their horses, so you might get a few more orders from Australia!

Claudia, 3/10/03:

Yesterday (Friday), I received the bridle I ordered earlier this week. Thanks for being so prompt. I was hoping to beat my husband to the post office yesterday (not really expecting it that soon), and planning to break it to him gently that I had bought yet another horse thing. He got there first, but it helped him to know that I have 30 days to make sure.

I rode my horse with it this morning, and he did great. It thrills me not to have to put a bit in his mouth, and I felt like I had just as much control. He neck reined just fine on a loose rein. I did some lateral flexion exercises and one rein stops with him (I was really nervous about doing that with a bit in his mouth). After our workout, I led him around and let him graze awhile in some beautiful fresh green grass. It was good not to have to worry about the bit being in the way or me pulling on his mouth while doing that. I probably wouldn't have had those special moments with him if I had had to traipse all the way back to our starting point to collect a halter and lead rope.

I'm sorry I can't give you a glowing rags-to-riches story. This young Paint is a new purchase and I've only been on him a few times over the last three weeks, but he did fight being bitted, even though I pride myself on how gently I can handle that maneuver.

I got the impression from the pictures that the crossover straps under the head should be loose and glide through the O rings easily, but that doesn't seem to be the case. They stay pretty snug. Is that correct?

Ed: Yes]

Gay:

Thank you so much for developing this bridle. I just bought one for my Arab. He is very short backed and lateral work has always seemed more difficult for him. With this bridle he just floats laterally. I am so pleased. I had been using a french link snaffle or a rope halter but the halter didn't give enough control for dressage and I thought the snaffle was the best I could do for him. I found your site from another horse site and I don't remember which one but I am so glad I found it. I am starting an abused horse over again and using the Parelli method which has been very successful for me and this horse will also use the Bitless Bridle. Raz seemed to understand right away how things were supposed to work and even collected though I am not very accomplished with my seat as yet. I assume this will make me better in a hurry.

Thanks again.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Thank you so much for your charming report and kind comments. Yes, you have hit the nail on the head ... the BB does help people ride better. It focuses their minds on the importance of seat and legs rather than hands. But having a happy and compliant horse with fewer (man-made) problems is also a great help! - Bob, 3/5/03]

Gay, 3/5/03:

A short follow up, I have started ground driving the abused horse I mentioned. He bolts when anything new is presented to him, with the Bitless Bridle he is totally under control and within 5 minutes he was settled and learning turns and maneuvering around cones. I can see that this bridle is incredibly useful, it removed so much of his anxiety. We have built a lot of trust between us and I was worried about a bit interfering with it. I have shown this to one of my friends and hopefully she will see the advantages. Tomorrow I have a dressage lesson on my horse, RAZ. My dressage instructor doesn't yet know that I have done this. Knowing her, she will be open-minded, as she was with the Parelli material. She uses that on her horses now, with definite improvement. I will ask her to ride Raz and feel the difference. I hope this bridle gets known by many more people and that many more horses benefit from it.

Gay, 3/17/03:

This will probably be my last communication, just wanted to let you know my dressage instructor was impressed and I am making good progress with collecting Raz with my seat. The longer I use this bridle the more comfortable I am and the more comfortable my horses are. This was big bucks to spend on a bridle, but it is worth every penny and you can't have my bridle back. I put my other bridles away. I can't sell them to anyone because I don't want to promote the use of bits. Thanks again from both me and my horses.

Jennifer, Melbourne, Australia 3/16/03:

Subject: Truly Amazing!!

I received my Bitless Bridle on Friday. Firstly thank you for such a quick efficient service!

I tried the bridle on Saturday ≠ at first I jumped on in the paddock and didn't have much control. I then dismounted and led him to the sand arena. Next I checked the fit again and tightened the noseband as I could fit about three fingers under the chin strap. I walked him around and his stops immediately improved 100%!! If I ask him to stop he usually thinks about it for about five steps and then finally pulls up. With the Bitless

He was a bit confused about turning and kept trying to open his mouth ≠ I guess to evade the bit that wasn't there! After a short while he got the hang of it. I asked him to back up and he did this perfectly. My horse is a standardbred ex-pacer with only very basic riding training. In the Bitless Bridle he arched his neck, tucked his nose in and backed up with no hesitation. In a bit he flatly refused to move or only backed 1 or 2 steps at best. He usually opened his mouth while doing this as well in the bit.

Another thing that was noticeable was that he engaged the hindquarters ≠ something he's never done. When cantering he was relaxed and stretched his head out and just felt so much more rhythmical than usual (normally short, choppy strides at the canter).

While we were testing the bridle in the arena a 5 month old filly broke into the arena and was cantering around us, pigrooting and running into my gelding. Normally he would at least shake his head around and at worst chase off after her. He was completely calm and always had his ears on me not her!! When she ran into him he stopped and stood quietly while she got out of his way.

No one was there to witness my horse in his new bridle so I phoned the people I ride with and they were shocked that the bridle worked. They were very skeptical when I

purchased it and didn't think it would really work. Yesterday they saw first hand how my horse went and he did even better again second time around. Now everyone I ride with wants to try it. Having said that they all told me that if I hadn't bought one they never would have considered something like this without seeing the actual bridle used in person.

I guess the best part was that I was no longer inflicting pain on this poor animal, he was much more relaxed, I felt far more confident in him and we just had the best ride in the arena. I can't wait to take him trail riding next weekend - it was flooded this weekend on the tracks so couldn't take him out. I expect he'll be perfect as he's always better out than in the arena.

Yesterday I saw some kids at the local pony club yanking on their horses' mouths through their bits - the thought sickened me. One kid was even punishing his horse by harshly jabbing his horse in the mouth with a bit many times in a row. It's safe to say that I'll never put a bit in my horse's mouth ever again.

I'm compiling a bit and bitless comparison so once I've been out on the trails in my group I'll send it to you.

Thanks again for a wonderful product and no doubt you'll be receiving some more orders from Australia soon!

Good Luck with this brilliant product!

Jenny, 3/18/03 :

Sure, you can add my email to your testimonial section - it helped me decide to order the bridle and I'm sure it would encourage others. As I said in my first email, other people were skeptical and wouldn't have ordered without seeing mine first. If you ever decide to branch out into overseas agents I would love to hear from you. Word of mouth is usually the best form of advertising. I also have recommended your website to a work colleague's relative in Melbourne who will also pass on this info to her horsey friends. I also belong to the Standardbred Pleasure and Performance Club of Queensland so I'll be writing an article in the next newsletter about the success I've had with the bridle and encourage others in the club to have a look at your website. People in the club are already open minded as Standardbreds aren't usually promoted as good riding horses and many people in this country still reckon they are only good for dog meat after racing. The bridle will really help me push the breed further as others will see how good a riding horse an ex-pacer can be.

I will fill out your questionnaire after the weekend of trail rides and also email back my little report.

Thanks again for an excellent equine product ≠ it's just the thing my horse needed after years of being tied up in all sorts of gadgets. I'm positive my horse appreciates it as he was hanging around the humans on Sunday instead of with the other horses! Usually he's the anti-social horse of the group!

All the best with your business ≠ I'm happy to recommend this product to anyone.

Jennifer, 4/13/03:

Please find attached my questionnaire/comparison for Dr Cook. My horse has only been out on the trails once (yesterday) in the past six weeks due to flooding in the forestry. He did try the Bitless Bridle out to see what he could get away with as some horses did run away from us. I didn't lose control of him but he did various things to evade the bridle ≠ all of which had no success. By the time we were riding home he had given up. His walk was much better and his trot so much more smoother ≠ I could control the speed ≠ can't usually with a bit. Also attached is an article that's going to appear in my club's newsletter. (The club being

Standardbred Pleasure & Performance Club of Queensland). There are some photos at the bottom of the article. If you ever want a follow up down the track please let me know. I think he needs to become more familiar with it ≠ and I also need to relax and stop thinking that I won't have control without a bit ≠ it's a hard thing to adjust to after many years. Keep up the good work!

Jennifer, 4/28/03:

Since owning the Bitless Bridle I've had a lot of interest. Next week I'm taking it out to a pacing (harness racing stud) where they are going to try it on a racehorse. Hopefully it will give the horse an edge without a bit in its mouth. Will let you know how it turns out ≠ if all goes well you'll be receiving some more orders from

I just love the product and my horse has tried his best to try it out and he can't seem to beat it so it's a very valuable piece of tack for me now. My horse still appears to be smiling when he wears it and I've noticed that he now is more co-operative with me on the ground as well. He now comes over to me when I walk in his paddock and he sticks his head into the halter and bridle with no problems and there are no dramas leaving the other horses to come out with me. I'm still thrilled to bits with the product so just had to share with you!!

Jennifer, 5/22/03:

Further to my email earlier I tried my Bitless Bridle on a harness racehorse at a training session. The bridle was too large in the noseband for the racehorse, so consequently the horse didn't pull up very well. They seemed more impressed with gadgets than lack of metal in a horse's mouth. They asked why I would bother even using such a device on my horse (who used to be one of their racehorses) and I explained that I was doing it for the horses welfare and comfort but they failed to see what the purpose of that was! It was pretty clear to me that the horse's welfare wasn't really considered in this particular racing stable.

I still happily use my Bitless Bridle and find that my horse improves each time with use. I don't expect miracles from the piece of equipment but I think the horse understands this better than a bitted bridle. I also found out from the above people that my horse was never actually broken to saddle/riding ≠ they just got on and rode him. Each time they kicked him, he kicked out as well. This probably explains his lack of understanding when asked to do certain things. I'm sure he has the brain to learn but hasn't been given the chance.

One thing I wanted to ask was when I was cantering the other day (in the bitless) on the way home with another horse in front, my horse put his head down for a stride or two until I pulled his head back up. I don't know that I would call it shaking (the facial neuralgia) or just being naughty / excited. Is there a way to tell if a horse has this? Also when out on the trails, some times when I ask him to stop he stretches his head and neck out in a straight line. I'm guessing he is doing this to avoid/evade the "squeeze" of the bitless around his head as opposed to opening his mouth or clamping his teeth on the bit to avoid being told to stop. What would your opinion be on these two issues?

Apart from the above the bitless is no different to use (from my side) and I see no need to put a bit in my horses mouth. I know people look at me strange when I ride with it. It is amazing how many people think I'm using it because my horse must have some mental deficiency! The majority of horse people think that bits are everything and if your horse has any problem use a stronger/harsher bit. It's a shame that people are so backward thinking when it comes to horse training. I'm looking at getting an instructor soon to teach my horse

something new and hope they don't think old school and insist that a horse must have a bit to understand.

Thanks again for this product.

Jennifer, 5/26/03:

Thank you for your quick reply. I rode my horse out in the forestry and he didn't display either of these signs this weekend which leads me to believe that the head down while cantering was probably just good spirits out running with his mates in the bush. Stretching the head out straight always seems to me like he is trying to evade the tightening of the noseband while braking. As I only used to ride him in a simple bridle with no noseband I think that the cross over straps and noseband are two things that probably irritate him by pulling his hair or pinching. He also sweats a lot more under this bridle being the Beta not leather so he may have sweat tickling him.

He does appear to be getting used to the bridle and I haven't had a control issue with it. On Saturday while riding back past our paddock three horses took off galloping away and my horse was keen to chase after them and go silly but after checking him he kept walking so he does listen to the bridle and does behave when asked. (He just needs reminding sometimes!) Yesterday we went out and had a lovely ride and he behaved beautifully. His canter was slow and calm.

On another subject I tried to explain to the racing people the concept behind the bridle enabling the horse to breathe better hence run faster but they looked at me as though I was nuts! I did tell them that my horse was smoother and more balanced but again they just looked at me strange. They are very old fashioned in their thinking. The owner's daughter was there and she said it sounded like it was a good concept. She's trying to get a training license so maybe the next generation of trainers might be more open minded. The two horses I saw gallop that morning both came back from their workout with problems. One couldn't get her heart rate down and another had one leg iced due to some injury. I was watching them as they galloped around the track with their mouths open and foaming. The third horse that galloped in my bridle had his mouth neatly shut and looked more comfortable to me. I'm no expert on racehorses but I could see the horses' differences with bits and without.

I love the fact that my horse can go out on the trails and pick along the way and not have green slime all over his face by the time we get home. I think he loves the bridle ≠ he always looks like he is 'smiling' in it.

I thank you again for your reply and wish you every success with this bridle.

Jennifer, 6/2/03:

Thank you for your reply. Attached is your form filled out. As my horse only exhibits this behavior some of the time it's hard to tell if it's just playing up or whether he actually has some problem. Certainly with the bitless he has become much better to bridle. With a bitted bridle the head would usually go up and teeth would remain clamped shut. In the Bitless Bridle now he actually lowers his head and tucks his nose under so I can easily slip the bridle on so that would suggest he prefers the bitless to me. His attitude to arena work is just lazy. Just glues himself to one spot and refuses to move until I get really firm with him ≠ sometimes takes a slight slap of the reins on his neck to make him move. I have ridden him once with a crop which I barely had to use but he seemed upset about me having one and was quite tense while working so I haven't used one since.

I'm glad that I've fitted the bridle correctly so I would be getting the right use out of it.

Patt, Iowa, 3/27/03:

I believed all the letters from people who had tried these bridles even more than your claims.

When I put it on my 4-year-old Rocky Mt. Horse I figured it would work, and it did. Others had said there was no learning curve ... I agree. What it seemed like to me was that we were finally speaking the same language. He understood what I wanted him to do and did it willingly because there was no pain. When I do have to hold him back (he was barely broke last year) he complies with encouragement but mostly I know I'm not ruining his mouth.

It was like when I was training my puppy with a clicker. The teacher kept saying you have to remember that they don't know your language, but the clicker helps them understand that they are on the right track. Well, with this bridle there was never a transition. He knew instinctively, and I think appreciates that I'm finally speaking his language instead of him having to learn mine. I am telling everyone about it. They all think it is a hackamore or bosal, and don't think I'm on to anything new. That's OK.

I know my new horse is very calm and willing. I wasn't having any trouble with him in the bit, but when I read about this I knew this was the more humane way to go. I was right. We have ridden 4 times with it in the last week and there was never an issue as to what we were doing or where we were going. Thank you for loving horses so much that you found a better way to partner with them.

My next move is to go barefoot. Last year I got a treeless saddle and love that too. I want to try this with my 20-year-old Arab who is very high strung and fights to do what she wants. I guess that would be a better test. My friend said when she read your web pages that it seemed people who used it all had problem horses. Since hers wasn't a big problem why change? Well she has watched me now and thinks she wants to try it. My only problem? Then I have to put him back in the bitted bridle for that ride and I don't want to ... ever!

M.E., 3/31/03:

I just wanted to say what a fabulous product. I am using it on my Paso Fino who can be stubborn about going the way I want him to go. This bridle is less stress for both of us. He is happier and so am I. There have been no problems with control with him. The ability to use it as a longing bridle is a very convenient feature too. We have ordered one for my husband's Paso who is as hot as mine can be stubborn. We will keep you posted. Thanks for a great product and website.

Lauren & Chilli, 4/1/03:

I know it's been a while, but I wanted to give you an update on my mare, Chilli. Once her back healed, I started riding her again. We've slowly built up over these last 3 months. Chilli can now walk, trot and canter both ways very well. The Bitless Bridle is a great piece of equipment, the best I have ever bought. Chilli performs wonderfully in it.

A few days ago, I had a chance to jump... after app. 6 months of waiting! I asked the coach teaching the lessons while they were cooling down (at our stable, we have to have a coach there to watch us jump). She set up a little crossrail with a ground line. We came in at a

trot. I was amazed. No rushing, no head up, nothing. Just a calm, steady trot, a canter stride and over. It was so much fun. Chilli was doing really well. She didn't madly rush off after the jump. She broke down to a trot and off we went again. The coach raised the height and again no problems. She raised it again. Chilli practically flew over but still no rushing. It was a great feeling to be jumping again.

I've waited for that moment for a really long time! And Chilli was so good. She even accepted the contact, rounded her back and flew. It made me realized how much I missed jumping. Even the coach was surprised at how good she was. It is an amazing change from before when she tried to gallop to the jump with her head in the clouds. It also makes me realize how lucky I am to have such a special horse. Chilli is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me. She's such a sweetie and she's so much fun to ride; I never know what will happen next!!!

I just wanted to thank you for the Bitless Bridle! It's taken Chilli beyond what everyone thought she was. Everyone who knew her before is really surprised. They keep telling me I should get a "real" bridle though. I just reply, "This is the only 'real' bridle I've ever owned." Anyway, this month, we're going to be competing in a small show. I think we might need a bit (we're finding out) in the flat classes. It's too bad. I think I'll maybe attach a bit and use the entire bridle like a double bridle. Can this be done? So, thanks again! We REALLY appreciate it!

[Dr. Cook responds:

I am delighted to hear that you and Chilli are so happy. Thank you for the lovely follow-up report. For showing, I suggest you place the simplest of bitted bridles (with a bridoon bit from a double bridle) over the top of the Bitless Bridle. Now you will have two pairs of reins (as in a double bridle) but you will only use the rein to the Bitless Bridle. This should allow you to comply with any show regulation. Please keep in touch and let me know how you get on with this approach. Best wishes, Bob, 4/2/03]

Lauren and Chilli:

Again, I thought you might like an update on CHILLI :). Well, last Sunday we entered a show (we were allowed to use the bitless). We got a third in hunter over fences and a second in equitation over fences!! Everyone who doubted the bridle before were amazed!! There is such a huge improvement in Chilli!! She now accepts contact and jumps like a hunter!! I want to thank you again for the bridle!! It's made such a difference!

[There are many different reasons why a horse may become a habitual rearer. The main categories are referred to in the following response by Dr. Jessica Jahiel, though the response is not intended to be a comprehensive and detailed analysis of each category. With Dr. Jahiel's permission, however, I am reproducing this newsletter from her excellent Horse-Sense Archives as it is highly relevant to the problem in general. Amongst other causes, Jessica rightly lists the need to consider "tack fitting and adjustment analysis." The case histories described by Ally and Jessica refer to a number of clinical signs of pain exhibited by rearing horses. Such signs are rarely diagnostic of a specific cause, as pain in different parts of the body will often generate similar behavioral changes. Having said that, it is nevertheless true that all the signs listed in the following piece are compatible with bit-induced pain. In my experience, bit-induced pain is a common cause of a horse rearing. For further information, see the questionnaire available online as part of my three-part article "Fear of the Bit." The questionnaire in

Part III of this article contains a list of the 100 or more signs that have been frequently alleviated by removing the bit. - Robert Cook]

ON REARING

HORSE-SENSE: Archives #4389 from www.horse-sense.org, Date: 4/7/03

From: Ally

Subject: reaction to "un-sellable horse"

Dear Jessica,

I know you don't usually do follow-up letters, but I hope that you will make an exception. I feel that I have something important to say to Kimberly, the girl with the out-of-control horse that attacks other horses and rears and falls over backward with its rider.

I am thirty-seven years old now. Twenty-five years ago, I was just like Kimberly. I loved horses so much, I was twelve and I had read "The Black Stallion" until the pages fell out, and I thought I knew a lot about horses. I begged for a horse, and we started looking at the classified ads. We found a really beautiful horse named STAR, and the man told us that the horse had Olympic jumping potential but his little daughter just wasn't a very good or brave rider, and she needed a real quiet, pony-ride kind of horse and they couldn't afford to keep two horses. We were getting a wonderful horse and a wonderful deal.

I'm sure you are shaking your head right now reading this, but we didn't know that anyone would lie about a horse. So when the man told us that I was such a talented rider I needed a horse with that kind of talent and potential, we weren't suspicious, my parents were just very proud of my talent, and I was too. At first I thought that Star was hard for me to ride because he was missing the little girl who used to own him, so I spent a lot of time feeding him sugar and carrots and petting him. Some days he would try to bite me or try to chase and bite the other horses, in turnout or even through the stall walls, other days he was nice. When he would bolt, or spin and duck and run away from something that hadn't bothered him the day before, I thought he was just being high-spirited. When he reared, I sort of liked it at first. I tried to hold on to his mane and wait for him to come down. Some days he would rear up so high he would fall over backwards, and I got hurt a few times when I couldn't get out of the way fast enough. One day my ankle broke when he landed on my foot.

I told my parents that Star was sensitive and spirited and that he hardly ever did things like that. After they saw it happen enough to know that "hardly ever" wasn't really true, I told them that horses did stuff like that sometimes, it was normal. Then one day he flipped over and I broke my pelvis. I had to go to the hospital in an ambulance and then I had to tell my parents everything. They said they didn't want me to ride Star any more. They called my trainer and told him about all the rearing and falling over, and asked what to do. He said nobody should ride the horse and told them "Call the vet." Doc came over and looked at Star and did some tests, then he said he thought Star should go to the big vet hospital for more tests, so that they could try to figure out what his problem was and if it was something that could be fixed.

We weren't rich people, but my parents agreed to pay for all the tests and sent Star to the clinic. I couldn't go and see Star because I was in the hospital and then in a hospital bed in my own room at home because of the broken pelvis, and it was a long time before I could walk at all. After two weeks, Doc (my vet) came over to our house and sat down and talked to my parents in my room so I could hear. He said that Star had bone injuries in his spine that were causing nerve pain. His wife is a chiropractor and she said he had a lot of problems that were beyond anything she could help with. Doc said it wouldn't be right to sell Star, he was too

dangerous from hurting all the time, and somebody would get hurt the way I did, or killed. My parents said to put him down, and Doc said he would do an autopsy and tell us what he found.

A couple of days later Doc came back and said that we did the right thing. Star had damage in his neck and in his withers and in his back just behind his withers, and Doc said that the rearing and flipping happened because something put pressure on the nerves, either from the rider moving in a certain way or the saddle shifting or just a movement that Star might make like rounding up his back to jump or go into a canter (which was one of the times he would bolt or rear). He said that Star was probably in pain every single minute of every day, and that the "crazy fits" happened whenever the pain got to the point where Star couldn't stand it.

I felt glad that it wasn't anything I had done, but I felt terrible that for three years, every time I rode Star I was causing him so much pain. Doc said that I was lucky not to have been killed, that riders did get killed when horses go over backwards like that. He also said that going over backwards is probably what caused the damage to Star's spine in the first place, maybe he had fallen in a trailer or reared and fallen on a rock or just hit his withers too hard on hard ground. He said that horses aren't meant to go over backwards like that but some trainers pull them over backwards on purpose to punish them, and he'd seen other horses that were permanently ruined because of that.

After Star died, we heard some stories about him with his previous owners, and it sounded as if he'd had the problem for some time before we got him. One of his other owners was in a body cast for a year, and he had a bad reputation for rearing and generally going nuts in the middle of a ride. We didn't know any of these people had ever owned Star. The guy who sold him to us had left the area, but we did eventually find out that he was a horse dealer and didn't even have a daughter, so the story he told us about how Star was just too talented for his little girl was a complete lie. We guessed that Star had once belonged to one of the "pull the horse over backwards" trainers, and then got sold when it was obvious he was wrecked, but we'll never really know about the cause, only the effect. Poor Star was probably in pain for years before I got him, and I just made it worse.

My parents spent a lot of money on those medical tests for Star, and they paid Doc to put him down. I admire them for that. Once they knew that Star was dangerous, before they even knew why he was dangerous, they said they wouldn't sell him unless his problem could be fixed. There is no way they would have handed him over to another young girl, or anybody else, to ride, even if they could have saved money or even made some money if they'd done that. They were the most honorable people in the world, and even though they didn't know anything much about horses, they knew about ethics and honor and responsibility and doing the right thing. The right thing for Star was to put him out of his pain. They did that, and they never mentioned anything about the money to me, not ever. They died in an accident five years ago and I never had a chance to tell them how great they were and how much I loved and respected them always. I guess that's what I'm doing now, in this letter. Anyway, I just wanted to tell you and Kimberly how things went for another horse with a similar problem. Kimberly, if you're reading this, please don't try to get rid of your problem by selling the horse to someone who doesn't know his history. And don't give up on horses, you just need a different horse that can be your friend. Your horse is probably in pain all the time just like my horse was, so please, please, don't sell him and let him go on suffering and maybe injure or even kill a rider when he is hurting so much he is out of control. It may not be illegal to sell him, but it's wrong. And don't try to ride him again yourself, please, or you might not even get to choose whether you're going to stop riding. My broken pelvis hurt for a long time, and it will never be

normal. I'm not even forty yet, and I already have arthritis in my pelvis because of the accident. I've heard of people who were killed in similar accidents so I guess I shouldn't complain, but please don't take any more chances and don't let anyone else take those chances either.

I know that your original question was basically just "would it be okay to sell my horse and not tell buyers about him rearing and flipping over, or should we put him down?" and if those are your only choices, then putting him down IS the answer, but if you're a regular HORSE-SENSE subscriber and if you've read Jessica's HORSE-SENSE archives, you know about the different things you could try, if your parents were willing to put some money into the horse. But since they aren't, you just don't have a lot of choices. Please don't let your parents sell your horse to someone who doesn't know about it. Even if they don't care anything about the horse, and even if they never got sued, or if they got sued and won the lawsuit, how could they live with themselves if somebody else's daughter got badly hurt or killed? Your parents may not have considered that even though they are really the ones making the decision, you will live with the consequences for a long time, a lot longer than they will. Thanks for reading all this, if you did. And Jessica, thank you for printing this, because I just kept reading the letter and saying "I'm Kimberly, I'm Kimberly". I don't want her to go through what I went through, and I don't want her horse to go on suffering the way Star would have gone on suffering if we hadn't put him down. - Ally

Jessica:

Hi Ally - you're right, I don't usually publish follow-up letters or comments, but the original letter provoked a flurry of responses, and yes, I'm making an exception for yours. Sometimes it's important to hear the words of someone who has "been there, done that". I'll include my "combined" response - to your letter and to all the other letters about Kimberly's horse.

Your parents must have been wonderful people, and I don't think it matters one bit that you didn't have a last chance to tell them how much you loved and respected them. They must have known. I'm SURE they knew.

They made a mistake initially, in buying that horse for you, and they paid a high price for the mistake, but the price could have been much higher. By "price" I don't mean the money that went into the horse and his upkeep and diagnostics and euthanasia, although it may have been a large sum. I'm talking about the price they paid in terms of knowing that they had put you at risk and almost lost you - a broken pelvis is a major injury, but you're right, riders DO get killed when horses fall on them.

Based on Kimberly's letter, I strongly suspect that her horse may be suffering from back injuries, very possibly the same sort of injuries that your vet found in your horse, Star. But in the absence of diagnostics, or suspicions confirmed (or not) by necropsy, there's no way to be certain.

You're right about the HORSE-SENSE archives - thank you for pointing that out. OF COURSE putting a horse down is not the first option, nor is it ever an easy, casual choice. There are many, many options, in terms of both diagnostics and treatment modalities, available to horse-owners who are willing and able to spend the money. These things ARE discussed, at length, throughout the HORSE-SENSE archives. Various forms of medical diagnosis and treatment, farriery, dentistry, chiropractic, massage, and acupuncture, together with tack fitting and adjustment analysis, improvement of the rider's skills, quite possibly a change of trainer.... the options and possibilities are extensive - IF the horse-owner is willing and able to investigate them. That's "willing" - AND "able". BOTH.

To be fair to Kimberly, there are many horse-owners who would be willing to spend the money IF THEY HAD IT, but who simply don't have the funds. And even if someone is able to pay for extensive tests, there are times when - as you learned with Star - even costly, complex diagnostic tests won't tell you everything you need to know, or provide a positive prognosis. When that's the case, euthanasia is a better answer than trying to sell the horse. That doesn't mean that you can count on the results of a necropsy to clear all confusion and let you know that you made exactly the right decision - the results may NOT provide a definitive reason for the horse's problems. Sometimes you can't KNOW, you just have to do the very best you can based on the incomplete information that you have.

Also, don't forget that Kimberly is a minor. She wasn't the one who determined that the only two options were to sell the horse or put it down, and she won't be the one making the final decision. Her parents made that determination, and her parents will make the final decision, which is why much of my answer to her included information that her parents need to know.

There have been quite a number of recent letters to HORSE-SENSE on this subject, as you can imagine. Many are like yours - although yours was the most detailed and specific - and consist of personal accounts by riders who have been injured, or whose family members or friends have been injured or killed in similar situations. One woman wrote about a friend of hers who had taken on a "problem horse" for training - and who is still alive, but ended up spending a year in a body cast and has now given up horses entirely. These are very sad stories, and there are two elements that appear in all of them: a horse in pain, and a rider in danger through ignorance about the amount, type, or degree of the horse's pain.

"Unethical sellers" and "horse dealers" are used as synonyms in many of the letters, but I'd like to take just a moment to say that it's unfair to brand all horse dealers as unethical and unscrupulous. I've known a number of horse dealers who were very honest and straightforward.

I think it's more useful to remind horse-buyers that whether they are buying from a dealer or trainer or next-door neighbor or best friend, they should always be careful. This includes getting good advice and help during the search and purchase, including their instructor's or trainer's approval of the potential purchase, and their vet's positive assessment of the horse's soundness and suitability for their purpose. They should also be reasonably aware of the market, so that they can distinguish facts from hype, and recognize unrealistic claims. (Hint: sound young horses that have demonstrated genuine Olympic potential are not likely to be sold at bargain-basement rates - nor are they usually listed in the classified ad section of the local newspaper.)

Be aware, be informed, be careful. Just because someone is a horse dealer doesn't mean that he is dishonest. Just because someone is selling his own horse out of his own little barn at home doesn't mean he is honest. Just because someone is honest doesn't mean he can't be misinformed, insufficiently informed, or just plain wrong.

Now, let's go back to the specific problem of Kimberly's horse, with its explosive fits of aggression, rearing, and flipping over backward. Ally has provided the "been there, done that" viewpoint based on her own experience with Star. Some other HORSE-SENSE readers have made suggestions - well-meant, all of them, I'm sure - about how the horse should be sold as a "companion animal", or given to a professional trainer who could "fix its attitude", or sent to a rescue organization or retirement home. There are actual or potential problems with all of these options - each one needs to be thought through, in the context of what the situation would mean for this particular horse.

GIVE IT AWAY OR SELL IT AS A COMPANION ANIMAL

A horse that attacks other horses is not likely to be a suitable companion animal. Think about this.

HAND IT OVER TO A PROFESSIONAL TRAINER

Good professional trainers have full schedules and waiting lists. They don't have the time, energy, and barn space to take on additional horses, much less horses like this, much less for free - and they certainly aren't eager to invest their money and time in such horses. A "problem horse" that is sound and healthy but has been mishandled is one thing - eminently retrainable, and thus probably worth the effort involved in retraining it. A horse that is a proven danger to itself, its rider, and other horses, and that would certainly need extensive and costly medical tests before any responsible trainer could even hope to begin to work with it.. is another matter.

LET THE HORSE RESCUE SOCIETY TAKE IT

Rescue societies are set up to save horses that are abused and/or neglected, and this horse simply would not meet the qualifications for impoundment. I've seen the photos of Kimberly's horse, and I can assure you that it does not appear abused or neglected in any way. There are no prominent hip-bones visible, and no overgrown hooves - nothing that would justify a rescue investigator's attempt to have it impounded.

SEND IT TO A RETIREMENT HOME

There are some well-known, good-quality retirement homes where horses that cannot be ridden can live out their lives in grass fields with safe fencing, good companions, and a caring staff to look after them, but these are like good nursing homes for humans - they, too, have waiting lists, and... they aren't free. It's true that there are some facilities run by organizations or individuals that advertise that they will accept any and all horses, at no charge, but before sending a horse to such a place, the owner would be well-advised to investigate the conditions thoroughly. Some such "homes" are thinly-disguised dealerships; others are feedlot waystations on the way to the slaughter house. Are there any genuine homes where all horses are accepted? Yes, a few. But before you send a horse to spend many years at ANY facility, investigate the facility thoroughly. And before you send a horse anywhere at all, think about the condition and comfort of the horse. It may put the owner's mind at ease to think that the horse is "safe" somewhere and will never be ridden again, but is this enough to ensure a happy, comfortable retirement for the horse? Can the horse ENJOY its life? Some medical conditions are compatible with a happy life in a pasture, but some are not.

Quality of life is all-important. When a horse is in constant pain and has regular bouts of excruciating pain that causes it to explode out of control, what will be that horse's quality of life, even in the kind hands of an affectionate owner?

Kimberly, the young girl who wrote the initial letter is an affectionate owner - not a vicious or unkind or abusive rider, as some readers wrongly assumed. She's obviously young and inexperienced, but it's equally obvious that she means well, tries hard, and is genuinely perplexed about what to do with this horse. She knows that she can't compete it and can't control it, doesn't really want to ride it, is afraid of it, and is so unhappy that she is beginning to wonder whether she wants to ride AT ALL. Her instructor hasn't been able to help her or her horse, and the free advice she's had so far has all consisted of variations on "shoot the horse".

She knows that there will be no money spent on the horse, so professional evaluations, diagnostics and treatments, even if any treatments were possible, simply aren't in the cards. Her choices, as set down by her parents, are very limited: She can keep the horse, sell the

horse, or have the horse put down. In other words, she has one impractical, dangerous option, one unethical, dangerous (to others) option, and one sad (but compassionate) option.

Keeping the horse won't make its problems go away, and in any case she doesn't want to keep it. Remember, this is a teenaged girl who loves horses, but is so frightened and frustrated that she is thinking of giving up horses. That is NOT a good situation for the horse, and it's not a good situation for the teenager.

If the horse is out of control because of injuries to its back, selling the horse to a new owner is unlikely to help it, unless the purchaser is a wealthy philanthropist veterinarian who happens to be a brilliant diagnostician, and what are the odds of that? Selling the horse could make the horse's life even worse than it is, possibly much worse, and would be very likely to endanger the buyer or another human - or another horse.

Putting the horse down isn't an easy or casual choice, but in this case, it may be the best of the available options.

The problem, like so many other horse problems, comes down, in the end, to two things: money, and quality of life. Money is a very real problem, since the decision has already been made that there will be no money spent on diagnostic work, and no money for therapy, even assuming that a thorough diagnosis would reveal conditions for which therapy is possible. Not every horse owner can afford to investigate every possible therapeutic option, and an owner's financial limitations are NOT a reflection of the owner's affection for the animal. Some of you have said "If she really cared, she'd spend the money" - well, NO. It's not always that easy, and "caring" and "money" are not synonyms.

That leaves the question of quality of life. Is there any way to justify keeping any animal alive and in perpetual pain, continuing to live but unable to enjoy life? Every horse-owner, every pet-owner, is faced with a question like this sooner or later. When we take on animals, we take on the full responsibility for those animals, their lives, and the quality of those lives. At some point, all of us are faced with a difficult decision - perhaps not so dramatic as Kimberly's decision, but difficult just the same. And at that point, the welfare of the animal has to be what drives the decision. It's not a question of how fond the owner is of the animal, it's a question of what the animal needs. Sometimes, love means doing whatever you have to do to hold on. Sometimes, it means letting go.

Like most HORSE-SENSE readers, I am luckier than Kimberly - I'm an adult, I can make my own decisions about my horses, and my decisions are based on what I think is best for the horses. If something is wrong with one of my horses, I have choices - I can choose to call the vet, send the horse to the clinic, take the horse to another trainer, try a different saddle... or retire the horse in a pleasant grass pasture with safe fencing. It's unlikely that I will ever be in Kimberly's position, faced with a difficult and depressing choice between only two options, both of them unpleasant.

Ally, thank you for writing - in fact, THANK YOU to everyone who has "checked in" on this subject. It's not an easy or comfortable topic, but if reading about this situation has caused other horse-owners to think about their own horses, choices, decisions, and responsibilities, then some greater good may come out of Kimberly's difficulties. We'll leave the subject alone now, but I'm sure that I can speak for the entire HORSE-SENSE membership when I say: Kimberly, we sympathize with your situation. Stay safe, and we wish you well.

HORSE-SENSE is a subscriber-supported newsletter. If you would like to help support HORSE-SENSE, please visit the website for information. Thank you!

=====

Jessica Jahiel's HORSE-SENSE Newsletter

<http://www.horse-sense.org/>

Copyright © 1996-2004. Jessica Jahiel, Holistic HorsemanshipÆ

=====

Materials from Jessica Jahiel's HORSE-SENSE Newsletter may be distributed and copied for personal, non-commercial use provided that all authorship and copyright information, including this notice, is retained. Materials may not be republished in any form without express permission of the author.

=====

Wayne, Lewisburg, TN 4/7/03:

I have been a professional trainer for more than twenty years. I have, for many years, taken horses who have either been over-bitted or tortured in other ways and have ridden them with reins on the noseband to subdue the horse's anxiety. One of my clients saw your product and ordered it. Her horse is an off the track overfaced ex-racehorse and jumper. We have done all of the homework to gain trust and just started with the reins on the noseband thing. She saw your product, ordered it, and last Friday PM, the horse was so comfortable and quiet and happy and NOT worried that he just loped around the ring with a HUGE yet controllable stride. He was crossing over the jumps rounder and softer than many of the show ring hunters I see and judge in the show ring. The change in the horse was almost like medication. I am totally convinced!

Your product is just fabulous! I am now saving pennies to acquire one of your Bitless Bridles next month, and hopefully persuade all of my clients to get one. I will have to buy the first one to purchase and then let them borrow it. Then they should fall right onto your website. Thank you from a very grateful trainer.

Carlotta, D.V.M., Ph.D. 4/11/03:

Subject: Bitless Bridle not working for my young draft!

First let me say, I was excited to see that my comments concerning the Bitless Bridle are posted on your website! I have referred several friends to this product and all are happy with it.

My Percheron OZ definitely likes the bridle much better than the bit, but my problem is with my new 3-year-old Shire, KANOAK. I have decided to go with the Bitless Bridle for his training since it works so well with OZ. However, no matter what I have tried (short of using a bit), I just can't get enough leverage to provide the control I need at all times. What I mean is that at the walk, Kanoak responds very well to signals from my legs and seat along with the Bitless Bridle. The bridle definitely works wonderfully to control Kanoak at the walk. However, when asked to trot and stay on the rail, he refuses to listen to the aids and pulls very strongly on my outside rein to go where he wants. Using half halts to control the reins (inside and outside) have not countered this problem. I even took a riding lesson to get help. I have been encouraged to control my outside rein but Kanoak just counters with more force. I am using spurs to help give the signal from my inside leg to ask him to move towards my outside rein. The spurs help significantly, but he still tries to evade the aids as much as possible. Yet

this horse steers without problem at the walk to stay on the rail, do figure eights, serpentines, etc.

I have also tried using a running martingale as recommended, but the martingale provided no help at all. At this point, I feel my only option is to use a bit. I have checked the fit for the bridle and it's correct according to the instructions provided. I will admit that Kanoak is doing better since I started using spurs in conjunction with the bit, but at times it's still a battle to keep him going where I desire even with this aid. What I mean is there is an area in the arena where my horse just decides he is not going to listen to me. When we start to near that area, I give stronger aids to counter this problem but I just feel the way he pulls on me that maybe a bit would help.

When I think about it as a scientist, I actually think a bit may cause him to pull more, but I am so discouraged with this behavior I don't know what to do.

I have tried long-lining him from the ground using long reins in both hands but my coordination is not so good at this point. Maybe I should return to this ground training with the Bitless Bridle to teach him about control using the outside rein.

I am sorry to send you this long email, but I love this product and don't understand why it's not providing the control I had hoped. Any suggestions you can offer are greatly appreciated! I will be out of town for a few days but I will return on 15 April 03, so I do hope to hear from you by email when I have returned.

[Dr. Cook responds:

If the bridle really is fitted correctly (noseband low and snug) I doubt whether this is truly a bridle problem so much as a training problem. He is a very young and green horse and I think you have answered your own question when you speak of returning to more ground training.

I would encourage you to browse through the archives in Dr. Jessica Jahiel's Newsletter HORSE-SENSE. Do you know her work? She is full of good advice on all matters of equitation and training. And her newsletter is, amazingly, free. Her website address is www.horse-sense.org.

The bridle COULD be given a little more 'tooth' by fitting a series of domes to the underside of the poll strap but I would rather that you tried the training approach first. I wonder if your horse is bored with or scared of a certain part of the arena? Could you find a small out-door paddock to work him in?

Please keep in touch and let me know how you progress. It may be that he just needs more time. - Bob]

Carlotta, DVM, PhD. 4/16/03:

Thanks for responding. Long-lining is helping tremendously. Today I tried long lining KANOAK. I purchased my own surcingle and reins for long-lining to ensure I had the proper equipment and increase my chances for a successful result. Long-lining definitely worked to teach my horse to respond to the outside rein. At the end of our training session I had him long-lining in a round pen and in an open arena at the trot, which is our problem gait. Also when long-lining he traveled wherever directed through the appropriate contact on the outside and inside reins. Kanoak was very quiet, relaxed and forward on the long line so he's definitely getting the hang of it! This training will continue to reinforce his understanding of the outside rein. Riding will also be incorporated in his training to make sure that his ground training begins to translate to under the saddle.

I think you are correct that the problem is not the Bitless Bridle but a training issue. As a scientist, I just can't see how using a bit will solve the problem, honestly. However, I won't know truly until the experiment is conducted under saddle.

By the way, I had already searched Jessica Jahiel's site for help but could not find information to address my specific issue. I was grateful for the suggestion. As always I appreciate your help!

Thank you again.

More feedback from a disabled rider:

Here is a THUNDER update. He and me are doing pretty well together. He is getting over his head shyness (from trying to get the bit in during the early days). We are riding well together--back to more harmony riding. When I am relaxed, we do great. Every once in a while he tries me and will not obey my commands. One day he decided he would not trot. Trainer got on--trot; I got on--stop. I was on this horse for 45 minutes when he finally trotted. It was certainly a question for "Ask Jessica!" I got a crop, and I just hit my leg and away he goes. Now all I have to do is say "get the crop!" :-)

I started training him on the longe line. It was going very well, and I had to go away for about 5 days. When I returned, he refused to go. He would stomp his foot, bob his head, look at me with big, pleading eyes, and back up. My trainer takes him, and he behaves perfectly. We are working on that. Anyway, overall, we are doing well. Still a bit of a problem to get him whoaed and stay at a whoa. I make him just stand there until I give the walk signal. Every now and then he does a headshake, but it is usually when he goes from a walk to a trot. I think it is more of a protest. He is doing well with the bridle. He accepts it easily. Once in a while he will toss his head when I am putting it on. I talk sweetly to him and he tops.

So, that is my latest Thunder news.

Catherine, 4/24/03:

Yesterday I took Thunder to the big arena. There were 3 other people and horses in there, one of which was a young 14 year old girl who is learning to ride. Her personality is 'I already know how, and why isn't the horse listening!' She was the only thing different for Thunder. As soon as I boarded Thunder, we both picked up on an unpleasant energy.

I walked him around, but neither of us could focus very well. I know he really sensed what I was feeling. I mentioned to the trainer (who is also my trainer) that there was a different energy in the arena. His comment was "Yes I know." I kept Thunder in and let him watch the activity. After everyone left, it really did not dissipate. Thunder did some serious headshaking and foot stomping. I calmed him, walked some, and got off. It was an interesting experience.

Cathie Hatrick-Anderson, Upton MA:

Maria Bull brought me your bitless driving bridle (prototype). I have heard of you and your bridle, but had never used one. Maria is using the riding Bitless Bridle on her filly CATE and it is working well. I will have to try it, to compare it with the driving bridle.

I read every piece of literature included with the bridle. It was fascinating! I have been starting colts in a hand tied halter instead of a bit for the past two years. I ride almost exclusively with one in hunter paces, in town. Team-penning, wherever, with as much control

as a bit. I have been retraining hard mouthed, jiggy, head shaking etc. etc horses with the halter as well, with great success just by virtue of having a bit removed, and also by being able to give corrections, without sacrificing the mouth.

Anyway, I first tried your driving bridle on my mare, that goes softly in a halter or snaffle. She's 15.1 hands with an average size head. Although I love the concept, I found when I had to give her a slight correction when she wanted to turn into the driveway toward home, that the part where you attach the driving lines doesn't release as well as I would like it to. Even with the light pull-and-release I use to halt it doesn't give back as much as I would like. Where it crosses under the jaw seems very tight. Not tight enough for her to object but it bothered me. I was wondering if the part under the chin to the rings were rolled (rounded) maybe it would slide back easier. I wouldn't want that to happen on a horse that was younger ...not getting a full release. The hand tied halter although it can be a little severe with the knots, its release is immediate.

The blinkers I adjusted to the highest notch and they were just barely in the correct position, although they could go way, way lower. The nose band I couldn't fasten (too small) even when I adjusted the nose piece a little lower than it should have been, trying to make it fit. There was way too much excess strap length to make the bridle bigger.

I just fitted it to my other horse, a little 14.2 hand Paint with a tiny head and muzzle, and the noseband buckle under the chin just barely fit. Blinkers were high as well with no more adjustment up but way too much to go down just as with the bigger mare.

Keep in mind this is just constructive criticism. I was asked if I would like to check it out. I absolutely love the concept. The (prototype) driving bridle just needs a little more work.

I have been driving horses in parades and fairs and training horses to drive for about 12 years. If I can be of any assistance please let me know. Feel free to check out my web site www.bobcatfarm.com

Cathie Hatrick-Andersen:

I tested the blinder driving bridle (prototype) once again on Beth Weidman's horse today. Beth is a friend of Maria's, does a lot for Waters Farm Preservation society, not sure what her title is, but I know she has contact with a lot of draft people. (The fit was not correct so) we used the regular riding Bitless Bridle. Beth does want to drive with your Bitless Bridle, or an open driving bridle.

Last week I drove MAESTRO (Beth's Arab) for his first time in the hand tied halter, he did wonderful for his first time driving, a little drunken sailor stuff, but no run away. For whoa, I would pull and release right away, he'd take one more step, I'd pull lightly and release again, then maintain that light pressure till he gave me a step back, and then he would stand and relax on a loose rein. A lot of people pull and maintain that pull until the horse stops, thus he fights the pressure, (off the nose/mouth if using a bit, head goes up, gets aggravated.) when I pull and release right away, the horse realizes a release is immediate, and will strive to avoid pressure of any kind. So right before I'm going to stop, I slowly make a little more contact with my reins. I say "Maestro, Whoooooah! (quietly, long and drawn out), then, I pull and release. I give him a lot of heads up, so he can get it right

Anyway, TODAY we used your bitless for his second time, (I had asked Beth if she would mind, because I thought it would be good for her, especially her horse, since it's more forgiving than a bit. I was pleasantly surprised when she told me she wanted to keep him in it to drive, since she hadn't ridden in one. Today Maestro was excellent; stopped at one subtle

request, and didn't take any more steps. And did excellent turns. was super-responsive, quiet. I told her at the last visit, that he would improve at least 50% and he did! Horses really do try to please.

Thanks again, I'll keep you updated from time to time on converts. I did use it and recommended it to a client's horse today (after Beth's) that had a problem keeping his head down to get bridled. I was successful with putting his bitted bridle on and off, but knew my clients still wouldn't be able to do it as nicely, so got out the bitless. He slipped his nose right in it. Then I hopped on him bareback and showed them how nicely he went with it. Hopefully they will consider purchasing one.

Cathie, 4/22/03:

Cate drove very nicely in the bitless riding bridle, with driving lines attached. If/when we get her trained to drive we will certainly stay with the bitless, but a check rein will have to be added, (not to restrict her natural head carriage, just to keep her head out of the dirt ... baling twine is a wonderful thing). When one is teaching a horse to drive it is necessary to have a check rein if the horse starts putting his head down, or he can get his head way down low to graze, avoid pressure, and it makes it very hard to steer. I have started many to ground drive and know this is true, so I'm wondering what you suggest as to an overhead check, or where to add a side check?

Cathie Hatrick Anderson, 7/11/03:

I have been using the bitless made by Dr. Cook for a few months now, intermittently with the hand-tied halter for correcting problem horses, and for starting babies, then going into, or back to a bit. I am very excited to report that with the help of a few friends, I just successfully hitched an Arabian gelding that was previously high headed in a bit, to a cart after five one-hour training sessions; two in a hand-tied halter, three in the bitless. We walked and trotted few times on a quiet street. We did a few turns, stops, and starts, and he was awesome. The horse had never had any type of driving work not even ground driving, prior to this.

Cathie Hatrick- Anderson, 12/3/04:

Thank you for the opportunity to test your driving bridle. As you know all of my own horses are for trail, none are broke to a cart, as I don't own a vehicle. I have ground driven all of them, and I have trained several of my clients horses to drive from start to finish, for pleasure driving.

As a trainer specializing in starting colts, and retraining problem horses, I have been demonstrating your Bitless Bridle to almost all of my new clients, for the past few months now. I am happy to report, it has been very well received ... after the raised eyebrows slowly go down.

I had retired my training bridle years ago as I have been using a rope halter with great success and gone into a snaffle from there. (I personally do not use bits on my own horses and my family has hunter paced, team penned, jumped, and trail ridden in rope halters) As western rider in central Massachusetts, where most of my clients ride English, your bridle is easily accepted as it looks a lot nicer than my rope halter. More importantly to my clients, it looks more like a bridle.

Imagine my delight when a new client of mine (and new friend.) said she would like to try using your driving bridle on her Arabian gelding she wanted me to train to drive. Previously

he had never been ground driven. He was a little high-headed my first visit, and didn't respond as well as I would like to basic commands. I longed and ground drove him in my knotted halter my first and second visits. Besides his high-headedness and lack of responsiveness in his bit, he was a great candidate for driving bitless. He got used to the driving lines very quickly and got over his nervousness of me walking behind him in a very short time. He had no trouble with the introduction of pulling a small log on his third visit as well as making the transition to your Bitless Bridle. We opted for the open bridle, as I don't like blinders/blinders. A driving horse should be highly trained, super responsive to cues, and able to wait patiently. He should require very light hands for stopping and have no fear of objects/sounds, moving, or not, from any direction.

Visit # four was excellent. We added the feeling of shaft poles on both sides in the field and on the road, straight away, and turns. We followed him with the cart, walking in front of him then holding back. He was indifferent to all of this. We practiced stopping with verbal commands with only slight reinforcement of a rein cue. We had no troubles backing.

After five one hour visits we hitched him to a rubber tire easy entry two wheeled cart. He was excellent and felt super light in my hands. We even trotted twice.

At my last visit, #6, the owner is now doing more ground driving. Her horse is starting to bring his head down naturally! She is developing great hands without sacrificing her horse's mouth.

My friends from Gilmerton Farm in Littleton MA. who came with me to help hitch are now planning on using your bitless driving bridle on their Suffolk Punch Mare! They just started riding her in your bridle. I look forward to spreading the word, one person at a time. Thank you for all the people you are helping and all the horses who didn't have a choice!

Cathie Hatrick-Anderson, MA, (508) 529-4209: I now have a cart that I am borrowing. I hitched my filly bitless but was using my rope halter. I do plan on using your bitless when I go out in public. Remember I'm a cowgirl and the rope halter just appeals to me. Yours looks polished and neat. No one ever accused me of being either!

I have recently been given the opportunity to test a prototype of a Dr. Cook's bitless driving bridle. I believe, after speaking with a mutual acquaintance, he thought I might be open to testing it as I have been using a rope halter almost exclusively since 2001 for starting colts and retraining problem horses.

I'm happy to say that I was able to successfully hitch a new client's (now friend's) horse that was previously high-headed with a habit of ignoring the bit. Not a horse I would trust to get in a cart with. He did have a lot of good qualities; he had no fear of the driving lines, a person walking behind him, sounds of rocks in a bucket, no fear of cars. He gave little reaction to the first pressure applied to the breast collar from pressure added to the traces, as I applied resistance manually via two lead ropes attached to them (We did do this gradually, then worked up to him pulling a log.) After 5 one hour visits we went off down the road, hitched to a rubber tired, easy entry breaking cart. NO BIT! He was excellent! He stopped beautifully and he's even bringing his head down on his own, as he slowly realizes, he is not going to feel the pain of a bit. (I chose to go with an open bitless driving bridle as I don't care for blinders/blinders.)

Dr. Cook was kind enough to give me a Bitless Bridle for my time in testing the prototype. I have since used it on a dozen horses. I believe that well trained respectful horses can make an immediate transition to the bitless with no special training; they absolutely love not having a bit. In working with many problem horses, that have absolutely no respect for

their owners, and have been driving through the bit, jig, buck, rear, etc. I prefer to transition with a hand-tied rope halter, with two clip on reins attached. This allows me to give a more serious correction than the bitless could do, as it is pretty hard to cause any pain with it.

It may sound severe, (not as severe as what they've have experienced with a bit in their mouth.) I am firm but fair when giving these corrections, with quick flick of my wrist to the reins, then an immediate release. Sometimes these bad behaviors; head shaking, refusing to stand to be mounted rearing etc. disappear immediately because many of them are caused by previous cruel treatment to the horses mouth. Even if your hands are soft, the previous riders hands may not have been so kind. Other times it may take two or three sessions for the horse to realize the extreme pain is not going to happen anymore, and will relax/perform better with every bitless ride.

I have thought of this analogy:

Let's say going to the dentist was completely pain free, even with today's technology, I would be a little skeptical. So I make an appointment. I'd walk in a little stressed, anticipating the pain I have felt before. I sit in the chair and open wide. I am exposing a very sensitive area - my mouth - and see a needle coming to my mouth (bridle no bit). The dentist (rider) is telling me it's not going to hurt. It's a painless shot. I really don't believe him, even though we communicate in the same language! Then the drill starts up. I hang on to the chair tightly, and tense all my muscles, as I am told to relax. Wow, there is no pain! I can finally start to relax. Eventually since I don't experience any pain, I stop tensing. It's amazing how different my attitude will be in the future!

Give your horse a few sessions to realize things are going to be different. Work in a small arena until you are confident you have the same amount of control.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me. I'll be happy to give you information over the phone or come out and help you transition to bitless".

Debbie, Elmira, New York, 4/19/03:

Subject: Happy Horse

Just wanted to let you know how much my horse is enjoying the Bitless Bridle. He is a 3-year-old Rocky Mountain gelding that I am currently ground-driving with great success. Once he is ready to be hooked up to a cart I will be ordering your leather bridle. Please extend my thanks and appreciation to Dr. Cook for inventing a kind, gentle way to train one's horse.

[Dr. Cook responds:

I wonder if you could give a little feedback on your progress with schooling your young horse for driving? I see that about nine months have passed since you first started so I am hoping that you might by now you have got him hitched-up? Anything you could tell me would be of value as I have very little feedback on driving at present. But we do have regular driving bridles now available in all sizes, so we are making progress. - Bob, 1/15/05]

Debbie, 1/15/05 :

While I LOVE my Bitless Bridle (I purchased the regular bitless beta bridle several years ago), I don't have much feedback to give you in regards to driving.

I've raised my horse since he was 8 months old, and he'll turn 5 in March. From when he was a yearling til the age of 3, I ground drove him everywhere with the bitless bridle with great success. At the age of 3, I sent him to be trained under saddle and have

A couple of months ago, I started ground driving him again with the hopes of hitching him to a cart soon. He is being resistant to being confined in the shafts. I now have a trainer working with us, however, as she watches me go step by step she reassures me I have done each phase as she would have... with great care and patience.

He may still be too young to introduce him to driving. In which case, I'll wait a few more years. I don't want to turn my otherwise docile, good natured fellow into a nervous, flighty lunatic.

I'll keep you posted on how we do.

Anon, New Zealand:

Subject: A GREAT NEW PRODUCT

I'd like to share my thoughts on a new product I tried recently. I've owned my Standardbred gelding DOOLEY (Bionic Hanover NZ) for 8 months and he's the best horse I've ever owned. (Last horse was an arab cross ≠ says it all really!) When I purchased Dooley the owner told me that he was too strong for her. She'd only owned him for about 4 months prior to me purchasing him.

I haven't had any dramas with Dooley. He only goes into 'race horse mode' when we've been cantering for a while in the bush or someone else overtakes at speed. We only trail ride on the weekend but I'm always looking for ways to improve the life of my horse. His racing career has taken its toll on his legs so I figure that any slight improvement in his life is worth a try.

I was reading a magazine one weekend when I came across an article on a 'Bitless Bridle'. The difference between this concept and other bitless methods such as a Hackamore was that the Bitless Bridle didn't give the horse any pain or obstruct the horses breathing. I was very interested in this as I liked the idea of a less invasive, more comfortable method of communication with my horse and I believe that Dooley only needs further education to change his 'racehorse' ways. I jumped on the website www.bitlessbridle.com and had a look around. All of the claims made on the website seemed too good to be true. After reading the large amount of testimonials on the website I decided to order one from the U.S.A.

I was surprised when the bridle turned up at the post office only 9 days later. I tried it on my horse the next day. At first I had less control with it than a bit so then decided to dismount and lead Dooley to the sand arena. I checked the fit again, as it is imperative that the bridle is fitted correctly to get any benefit. I noticed that I had the noseband too loose so readjusted and jumped on. I walked Dooley around so he could get used to it and it didn't take too long.

I instantly noticed that his back came up underneath me as he was using his hindquarters more. I asked him to stop which he did immediately. Now usually with Dooley it's a matter of asking him to stop' then waiting for about 5 steps before he decides to do it. Out in the bush you'd be lucky if he stopped unless there was a huge clump of grass directly in front of him.

Turning took longer as Dooley tried his best to exit the arena. Usually in a bit, and with plenty of leg, Dooley would pull against me to get back to that gate rather than work in the arena. With the Bitless Bridle he tried his usual trick of opening his mouth to evade the bit but

alas there was no bit to evade!! The look on his face was "what the # this doesn't work anymore".

Backing-up is another one of Dooley's downfalls. Asking him to back up in a bit is usually met with absolute refusal or giving in for 1 or 2 steps if I'm really lucky. Now backing-up in the bush is something that would be useful with all the narrow tracks we ride and fallen trees we come across. In the Bitless Bridle I asked him to back up and he arched his neck, tucked his nose in and backed up in a straight line beautifully for 5 steps or more!! I was starting to get a little excited at this point. While we were trying this out in the arena, a 5-month-old filly that shares his paddock broke in under the wire and started cantering around my horse, pigrooting and generally disturbing the peace. Not once did I loose control of Dooley. Not that he's the hypo type, but when he wanted to take off after the filly I could check him slightly and he would go back to listening to my commands and just walk on calmly. Because of Dooley's quicker responses to me I felt far more confident on him and could relax. Being relaxed transpired through to him so therefore he felt much nicer to ride. When he cantered I felt him stretch his head out and he moved more rhythmically instead of choppy and short with head up.

Next we had to try the bridle out on the trails. Dooley always prefers trail riding to riding around in the arena. For Dooley, tracks that have grass on them offer so much more appeal as opposed to dirt tracks. He's always reliable on the trails in a group of horses. Reliable as in, will put his ears back at anyone that passes, including the dog. You can also count on him to kick any new horse that comes too close to his rear end! Other than that he's calm in the bombproof kind of way that most Standardbreds are. Due to rain our tracks were flooded so there was about a six-week gap since my horse last went out on the trails. We went out in a group of six horses. We had four horses from our yard and two Standardbreds from next door. This would be a real test for the bridle. I was a touch tense going out without a bit and was having all sorts of images popping up in my head as to what my horse would do. I told myself to relax and trust Dooley as per usual, and as I relaxed so did he. As one Standardbred paced off, another two Anglo Arabs trotted after him. I asked Dooley to keep walking to check if I would have control. He always wants to follow the crowd. He stretched his head out trying to get out of my control but that failed.

Further along the trail, four horses trotted and cantered off, and I kept Dooley walking with one other horse while the group went ahead of us. I could feel Dooley getting tense and fidgety. As we went around one corner Dooley did some acrobatic move, which included a head down and lame attempt at a buck but he still could not get away from the control of the bridle. He kept walking briskly, keen to catch up. Again, further along the track, everyone else trotted off and I asked Dooley to walk on. He tried to trot off after them but with only one slight check on the reins he kept walking. I asked him to trot on after them and when he wanted to go faster I could control his speed. His trot usually isn't smooth as he bounds along but in the Bitless Bridle he trotted so smoothly and he felt so comfortable. I could actually control his speed in the Bitless Bridle better than with a bit. I also found that when slowing down he was also smoother. We also passed some furniture that had been dumped in the bush. One Standardbred jumped sideways and Dooley walked past without even blinking. I find that he is more confident in this bridle. I also noticed that he had a nice working walk the whole ride, not his usual sluggish, drag-the-feet kind of walk.

Once back at the gate of the property where he lives I jumped off and opened the gate for everyone and they all walked up the driveway. I re-mounted and asked him to walk up the

driveway - not chase everyone else. He dropped his head and walked very calmly back to the group.

I've only used this bridle five times since I've had it and it always impresses me. I think Dooley even prefers it to his bitted bridle. When bridling he would usually clamp his teeth together and refuse to accept the bit. (I've had his teeth checked and they are OK.) In the Bitless Bridle I only have to open the noseband and he'll stick his head in. Just seeing his enthusiasm is enough for me to change. I'll keep using this bridle and hope to never use a bitted bridle again. The people I ride with even say "Dooley's smiling!"

Maria, 4/28/03:

It is a beautiful Spring day here -- CATE and I had a fairly long trail ride yesterday morning during which she behaved herself better than a grown-up horse. She has beautiful gaits! I am so lucky to have her. Later that day I went up to see how she was doing, and when I called her she whinnied twice to me from out in the field and CANTERED over to see me! And I don't even feed her treats (except at meal time in her bucket) so she really came over to see me. She is a brilliant little horse; our relationship has very much improved since we began riding together, and I was over the moon about it before we began to ride! Here are 2 photos of Cathie on Cate, and one of me on Cate -- all taken near Claire and John Haggerty's house on Old Upton Road.

[Ed: For Maria Bull's series of articles on the training of CATE using the Bitless Bridle, go to: Bull, Maria: "Train Your Horse at Home!: A first Timer's Experience" *Horsemen's Yankee Pedlar*, Parts 3 & 4, May and June, 2003]

Heidi, Redmond/Winthrop, WA, 5/6/03:

INCREDIBLE!!

You have invented the best possible piece of equine equipment that I have ever seen!! I can't get over how amazing my horse is! Here is my story (I apologize in advance for raving and rambling, I'm so darn excited!).

I bought DOC, a twelve-year-old former team penning horse nine months ago. Sweet boy, wonderful ground manners, very smart. He was using a twisted wire bit with a tie down. I was certain I could get him into a snaffle with some time and patience. He tossed his head, got sweaty, pranced, spooked and I never had a truly relaxed ride. I tried a hackamore, a mechanical hackamore, a snaffle, a Myler bit, a kimberwick, and finally back to a larger twisted bit (cringing every time I rode him) with a martingale. It was the only thing that could stop him and then even that was iffy!! Up until last week, I was ready to sell him. I read about your bridle on The Horseman's Advisor website. I figured, what the heck, it has a guarantee, and then I can say I tried everything.

I was so nervous putting it on him, but he seemed responsive in the round pen. He was relaxed and ears forward with easy strides. I couldn't believe it! Then, I took him out on a trail he had never been on with two friends (bringing the twisted bit and martingale just in case). Dr. Cook, where did my horse go? How is it possible that I now have this gentle, sweet, courageous horse that stops on a dime??? My friends are convinced I've drugged him or got a different horse. One of my friend's husband who rarely rides said that he'd buy him in a heartbeat if I ever sell him. AS IF!! I feel like a teenager in love!!

Thank you, thank you, thank you for giving me the horse I knew he was!!!

Alice, 5/17/03:

Subject: Total Excitement!!!!!!!

A friend of mine has two Black Arabian horses both are now 5 years of age. I help train them for trail riding and we were using bridles with bits. The first time in using one on KESTREL (gelding) he was a little confused but quickly adjusted. I worked with him for a total of 10 minutes the first two times. Then Mark (the owner of both horses) got a second Bitless Bridle. I tried it on SPIRIT (the mare) and she seemed to adjust to it in about 10 minutes. I was still unsure how both horses would behave, so Mark and I rode around the stable for a short time.

I think a few days later Mark said we are going out on the horses. After getting them tacked up (using the Bitless Bridles) we rode around in the arena for a short time. I was not comfortable with how Kestrel's response was. I then switched back to the old bridle (the mylar comfort snaffle). Kestrel started tossing his head a lot as if to say NO NO!! So I switched back to the Bitless Bridle and I was amazed that Kestrel was choosing this one as he was behaving nicely. After all that we headed out for a short ride. Both horses did so good that Mark and I was surprised.

Well, since that first ride we have done several more rides. They did GREAT!!! One time as I rode Spirit down a steep hill with Mark on Kestrel in front of us we had to stop so mark could clear away a branch. Kestrel did GREAT on standing still but Spirit was not happy. Spirit starting to buck on this very steep/tight path. This was not the safest place to be on a bucking horse, however, when I pulled back gently in hopes to calm her down I was amazed, NO, SHOCKED. Spirit not at all happy to have to be still in this position was very well behaved. Instead of fighting more to keep going she stopped and waited for the next command. Spirit walked on down the hill and was willing to stop again one more time, very calmly.

My past experience with her is when she wants to do something no matter what she will do it. After that I was so HAPPY about this Bitless Bridle that I told Mark I don't ever want to use anything else. Our bitted bridles are just hanging in the tack shed. Both Spirit and Kestrel are doing better each time we go out on trail. They are even eager to go out when they see the Bitless Bridle. No more tossing the head, trying to go one way when we want to go another, stopping and going forward when asked and standing still when asked. The trust and love they both have for us is growing more and more.

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR MAKING SUCH AN OUTSTANDING & AWESOME BRIDLE!!!!

Bonnie, Bowling Green, KY 5/26/03:

I have to admit, that since I read printed out & read all the info on Dr. Cooks website - I have had nightmares about my past riding with my Arabian horse for 13 yrs, in Competitive trail & Endurance. And I pray that horses are forgiving creatures, more so than humans - as all the typical behavior issues I dealt with are in black & white. I am sure if I had his jaw line x-rayed, it would be full of bone splints. How sad, I am so sorry, my precious Zephyr.

My daughter is now an accomplished dressage rider, and with this in mind - and now having a better understanding of the physical & mental torture we put our horses thru with "bitting up" getting "on the bit" - and all the behavioral issues that I see in a dressage barn - its

no wonder that "horse people (?)" invented the flash for a cavesson. How much crueler can we get? I have always expressed my opinion distastefully about cranking the flash so tight on the horses that I see in training, that it makes me want to put a noose around the trainer's nostrils. Whatever can a person do?

I am a voracious reader of all the horse magazines, especially Dressage Today. All the issues that are dealing with training, pleasure riding and advertising, can be better served if The Bitless Bridle was used. Will Dr. Cook consider putting his articles in Dressage today, in segments - if it is too lengthy in its entirety/ ESPECIALLY THE "Pathophysiology of Bit Control in the Horse". Oh my god - what an eye opener. Please do us a great service and share these articles in Dressage Today, HORSE ILLUSTRATED, EQUUS, etc. Can Dr. Cook do any clinics in the Nashville- Bowling Green area? I will help get this done if it is a possibility. I want to help you start a revolution ... I could be the small tsunami and you could be the big one.

I will be ordering my new BITLESS BRIDLE next week for my Paso Fino.

Please respond... Thanks...

[Dr. Cook responds:

Please sleep soundly ... horses are amazingly forgiving and do not hold a grudge. We have all been guilty in the past and so have our ancestors for 6000 years. From time to time I nudge Equus and Dressage Today about publishing something on the bridle but they are curiously resistant. Equus must have a huge file of the material I have sent them in the past few years ... unless they dropped it immediately into the waste paper basket! Perhaps a letter from you would have the required effect. I have not yet sent anything to Horse Illustrated but we are about to start advertising in this journal so perhaps this would be a good time to try. I am attaching some additional items that you will I think find interesting. The second article has not yet been published and Figure 2 still has to be drawn. Don't let any of it give you sleepless nights. - Robert Cook, 5/30/03]

Bonnie, 5/30/03:

OH MY GOODNESS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I am soooooooooooooo enthralled that I have a response back from you!

I just got home from work and will be reading it all voraciously. I have a question for you and to see if you would consider this as a way to assist us "horse" people and our beloved horses. Could you possibly do a clinic in our area, "a before and after" type clinic. For example; a seminar with your product and we could bring "live" horses with their current bridles & bits, and then we could try out your BITLESS BRIDLE in an instructional ring type setting? I would help you get it set up. You could stay with us during the time frame (we have a humble little ranch house on 6 acres) but I am sure that we can get participants & auditors to attend. Please tell me what you would expect for a clinic fee?

Well, I am so excited that I cannot wait to read your articles.

I just cannot believe that the public will not embrace your concept. If the jaw lines were x-rayed now before the horses were dead, gee, what would we see?

Anxious to hear back from you.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Thank you for your enthusiastic reception of my last e-mail and my apologies for this slow response. Much as I would like to be able to offer clinics, I regret that these are not possible for me to do, for family reasons. But I appreciate your willingness to set one up. Perhaps in due course you will feel confident enough to give one yourself?

As we are now selling our bridle worldwide, I do not feel too bad about not being able to offer more geographically focused events. It is people like you that are spreading the word for us, so please keep up the good work. - Robert Cook, 6/15/03]

Bonnie, Bowling Green, KY, 6/29/03:

For one reason or another, I have not yet purchased your Bitless Bridle as I had stated before. (My horse was ill - unplanned vet bills & various other reason that prioritized me from NOT adding the 100th (joking of course) item to my tack room). If I could go back and recoup all the \$\$\$ spent on saddles and bits, I could be driving a jaguar.

I do have a question for you please. I have still been reading & researching & comparing versions of the Bitless Bridles - and find that there are several "imitations" to your BITLESS BRIDLE. All of which are priced lower than your original. And of course my question to you is - "from a buyers standpoint and for future questions from a future audience - what is the difference from yours versus the imitations?" What would spending the additional \$50.00 to \$100.00 extra, for a Dr. Cook - do for my horse? I have seen other versions that also have a bit attachment "In case - the Bitless Version goes amuck out on the trail"....etc.

Now that my horse is better - we are going to start a conditioning program. With our pastures being so rich and moist this year (rainfall at + 8 in. for the month), my pasofino was slightly gimpy in the front feet & he has gained alot of weight QUICKLY and I had him x-rayed in the front feet - I felt he may have the onset of rotation - and sure enough, a SLIGHT degree of rotation & the start of founder??) & he tested for Cushinoids, (he was borderline). We had rocker shoes put on him and put him in a dry lot - & Thyro L added to his diet. He has lost about 100 lbs in the past 3 wks and is now ready to some exercise.

Hence, my desire is to switch over to your BITLESS BRIDLE, use it and become knowledgeable from the seat of my horse's responses. And then possibly help you promote YOUR original. So anyway - that's my story and I am sticking to it!!!! ;0)

Long story short - I will order your bridle soon... Wishing you well...

[Dr. Cook responds:

Hello Bonnie.

As I have done all the work to validate, test, research, publish and market this bridle I think these are reasons enough for you to purchase mine rather than one made by a pirate who is jumping on my bandwagon and undercutting me. I have not seen the imitations but ask yourself whether they are willing to provide the same technical support that you have already experienced in our extensive correspondence? - Robert Cook, 6/30/03]

Bonnie:

That's the answer I was looking for... yes, I agree w/you. You have won my vote ... due to the fact that you can substantiate your research, with published works and artistry of the inside anatomy of the horse's mouth, palate, neck and especially in motion. Thank you for being so thorough. You have won me over without even a test on my horse. Yet ... how do you handle the piracy of your product? Thank you for your thoughtfulness & honesty.

Bonnie, 8/3/03:

My Bitless Bridle came this week. It appears to fit well, a medium for my Paso Fino named ZIP. When I bridled him, his mouth was searching for a bit...and was acting "high headed". Once he realized there was "no bit", he calmed down and let me fit the headstall

according to the directions. We have not ridden yet, we have monsoon rains here in KY. I hope a bit of sunshine peeks out so that I can get a ride in today. I am looking forward to my new adventure with my horse.

Also, my daughters Holsteiner's bumps have been receding while he was on the antibiotics specifically for strangles. I think we beat it. The bumps are barely there today after 6 days of meds. Makes me think that it may not have been strangles because I know strangles runs its course with the bursting of the infected glands. I think your diagnosis may be more aligned with the malady ...

Being chatting with you soon...

Bonnie & ZIP:

Subject: Good news

This was my second official ride on my Paso Fino, ZIP with my new BITLESS BRIDLE. Here are my "bits" of great news from me & ZIP:

ZIP is now "Catchable"...

He is NOT high headed and wild eyed when I tack him up.

Graciously accepts his new headstall without the bit. Dips his head into it... oh my god, did I die and go to horse heaven?

Is NOT excitable anymore, he seems to have mellowed out overnight (My HOT PasoFino?????)) My daughter has told me in the past that he was too hot for me... she cannot believe my stories. I cannot wait to get one for her Holsteiner, he is humongous and does NOT have any brakes)...

Saddling up is not like putting a saddle on a moving target, trying NOT to get my toes stomped on.

ZIP stands QUIETLY at my mounting block and DOES NOT rush off in a flying corto before I can get my other foot in the stirrup. Is not in a lathered sweat by the time I am saddled up & going down the road. Lunging is NOT a fight, he listens WILLINGLY to all my voice commands and scoots around CALMLY in a circle while on a lunge line. (The rings on the side are perfect for lunging).

ZIP is NOT the same - he is 10 times quieter and calmer, seems to enjoy "getting dressed". (Did you send me another horse???) lol...

Today, my neighbor was walking up her long driveway, she is about 85 yrs old and hunch backed. Well, as ZIP & I were warming up in my front yard, she was walking closer toward us, with a wide rimmed , floppy, straw hat and carrying a walking stick. She was waving her "walking stick" to say hello. Normally, ZIP would snort - reel backwards and run off. I quietly worked both reins and he calmed down deciding he was not going to get Mouth Pain when this hunchback, prey eating, two legged creature was coming at us with her walking stick. Of course she is deaf, and I was asking her to say something so ZIP would understand that she was human. To no avail, however, normally I would have cranked on the bit to get his attention, this time i just gently seesawed my BITLESS BRIDLE and HE LISTENED!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

YIPPEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Can you feel that love coming your way?????????? And nickers from my Zip to you too!

My neighbor is ordering one for her Spotted Saddle mare, who cannot get comfy in all the bits she has tried...at least a dozen or so. Her name is Roberta Clark. She said she ordered one last week.

Well, enough said for now. I hope to get some long distance miles in the next few weeks now that the heat wave is over. Thank you, thank you ... and hope to share more stories with you soon.

Bev, 5/27/03:

Subject: Bitless Bridle and DSSP update (Josh)

First of all, let me compliment you on the tremendous customer service your company provides. When I ordered my Bitless Bridle several months back, I had partially completed the order and left the PC to think a bit. Within 10 minutes, I received a call from one of the most tremendously helpful customer service reps I have ever encountered. We spoke about the worries I had controlling my off-the-track 20 year old Tbred, the best type of bridle for him, etc. She was great!

I have used your bridle for the last several months with my little guy - the gagging and coughing has stopped! He is much more willing to put his head into the bridle now - in fact, sticks his nose right in unlike right before I changed - he would throw his head up in the air to avoid being bitted which was highly unusual for him. I have as much control as I did before (tongue in cheek here).

My only complaint is that I have trouble getting him to use his haunches and go "on the bit" but we're working through it. This was the best purchase I have ever made for any horse and I am a staunch supporter of going "bitless". Funny thing - my vet, Dr. Bonnie Smith, apparently studied with you at Tufts and was really happy to know that this worked. The bridle avoided much expense in treating him - the next step was to have him scoped and maybe treated. So, thank you, thank you, thank you. And my Joshie thanks you as well - he is a much happier boy now. You have another convert and at this point in my life, I doubt if I'll ever use a bit on a horse again if I have any choice about it.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Thank you for your kind words about our customer service. I have passed on a copy of your comments to all concerned and they were delighted.

Please tell me a little more about the history of your horse relative to the gagging and coughing. I am especially interested in this connection. Is this your 20 year old Thoroughbred? And might he have had some throat surgery before he was retired from the track? It sounds as though we might have talked previously about this? Maybe I should search my e-mail archives?

I am attaching an article that you might find interesting. Give a copy to Bonnie, with my best regards, when you next see her.

Thank you for the encouraging feedback. - Bob Cook]

Bev, 6/1/03:

Thanks for the article! You know, it's funny how in hindsight, a lot of little things started adding up to the big picture/problem and I was simply too dumb to put them together until it was almost too late. Let's see if I can give you a bit of history.

I purchased Josh about three years ago for a trail/pleasure horse. When he was three and on the track, he bowed a tendon during a less than spectacular 3-year-old season - I don't think he won a thing. When I purchased him, he was ridden in a snaffle I think. He was a bit hot (understatement) due to sweet feed so I put him in a jointed kimberwick with no problems

and took him off the sweet feed. Two years ago, he re-bowed that same tendon due to overwork one day (my fault)

About a year ago, I switched him to a comfort snaffle made by Myler thinking he'd like that better than the kimberwick. It was after this that he started to have difficulties. The first sign that something was wrong was that he started to have difficulties keeping up with my friends' horse on the way back to the barn. On the way out, he's the one in the lead and used to keep up with her going home as well. I started to notice him lagging a bit behind. Then when we'd take them to the pasture on the trail, he was unable to eat the long blades of grass without gagging. So, last year sometime, while we were cantering up a long slope, he gagged without warning so badly I had to tear off the bridle and let him work it out on his own. We attributed his choking to the apple I had fed him before we left (maybe it had gotten caught and jarred loose during our run. So, I took it easy on him the rest of the trail ride and he seemed fine. The next episode was after I wormed him with Quest - I rode him the next day and he choked and gagged again. This is when I called Dr. Bonnie out (Xmas Eve). She examined him and said he appeared perfectly healthy if she didn't know he was having this problem. So, we discussed scoping him and possibilities as to what it could be. This is when the dorsal soft palate displacement discussion started and I started to research possibilities and reasons for his problem.

In retrospect, I remember that when we would gallop our horses together - both off the track tbreds - Joshie would grunt as he ran....he doesn't do that anymore either. And another thought - he used to be easy to bridle - never tried to avoid the bit when being bridled - towards the end of his time in a bit, he was getting very difficult to bridle - raising his head, etc. Now he just pops his little nose right in the noseband. Doesn't fling his head about anymore either when walking down the street - he used to do this little jabbing type motion with his nose - almost like he was repositioning himself with the bit.

This month when Dr. Bonnie was out for spring shots - we looked for an old scar - no luck. Doesn't appear that he's ever had surgery for that - she was very excited to hear that he's all better with respect to the DDSP and that your bridle really works well.

So, I don't know how much this helps you in your research ≠ both Josh and I are so incredibly grateful for the Bitless Bridle. I just wish more people were open to the idea of going bitless and not causing their horses pain and discomfort.....I'm trying to talk my friend who also has a 20 year old 16.3 Tbred into trying one as well but she's really afraid of what could happen. This mare is very tough to pull up sometimes and is always leaning on the riders hands. I'll have to check with your customer service to see if you have a warmblood size (used preferably) that she could try on her to see if it works....

Thanks again and if I can answer any more questions, let me know!

Mary, Marenmark Farm, Anna, OH:

I just spent most of this rainy morning reading information about the Bitless Bridle on your website. Incidentally, I also ended up placing an order. The order was to be for 1 medium and 1 small biothane bridles, but the website processed for 2 med. 1 small...which is OK., since you have a good return policy. I have a feeling I may end up keeping the 2nd medium bridle for my husband's horse, if they work as well as they are supposed to.

I thought I would just let you know why and what for, that I decided to order the Bitless Bridles, then maybe follow up to let you know how they work out once I get to try them. We raise Dartmoor ponies (predominately) but also have 3 gaited horses for trail riding, and a

Quarter horse with her own little quirks. I'm tired of trying to find and fit bits for each horse to try to "cure" or "fix" this habit or the other, or to find their comfort zone. I also have two 2 yr. Old Dartmoor ponies ready to start schooling, and have procrastinated starting them because I hate going through the biting process.

In 1991 we imported a nice Dartmoor mare to use in our breeding program, and it was also our intention to train her for riding & driving for pleasure and show. In all of the years we have owned this mare, she has never accepted the bit, or allowed it to sit quietly in her mouth without putting her tongue over the top and constantly fussing with it. (We do routine dental work on all of our horses/ponies, to help rule out biting problems in general). I got by with getting her trained by using a drop noseband to "tie" her mouth shut so that she wouldn't put her tongue over the bit. She would fight this for a while, then eventually give up enough to get her attention. Consequently, she has never been shown, and her riding and driving were kept limited, just because of the hassle to get her to accept the bridle. Eventually, I found, and started to use a pony size hackamore on the pony, and she would behave wonderfully. This limited her to just riding, but that's OK ... she's also a nice broodmare and with her temperament around kids, she's remained a keeper. I'm hoping that the Bitless Bridle will work for this particular pony as well as the 2 yr olds that I'd like to start schooling.

As for the QH mare, she's been trained well, but after about a half an hour under saddle, whether trail riding or arena work, she begins this annoying habit of tilting her head side ways, and rolling her tongue around. This is often accompanied with shaking her head up and down intermittently, and then dropping her head as if to pull the reins away from me. Once she starts these things, it's hard to get her to stop, and it's hard to get her attention ahead of the matter. Sometimes, esp. trail riding, this is followed with nervousness and sweating, and prancing as if she's ready to explode. She never gets out of control, but it doesn't make for a very pleasant ride in the end, no matter how quiet I try to sit her and talk to her. I've tried a host of different bits, from western to English, and the mechanical hackamore (in which case, she will start biting at the shanks as well as tilting her head and rolling her tongue. (if you have any comments, feel free to reply).

The gaited horses are all very well trained for their purpose and don't fuss with the bits they wear. But I think they would each benefit from not having a bit in their mouths during rides, if only to allow them to drink more freely, when we stop at "watering holes", and be able to graze more comfortably when we stop for breaks on the trail. The mare seems to have the most quirks about her, regardless, of biting. And one of those is stumbling when she gets a little separation anxiety if kept behind the others on a ride, and when following others, she's reluctant to let you "tell" her where to go on the trail, like stepping around a mud hole or something. She will toss or wring her neck, to fight the cue of the rein, and stomp through the muck instead of taking a little side path around it. I have a feeling that most of this is just her attitude, but I'm curious to see if it doesn't have something to do with the pressure of the bit, when she is asked to maneuver around something.

I've ridden each one with the mechanical hackamore a few times, and they each respond to it well. The above mare didn't improve in her quirks (stumbling/head tossing) much, and one of the geldings decided to play with (or bite hold of) the shanks after a while, which is a bit unnerving and annoying at times. So, I will be trying the Bitless Bridle on a variety of horses/ponies, and thought that if you have any comments or suggestions before I get started, I will be open for this as well. Can't wait until my order arrives!

Dusti, Delaon, TN, 6/28/03:

I worked with STORM this afternoon in my round pen and WWWWWOOOOOWWWWW!!!!!! I was shocked. I have only had Storm for 1 month; he was not neck reined - tonight, he began neck reining. I was absolutely amazed! He wanted to get out and go for a long walk but I kept him in the round pen and worked with him for a couple of hours. My father, who is a very experienced horseman and who rides all of his Arabians with rope halter/hackamores, was tickled that I had purchased the Bitless Bridle. He lives 3 1/2 hours away but will be joining me and my friends (the ones I bought Storm from and the ones who are big time BIT people) for a long ride tomorrow. I know I will make a few heads turn and maybe receive some feedback - hopefully they will ride with their mouths opened all the way to their knees! Thanks for a wonderful product! I am so excited. He didn't jump around like he normally does and obviously could not fight the bit as he had done before. I almost thought I saw a smile coming from his beautiful face!

Dusti:

Well, after a 4-hour ride with my father, husband and four other friends, I was a changed person and so was Storm. As I told you, I have only had him about 1 month and when I bought him from a friend they told me that he hated the bit (DUH!) and that he was hard to stop, etc. I worked with Storm Saturday night and again in front of my father on Sunday morning with the BB. My father was impressed. He is 63 and rides his Arabians with rope halters and talks to his horses as if they were his children (well I guess they really are - one horse he has is 31 - he was my 16th birthday present and I am now 40). Back to my story - my father was instructing me inside the round pen and I was using my legs to assist in turning which is something kind of new for me - I am learning. Storm turned beautifully and did not throw his head as he usually does. Previously when we would go on a ride, as we are leaving the property, he would turn around to go back suddenly. Yesterday as we were leaving, Storm pranced right out of the gate and was first in the pack of seven horses. NEVER was he ever first - he always lingered back. The funny part - NOT A WORD WAS SAID BY ANYBODY! They did not know what to say! Storm's previous owners, the ones who said "you can't ride a gaited horse without a bit" looked over SEVERAL times and I'm sure they noticed there was no bit. What could they say???

As I explained earlier, he is not moving quite the way I was told a Walker should but he never was. The previous owner said he needed some work. Although yesterday he did get into his gait several times but I believe I just need to ride him more. I have a 5-yr-old daughter and an 8-yr-old son and it is hard to ride except on weekends. However, when school starts back in August I will have a lot of free time before the kids come home from school. I am just going to continue to ride him more and work with him. The only change I will make is the reins I have, which are round braided leather reins with clips on the end. When I am riding and Storm is moving quickly they swing too much at the "O" rings. I bought a pair of reins that have the screws on them and I think that will be better.

My father was so tickled with the way things were going. He called me this a.m. and said that Storm and I were the best looking in the group. I was so PROUD to hear that! We are very close and my father has always made me feel proud but we never got to ride together much growing up. Yesterday was very special. Since he lives so far away, he rode my friends spotted saddle horse. (My father rides every day for about 4 hours bareback on his Arabians with rope halters.) When he rode Lady yesterday they had her outfitted with bit and chains and my father didn't voice his dislike but rode her and "talked" with her the whole way! He

told me that if he could have, he would have ridden her with a rope halter and shown those "experienced" horse people (HA HA) that it COULD BE DONE! (SORRY FOR THE JIBBERING!)

I can't say enough about the "BITLESS BRIDLE". We called our local paper today and put an ad in their for mine and my husband's bridles (with full check snaffle bits). My husband's horse (CAYENNE - a 6 yr. old GORGEOUS 15'3 Quarter Horse) just had a baby on Father's Day. When she is ready to begin riding again, we will NO DOUBT be ordering another Bitless Bridle. We have ridden her with a rope halter and I know she is a Bitless Bridle candidate. Today I also visited our local horse store and bragged about my new bridle. All I can say is that EVERYONE needs to try it. The fact that I (someone not perfect with horses and learning everyday) could make it happen so quickly and ease the pain and discomfort means everything in the world to me!

Thank you for such a humane and wonderful product! MY PARTNER STORM AND I ARE FOREVER GRATEFUL!

ALSO, CHECK OUT www.tanbarkacres.com. That is the website for the Friesian breeders in VA. where I bought my baby Friesian JANTSJE. And, that is me on the front page with my baby! I am such a celebrity! Is that my 15 minutes of fame or what??? HAHA

Take care and GOD BLESS!

A series of letters from Kathleen Hulle, a Licensed Veterinary Technician and horse rehabilitator. Kathleen volunteers to 'talk' to anyone who would like to hear about her experience with the Bitless Bridle. She provides her email address ... HulleKD@frontiernet.net:

Kathleen, 6/30/03:

Subject: FREEDOM!

I recently purchased your beta biothane bridle. It arrived today and yes, I did immediately put it to the test on my most critical of mounts. We have four here of varied breeds and histories. We specialize in rehabilitating horses.

KALEIGH arrived last November. Ours was the fifth barn to call home in her very short seven years. We welcomed her and all the stories that haunted her. After hand walking her for three very long wintry months on trail, I mounted. I rode her in a hackamore, walking, for the remainder of the winter. All this to teach her trust. I did have a saddle custom flocked and widened for her. Amazing how a properly fitted saddle can end even the most persistent bucking! And eventually, we began to work at training level dressage.

Quickly, I began to realize her biting problem was more than I could handle. I investigated Mylers and Herm Sprengers and decided on the Sprenger Ultra Loose Ring Snaffle in Aurigan. Well, she accepted it better than all the others but remained just out of my reach. By out of my reach, I mean feeling connected. I could not get her past first level dressage without this connection. I had as much control in the snaffle as I did in the English hackamore. Enough for most people but it was not harmony. So my search continued...

At last, the Bitless Bridle. I read, and read. With Kaleigh I have extraordinary control through seat, legs, and abdomen. So I could fake the rest if getting to fourth level dressage was an immediate reward in itself. But for us, I wanted more. I knew the answer was out there. I know now that I have found it. Your Bitless Bridle has made our connection complete. Yes, I have had only one ride in it. One glorious ride where she became butter in my hands. Where her fear and pain have finally vanished. I could feel by the end of the ride her self-realization.

Her swing had even more energy, her back was relaxed, and her shoulder had depth to each stride. There are no words to describe what it feels like to release a horse from oppression. Magic.

Now, this bridle was our final piece in our puzzle. I had already addressed saddle fit and style issues seriously. I have a fantastic saddler who works for the Albion company and she has worked very hard on fittings and adjustments. We had also spent months on riding technique and position to help Kaleigh adjust as she began to accept more in her training. My goal was always harmony.

Now that it seems Kaleigh and I have reached my goal, I have developed a new goal. I want to help others achieve this level of communication and harmony. If the Bitless Bridle can help others, I will be an ambassador of sorts. Of course, addressing all avenues of conflict are essential in eliminating stress for horses. Kaleigh's stress under saddle affected her everyday living. She became a tyrant of sorts. She was unsafe and cruel to other horses. It also changed her attitude toward herself. The first time I told her she was a good girl and patted her neck she nearly stopped dead in her tracks. It was as if it had been a lifetime ago that she had heard those words. Day after day, and accomplishment after accomplishment, she began to like herself again. Especially, when she was feeling understood. When she complained about a piece of tack, I listen and adjusted or changed it. When she was particularly naughty, I asked myself why. I did not blame her. Horses just don't decide one day to be bad. Horses respond to their environment. They are a direct reflection...like a mirror.

So, long as this letter is...it still does not tell the whole story. I have three others in the barn that will also benefit in their own way from your Bitless Bridle. Amazingly enough, I tried on the one medium size bridle on all three, from one Arab/Welsh cross, one Morgan, one Conn/Thor cross, to a long headed Thoroughbred...and it fit all! Simple adjustments...one size. Very NICE! The bridle is well made and meant to last. I would like to invest in a leather one but have read others comments on fit variables and such as compared to the beta biothane one...could you comment on that? I am concerned since long hours enjoying trails with my husband demand well fitting equipment. I do love the feel and ease of the beta biothane...but for dressage purposes a dark Havana one in leather would be perfect for my Lux saddle.

The push for acceptance of this bridle is imminent. It is like the Mylers and their final acceptance into the dressage arena...the louder the cry the more attention one gets. I hope many people see Kaleigh and I. She is the daughter of Hideaway's Erin Go Braugh, a well sought after event stallion. And many people witnessed her demise. It will be glorious to bring her back to recognition so quickly. Thank you for taking a great hand in this. Lucky for us we found your bridle. Please any comment that you may have will be very welcomed. Thank you again for listening to the horses.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Thank you for your most interesting feedback. I am delighted that the bridle worked well for you on your first ride. I hope you will give me further reports on Kaleigh and your other horses. When I am back at my home base, I would like to send you a research questionnaire for you to complete, if you would care to.

The leather bridles are beautiful and most of them fit very well at the first fitting. But if you have any problems, you simply send it back to us and we work with you until you are satisfied. Occasionally, a horse needs a different size browband or noseband. - Robert Cook]

Kathleen, 9/18/03:

Just thought I would update you on our progress with the Bitless Bridle. I have found Kaleigh to be exceptionally receptive to the bridle. She does start out long and low but eventually has a natural head carriage. Not only is she enthusiastic about our rides, she has developed an ego. She has accepted contact with the reins nicely and she now meets all our "obstacles" head on with no fear, inconsistencies, or hesitation. It is wonderful. I am anxious to see how quickly she progresses to second level dressage now that she is reaching for contact with my hands.

We started another older thoroughbred in the BB. She is twenty. After the track she evented to Prelim and 2nd level dressage with great interference behind. Her hind legs are a mess. On her second BB ride she was acting like a four year old! She was very easy to rate even though she asked repeatedly to canter and really move out. This is a horse that came to us with very little enthusiasm for any time under saddle. It was nice to see the change in her attitude. Now we will wait and see if her interference behind diminishes.

We have also started a gelding (he is thirty) in the BB. This is my husband's horse so I am giving you this information second hand. I have not witnessed this just listened carefully as he explained. SUNNY is very stubborn and hates to go out alone. David took him out for a trail ride alone in the BB. We have been riding him very nicely in a short-shanked hackamore as he is easy to rate and maneuver from one's seat. Dave explained that even as the bridle was properly fitted, Sunny's lower lip "dangled". David continued to watch this display as he finished getting ready to ride. After mounting the lip continued to "dangle" leaving his lips separated but jaw clenched shut.

Apparently, Sunny was particularly stubborn and resistant to the bridle and ride in general. The lip continued to be a display and he tossed his head at various times. I have given his explanation thought and wondered about Sunny's oral health. He had his teeth floated in May by an equine practitioner. We did not use sedatives and she described his oral health as above normal for his age.

Do you have any thoughts on this display? I hope to actually witness Dave riding Sunny so that I may update you. Before that, do you have anything specific that I should try or examine or watch for when that day comes? Dave has since gone back to the hackamore until I get a chance to watch him ride Sunny in the BB.

We have not tried the Arab/welsh gelding yet as he is taking some time off for a leg injury. He will also prove very interesting as a BB candidate. He is a competitive trail horse with head carriage issues and symptoms of trigeminal neuralgia. His progress will be great for supporting issues on the Bitless Bridle.

You mentioned a questionnaire? We would like to contribute any information that would benefit the humane treatment of horses. As equine rehabilitators and licensed veterinary technicians we are privy to great experiences and resources. We have read many of your publications on the advantages of bitlessness. We look forward to adding our information in the hopes of making the case stronger for the Bitless Bridle. In all, we are amazed by the reactions of just our horses to the BB. Because our horses have come to us for rehabilitation, they are the perfect candidates for study. They definitely have expressed what they don't like.

Good sharing information with you and any thoughts you might have on Sunny would be greatly appreciated. Thank you. Hope to hear from you soon.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Tidying my desk at the start of the year I have come across a long and very interesting e-mail from you dated July 10, 2003. My fear is that I may not have thanked you for it. If so, I do apologize.

I wonder if the lower lip relaxation on SUNNY has altered in the last six months? This is something I hear about occasionally but I do not feel that it is anything to worry about.

I am attaching the questionnaire about which you expressed interest. I would be glad to have your feedback on the various horses that you have now tried with the bridle.

Have a look on the home page of our website (www.bitlessbridle.com) to see the details about a book I have just published. Also, the petition to the US Equestrian for a rule change in dressage and other divisions.

Happy New Year. - Bob, January 2004]

Kathleen, Licensed Veterinary Technician, HulleKD@frontiernet.net:

It was so wonderful to open my mail after a long holiday away and find a surprise email from you. Yes, you did thank me personally and that was as wonderful then as it is now. We are a very happy bitless barn thanks to you and the staff keeping us well stocked with various sizes.

And again another yes on Sunny's relaxation. He was the toughest since at thirty he is very set in his ways. After a handful of rides he lowered his head and began to swing his hips. It was wonderful to see such an old mount have an epiphany.

All together we have four in bitless right now. The 20-year-old arab/welsh remains in an elevated head carriage but is calm, consistent with his pace, and rarely stumbles now after years of rounding his toes. He is my long distance trail mount and I am very pleased with his reaction.

KALEIGH, our rehab conn/thor mare is the mount we are the most impressed with. She has a very shallow palate. Her previous owner did some damage while training to an extent we have not been allowed to know. She travels harmoniously in the bitless. Her head carriage is easily influenced, her mind focused, and trainable. At eight, she still behaves like a four year old. I am looking forward to schooling her in dressage. I believe she can show fourth level in a bitless ... if we can see a change in the Federations Rules.

Our newest is a 20-year-old Thoroughbred mare, previously raced and evented. She loves the bitless...very lite, very quiet, and very sensitive. She floats.

My husband and I road this season with the Landsmankil Trail Association. We have used this trail riding to rehabilitate and reschool young and older horses. Many people were impressed to see Kaleigh out in her bitless and how controllable she was. I have also introduced the bridle to the DC of a local Pony Club. She purchased one from you to try on some of her mounts. I am also working on a friend of mine who works for Albion. She is a saddler trained by Albion and she rides an arab mare that was rescued. She has had great difficulties with her and I lent her my leather bitless in hopes that they have an epiphany as well. I have yet to hear how it is going.

Dr. Cook, we are very excited about your research with the bridle. We will look into your new book. As a veterinary technician, I understand the anatomy and physiology behind your theory. As a horsewoman with over 25 years schooling, showing, and training, I live the theory now as I convert these rehab horses with your bridle and bring them back to a world that finds them useful again.

We will continue to talk to any and all that ask us about your bridle. We refer many to your website after they ride with us and watch how precise we can be communicating with our mounts. They love how harmonious our rides appear. The horses drink, eat, and travel with ease over hours of trails. Then they watch as Kaleigh does a half pass down the trail or passage out in an open field. I love their expressions as I bring her down to a trot after a full gallop in a

ride of four other riders. All effortlessly. This was a horse someone decided to euthanize due to control issues and anger. She is very happy and healthy now. I am glad someone took a chance and I am very glad I came across your bridle. Your research has become so valuable to David and I with our work with horses.

As we bring in more for rehabilitation work, we will put them in bitless' once the ground work is complete. Hopefully, all will react as smoothly as the previous mounts have. There is no learning curve that we have seen. And hopefully, as our work increases, more people will see the bridle and read the research. Our hope is that as our farm grows to adopt these horses out we will send all of them with a Bitless Bridle!

Thanks so much for touching base with me again. As a person in my mid-thirties, it is rare to find a company promote such an innovative product backed by concise research, promoted by a thorough staff, and supported by its originator. It is very rare. People are amazed when I tell them that we have corresponded directly. My response...he is a scientist devoted to his research.

May this year afford you the highest recognition! Please keep in touch with any advances or changes. And I will continue to gather information as we rehabilitate more and spend more time behind The Bitless Bridle! Please do not hesitate to forward my email address to anyone wanting information or feedback on the bridle. We would be happy to tell the story of the four we converted so far. My Best to You!

Jodie, Palatine, IL:

Thank you for introducing me to this wonderful bridle.

I bought my 3-year-old QH gelding last summer, and I was his 5th owner (he was traded a few times). After a few unfortunate circumstances that forced him to be sold, I was the lucky one to buy this sweet, green horse. Luckily, the last girl (trader) who had him really loved him, but he didn't get the time he deserved. He came to me with a Tom Thumb bit, throwing his head when I approached, and it usually took at least 20 frustrating minutes to get him to take the bit.

I started biting him with a large D-ring snaffle, which with time and patience seemed to help. However, he seemed to still be distracted by the bit, and this seemed to distract him further from what I was asking when riding.

The first time I bridled him with your bridle, it was amazing how easy it was. Riding him felt as it never had before, and all I could do was be AMAZED at how quickly he learned to bend to the force of pressure.

Not ONE person at the barn (an English H/J barn) had ever seen your bridle before. Even though the trainer refuses to ride and jump with this bridle, I have used it in the arena with great success. It's great that he can take the traditional bit, since it is required for shows, yet he can use this for pleasure riding. My young guy is steadily coming along, and now that he is 4 and I've had him for a year, I will soon introduce the bridle to him for trail riding. Other riders think I'm CRAZY for using a bitless on the trail, but I have come to realize that I actually have more control with the BITLESS since he understands the pressure concept (of the straps) more than the pain concept of the bit.

I hope my theory is right!

Thank you again.

Leigh, MD:

I just wanted to let you know that I love the bridle! I have only used it a few times so far, but I am amazed at the control and response I have with it. I think my Thoroughbred is a bit confused with it. After all he is 16 years old and has always had a bit in his mouth! He has a tendency to lean on the bit and tilt his head while schooling. I found that he did not respond this way in the new bridle. I found him to be a bit more relaxed and became softer and rounder quite quickly. I can't wait to start using it with the training of my 5-year-old Thoroughbred. I truly thank you for your generous gift. I'll keep you posted on our progress.

Another highly relevant citation from Dr. Jessica Jahiel's newsletter, reproduced by kind permission:

From: Lorna

Subject: "dead-mouthed" horse

Hello, Thank you very much for your splendid service!

I am considering buying a gelding which is apparently about 9 years old. He has a very placid temperament and is fairly comfortable to ride. When I tried him out I discovered apart from being very one sided, quite unfit, and down in the forehand, he is absolutely dead in the mouth! It goes way beyond hard mouthed - I had to haul his head around to change direction and again to halt. (I was using leg and body aids but he clearly doesn't know them) I don't think I have ever ridden a horse quite so unresponsive in his mouth. I rode him in a jointed snaffle, provided by the owner. He is unlikely to ever bolt (though one can never say that for sure!) but if he did, I can't see that he would be stoppable. His history is that he has been ridden by all and sundry! Due to his nice temperament anyone who has nervous or who has never ridden before is put onto his back. I suspect he has developed this dead-mouth from having the reins used as a lifeline to keep people on his back!

My questions are firstly, do you think that with schooling, exercise, and training, this horse's mouth could be made to be softer?. Or should I say, responsive to the reins? (Can a very hard mouthed horse ever become a reasonably soft mouthed horse?) Secondly, can you suggest anything to retrain this horse's mouth? (A different bit? No bit? Special "mouth" exercises?) I'm not hard on horse's mouths, normally riding English style with light pressure and occasionally going onto the buckle to let the horse stretch his neck and relax. I tried neck reining this horse and he was very slightly better like that, but not much.

Obviously I realize the entire horse needs to be trained and I think he may be worth the work, but I am concerned that he will stay hard-mouthed forever, regardless of all other improvements.

Thank you for your advice, (in anticipation!)

Jessica:

Hi Lorna! This horse sounds very sweet, and I'm sure that you are right about him. He is clearly good-natured but utterly lacking in training/education - he has learned to tolerate constant random input (read: abuse) without complaint, but no one has bothered to teach him anything else. All of the problems you've described - one-sided, unfit, heavy on the forehand, and "dead-mouthed" - fit neatly under the single heading "untrained". Horses are naturally one-sided and heavy on the forehand - that's why two of the main goals of training are to straighten and strengthen the horse, and to develop its ability to work in balance, carrying more of its weight behind. Horses are also naturally "dead-mouthed", in the sense that without an

education in the language of the aids INCLUDING THE REIN AIDS, they simply don't understand what all the pulling is about. This doesn't mean that they don't feel the pulling ≠ they DO feel it, and they experience the pain it causes. But as they have no idea what is wanted, they will typically react either by recoiling in shock and horror when approached with a bridle, or - does this sound like your horse? - by going obediently forward, leaning against the rider's hand, and putting enough pressure on the bit to (eventually) numb their mouths.

If you take on this horse, you will need to handle him as you would a completely green, unstarted three-year-old. The training process will be somewhat longer than it would be with an actual unstarted three-year-old, because THIS horse has certain expectations of the rider and of what riding is all about, and it will take some time to teach him new expectations.

Unless your veterinarian tells you that the horse's bars and tongue are permanently damaged and nothing but a mass of thick scar tissue, the issue of mouth sensitivity isn't likely to be a problem. As I said earlier, horses feel the pressure and pain, but if a horse doesn't know what the rider wants, and/or has no expectation of relief from the pressure and pain when it DOES what the rider wants, it will simply do its best to "tune out" what it has learned to think of as random input, like constant radio static, or a loud, endless lecture in an unfamiliar language. The "hard mouth" or "dead mouth" is rarely a physical reality; rather, it's almost always the result of an untrained or badly-trained horse being ridden by a series of heavy-handed riders who spend their time in the saddle "water-skiing" off the horse's mouth.

The horse has no idea that his mouth is anything but a "handle" for the people who sit on him, and he certainly has no notion that the bit and reins could be used for communication, let alone subtle, quiet communication. So far, his relationship with the bit and reins has been all pressure and no release. Constant, light contact, subtle brief pressure and subtle release are things about which this horse knows nothing at all - if he's going to learn, you'll have to teach him, and that can be done, but it will take time.

Can such a horse become a good riding horse, alert and responsive to the aids? Certainly, if someone is willing to invest the time and effort to train him all over again (or, more likely, for the first time), from the ground up. Can a "hard mouth" become a soft, responsive mouth? Certainly, because the softness depends on the horse's ability to understand and interpret the rider's signals, and if someone will take the time to teach the horse what the signals mean, what response is wanted, and what reward will follow, a "hard" mouth can become very "soft" indeed.

Something you need to bear in mind is that this horse's "dead mouth" - which is actually between the horse's ears! - may well be accompanied by "dead sides" and a "dead back", all of which are illusory. In other words, this apparently sweet and unflappable nine-year-old horse may have achieved a state of all-over numbness that really gives you no idea of his actual personality. Once he's fit, balanced, and understands that riding is a matter of TWO-WAY communication between horse and rider - say in two years' time, if all goes well - he may prove to be a horse that can enjoy life instead of being resigned to it, and he may also "wake up" and prove to be vastly more energetic than he seems to be right now. This prospect may please you or alarm you, but either way, you should keep the possibility in mind. I've observed this with a good many horses rescued from bad situations. Many of these are all-accepting; they don't try to run away or fight, they have simply given up, and remain preternaturally calm at all times. If you look such horses in the eye, they don't seem to be "in there" looking back at you - their eyes seem glazed. Too much sensory input has put them "on hold" mentally and emotionally. Once rescued and placed in the hands of horsemen, many of these horses change - not quickly, but dramatically. After a time, often a year or more, the horses appear to "shake

themselves" mentally and "wake up" from their previous state of near-autistic sleepwalking. At that point, some of them prove to be cheerful, happy, energetic souls.

If you like this horse and are willing and able to take on what may be a long-term project, by all means have a go. He's only nine, which means that in two years' time you could have a very pleasant riding horse with many years ahead of him.

The best advice I can give you is to begin his training as though he were very young and very green, and work to develop his body, mind, and spirit in the way that someone should have done long ago. Since he has learned to lean on the bit, I would suggest that you not use one for some time, perhaps a year or longer.

Basic ground-control and stable manners can be taught in a halter; longeing should be done using a proper longeing cavesson (find someplace with good footing, put him on the largest possible circle - at least 20 meters, and do hundreds and thousands of transitions).

For riding, I would recommend the Bitless Bridle, which works on the nose and the poll rather than putting pressure on the mouth. When the horse has become fit and learned a new way of carrying himself and a new way of going, when he has learned to understand, listen to, and respond to the rider's legs and seat, and when he has learned to respond to gentle pressure from the bridle, you'll be able to add a bit to the ensemble.

When you first add a bit, just let him carry it for a month or so - then, when you are sure that he accepts and is comfortable with the bit in his mouth, you can add a second rein (this one attached to the bit) and begin riding him with both reins. Gradually, over several months, you'll be able to shift the emphasis from the Bitless Bridle rein to the rein attached to the bit, and finally you'll be able to begin riding him with that rein only. That is, if you WANT to - many riders find that they enjoy riding without a bit.

As for which bit to use - begin with a very mild and obvious one: a mullen-mouth snaffle, not too thick. When the horse responds easily and well to this bit, you can change it for an equally mild but more subtle one: a French-link snaffle, which will also be easy on his bars and tongue, but will allow both of you more subtlety in communication. If, at that point, the horse tells you that he is more comfortable in the mullen-mouth bit, or more comfortable without a bit, believe him.

So it seems the real questions here are not "Can the horse be retrained?" and "Can a hard mouth become soft?" but "Do you, Lorna, have the willingness AND the experience, ability, patience, and TIME to begin and continue this horse's education from the ground up?" and "Are you, Lorna, comfortable with the idea of working this horse without a bit for a year or more, then gradually introducing a bit over a period of some months?" And, finally, "If, after all the time and effort, the horse makes it quite clear that it is much happier being ridden WITHOUT a bit, will that be a viable option for you?"

The first two questions MUST be answered in the affirmative - the third is more speculative, but is still a possibility that you may want to keep in mind. Much will depend on your plans for the horse. If you're thinking in terms of hacking for pleasure, or of competitive trail-riding or endurance riding, the use (or not) of a bit won't be an issue. If you are thinking in terms of the sorts of competitions for which bits are part of the required equipment, this may be too much of a gamble, and require too much of an investment in your time and energy.

If you do take on this horse as a training project, take your time, listen to him, have a plan, and be flexible. Good luck, and please keep me informed!

HORSE-SENSE is a subscriber-supported newsletter. If you would like to help support HORSE-SENSE, please visit the website for information. Thank you!

=====

Jessica Jahiel's HORSE-SENSE Newsletter

<http://www.horse-sense.org/>

Copyright © 1996-2004. Jessica Jahiel, Holistic HorsemanshipÆ

=====

Materials from Jessica Jahiel's HORSE-SENSE Newsletter may be distributed and copied for personal, non-commercial use provided that all authorship and copyright information, including this notice, is retained. Materials may not be republished in any form without express permission of the author.

=====

How does your Bitless Bridle compare to an English Hackamore?

[Dr. Cook responds:

Whereas the English Hackamore communicates a rider's wish to stop by applying (potentially painful) strong pressure to the nose, the Bitless Bridle does this by applying a trivial degree of painless pressure to the whole of the head.

Whereas the hackamore is acceptable for stopping it is weak on steering. The Bitless Bridle is better for both stopping and steering.

Whereas the hackamore is a bridle for riding only, the Bitless Bridle can be adapted as a lead halter, for longeing, for tying-up, for ground driving and for grazing on the trails. I hope this helps. - Robert Cook]

Rebecca, Cocoa, Florida 7/1/03:

I have been reading the user's comment about the Bitless Bridle and many of them have me nearly in tears when I read the profound differences in the behavior of their horses. I have also read some of the research papers you've published. I had spent 16 years as a Certified Veterinary Technician before I got my Teaching degree. That previous schooling gave me an advantage in understanding your work and diagrams. Unfortunately it only helped a little when I tried to explain it my riding friends. However, I am incredibly excited about your bridle.

I really wrote to tell you how I came upon your bridle and how I came to use it. I have a 3-year-old Appaloosa that I've wanted to start, but did not want to use a bit on him. He is only one that has not had bad experiences with anything and I so much do not want the bit to be one. I have four other horses that were rehabilitation projects from previous homes. I am a reasonably good rider, and try to be considerate of the horses I ride, but the control of a bit is much too easy to abuse and if I don't HAVE to use it, why should I?

I thought that maybe a side-pull would be an appropriate way to start the 3-year old. I'd asked a friend to keep an eye out for one, as none of the local shops had any. She came back from a trip with a nylon type of bridle that looked quite gentle. But, there was a long section with rings that for the life of us we could not figure out. There were suggestion from others and neither worked on the Paint horse we ride normally in a halter. Soooo, into the tack room it went for several weeks until I inadvertently came across your website while searching for something else.

Since bits are an issue with me anyways, I looked more. "Heeeyyy, I have seen that somewhere." Can you imagine my excitement when I brought that bridle out of the depths of

my shed and matched it to your diagrams?! I knew what to do with it ! I tried it on my friend's horse first, then another, then mine. It is so easy and makes so much sense. I did print out quite a few of the articles for myself to be able to refer to them frequently. I know this is incredibly long, but I'd like to tell you about the horses that I will be using your bridle on in the future. BTW, do you have any recommendations for a tack room full of bits? Decorating suggestions possibly?

My Morgan has severe scarring on either sides of his tongue that may have been caused by the mishandling of a bit. He refuses to take a snaffle, but will open readily for a straight bar. Though when ridden, he over-flexes, is often behind the bit, and hollows his back, all of which creates a "jackhammer" trot. I rode him home from a friend's in the Bitless Bridle. I have taken to riding in only a bareback pad (The worst thing I ever did was to take my saddle apart & discover the construction and incompatibility with horse comfort), so I did not look forward to having my kidneys jolted for the two mile ride home. However, BLACK responded so well. He still flexed, but not so much that his back was hollow. His gait was nicely comfortable as I had no difficulty in rating his speed with very minimal rein pressure. His gait is usually like this : go nice and slow - ease the rein a hair - go faster - collect rein - slow down - maybe stop; start over. Very uncomfortable. He drives too. I am also interested in the driving bridle I read about.

The 23 year old Quarter Horse came to me at 18 years of age so soured from barrel racing that he had become dangerous. He would rear and throw himself over to avoid mounting, and bridling him was a nightmare. It took many months of head-down exercises, and halter only to get him trusting and relaxed. BOOMER is aptly named. At 23 he still acts like a 10 year old. I rode him in the Bitless Bridle and he was very relaxed, not pushy, and much easier to slow down.

KOTA came with a bridle phobia so intense that he was scary to ride. He had been ridden in a twisted wire gag bit so tight that his owner would unbuckle the bridle to get it on him. Then put a rawhide tie-down on him to keep him from throwing his head (wonder why!). I'd been able to ride him eventually in a halter in the ring, then a snaffle. I went back to a halter, but he still shakes his head and resists pressure, but he does not get his mouth bruised from a bit. This horse is not poorly trained. He is so much more relaxed and much less touchy to leg contact. However he still reacts as if the headstall or halter is designed to injure him. I rode him in the Bitless Bridle yesterday. He tested it as if it were a halter by rooting and muscling into a turn. It was much easier to keep him from turning and did not appear to cause undue pressure on him. I intend to work with him more in it. There is a family that very much wants to purchase Kota. I told them I'd agree only they bought and rode with a Bitless Bridle. I believe with more training, this bridle could help this horse be happy and comfortable.

CADENCE is an enormous Paint horse of unknown breeding. I would like to eventually ride him in competitive trail. I have not tried the bridle on him yet. He will buck, though not as much or as vehemently as he has been known to. I've found that he can easily be over-bitted and that anything other than a snaffle will also cause him to rear. I will follow up with that information if you like.

Several others of my horse company are interested in the Bitless Bridle. I've lent out that one to pass along for our own "research". I would like to be able to send along to you any questions that we cannot find answered in the information already provided, if possible.

Thanks for getting through all of this if you were able to. I just had to give some idea of the horses that deserve the relief I want to provide them. The design of your bridle could be

very easy to replicate. Undoubtedly due to patents, that'd not be possible. I will inquire about availability of second-hand bridles you referred to in another article.

Mary, FBHS (Fellow of the British Horse Society), 7/5/03:
Subject: Dressage and teaching in the Bitless Bridle

I am writing to let you know that you have my wholehearted support for your Bitless Bridle.

I am an instructor (actually, I have devoted my life to training horses and riders and hold the Fellowship of the British Horse Society) and I have spent my life teaching people to ride with their body weight and not to use so much hand. I advocate a pressure of no more than half an ounce on each rein. When I was growing up in England one of our friends was Moira Williams who trained her horses and competed in show jumping with no bridle. The horse shows would not let her compete without a bridle or something on the horse's head so she used to put a headcollar on and attach a rope and then leave it loose! She was ahead of her time.

As a student I was trained for FIVE years on the lunge without saddle or bridle. When we were eventually given reins they were attached to a noseband, so I grew up with a very favorable view of the Bitless Bridle. In competition one has to use a bit, but that can change. If enough of us demand the change it will happen.

I first met your Bitless Bridle when I taught a clinic in Virginia in March and I had some new students with young Arabian stallions. I was warned by the lady putting on the clinic that these Arabians would be ridden in unconventional tack so I prepared myself for all sorts of horrors of draw reins, etc. Imagine my delight when they showed up in your Bitless Bridles! Very similar to a design of bitless bridle I have been using with students in Colorado for some years. On consideration, perhaps the ones I first came across in Colorado were in fact your design and make and I just had not realized it. In any case, I'm a huge supporter. One of my students here, Karen Kott, has just bought one and started using it and is already having great success. I'll see her on Monday.

I leave for Europe in a couple of days but I will be keeping in touch with you because I want to buy a bridle from you for a 19 yr. old Lusitano/TB mare who has a horrible aversion to bits. I'm using a Myler on her at present but it's not the answer. I'll be back mid August and will contact you again then. In the meanwhile, keep up the good work.

Sonya, Asheboro, NC, 7/7/03:
Subject: It Took a While

I've been meaning to write this for some time, but just hadn't made time until now. I ordered two Bitless Bridles maybe as much as two years ago, one for myself, one for my husband. About that same time I had taught my horse to drop his head from poll pressure using clicker training. Apparently he learned that lesson all too well & riding with the bitless carried his nose on the ground even with just normal rein contact. So I returned my bitless before the 30-day trial expired. My husband kept his, but returned to riding with a bit when he bought a new horse as that was what she was used to. The bitless hung in the tack room for many months.

One day I was discussing Bitless Bridles with a friend who'd recently acquired one & decided to pull the bitless out & try it again on my horse. I'd been having some trouble with him seeming to hesitate. While he certainly walked forward when I asked, each step had some feeling of hesitation in it. The next time out, I started him in his bridle with a bit (a bit that he seemed to like better than any others we'd tried) & carried the bitless along. After about an hour, I stopped & switched to the bitless. Within 15 minutes his stride lengthened & the feeling of hesitation was gone. I did the same experiment the next time I rode with the same results.

Then came a winter & spring of nonstop rain & family obligations so I hadn't ridden much. Finally though it dried out enough to hit the trails again. This time I used the bitless right from the start. My husband wanted to know where we were going in such a hurry as my horse was really walking out! This past weekend we had our second ride & my husband commented that he could really tell a difference in my horse with the bitless. So today I ordered him another one for his horse!

Just thought you'd like to know there was eventual success even when it seemed as though your product just didn't work for us.

Jessie, Moline IL, 7/9/03:

My name is Jessie, and I'm a huge fan of your Bitless Bridle. I show it to about everyone I ride with. I actually had an eventer who rode with me the other day and had to borrow it because she forgot to put her bit on her bridle when I picked her up. She loved it. She couldn't believe she had control over her hot-blooded psychotic Arab, and how well he did after a few miles of aggressive trotting and catering.

I've been showing all my life and have been waiting for something like this for a long time. I've always trained my horses to respond to leg and can ride them without anything at all, well, not in a wide-open field in a new area (we're working on that). The Bitless Bridle has helped a huge trust issue I had with my adopted Arabian who was used to severe bits and hackamores (not me). I've never used a bit in his mouth and he has great self-carriage, balance, and a nice round back during all gaits. I now have a baby that I'm training and all the people I meet are amazed that I'm riding without a bit when they see DREAMER move the way he does.

I have one question though. My dressage instructor is pushing me to ride in a bit due to competition rules. This is a new discipline for me and I'm trying to find out if I can show without a bit. She says that dressage is all about being on the bit, but as I understand it, it has nothing to do with the physical bit, but it's about self-carriage, collection, and so on.

I've been showing hunter jumpers with it and haven't had a problem. And I find that my horse tires less easily with my bridle. If you know of any associations that allow the Bitless Bridle in competitions please let me know. And if you ever need any help advertising these things I'd be happy to help you. I believe that the iron age of the bit should be over, and there is a better way to communicate with our four-legged partners.

I don't know how all these "natural horsemanship" trainers can call themselves naturals when they are still using bits? (just a thought).

PS I have a 17 hand Appaloosa. The bitless I have now doesn't really fit one of my horses, it's a little snug, do you have a warmblood

Maybe someday we can post pictures of horses on your website in true collection. When I give lessons and help train I only use the Bitless Bridle. It has made a difference, and I

am trying to adapt a new method of training using the bridle. My goal is to show everyone I can do three-day events in it, and compete at the same levels as everyone else using a bit ... cross-country and arena jumping. I've already persuaded a few into looking into the Bitless Bridle on performance issues alone. Best of Luck

I'll soon be buying another one. My Appy is outgrowing the bitless I already have! He's a big boy!

[Dr. Cook comments:

Yes, you are absolutely right. 'Self-carriage' not 'on the bit.' Perhaps one could use the phrase 'on the bridle' to mean the same thing but even this does not convey the true objective.]

Dena, Madison, WI 7/9/03: Subject: outside rein

In looking at the diagrams of how the Bitless Bridle works, it appeared to me that the classic use in dressage (and other English disciplines) of bending the horse through a combination of seat/inside leg to the outside rein would not be effective with the Bitless Bridle, since pressure on the outside rein of the Bitless Bridle turns the horse's head toward the outside rather than supporting a continuous bend to the inside, as occurs with these aids when using a bit. What do you hear from dressage riders about how your bridle affects both the aids for bending and their results.

Is the horse working "through" the bend without that pressure from opposing sides of the body (i.e the balance between leg/seat and opposing hand)? I am very intrigued by your bridle -- have ordered one to experiment with, both for dressage and jumping (stadium and cross country) -- and think it sounds very promising for the ways that I ride, but would love to hear more about this particular issue of bending.

[Dr. Cook responds:

You pose an interesting question.

The bridle can be used for neck reining, if a rider wishes, with placement of the rein on the neck rather than application of pressure. In this way there is no contradiction in the signal, as no pressure is applied to the opposite side of the head.

But in the normal use of the bridle, it provides a 'head reining' signal that is equivalent if not better than the use of an outside rein or a neck rein. Horses turn much better with this bridle, as the gentle push encourages a more physiological turn. There is no tendency to tilt the head, as with the pull of a bit. The head stays upright. When you get your bridle, let me know if you agree. - Robert Cook]

Dena, 7/9/03:

Thanks for your quick response. I look forward to receiving the bridle and trying it. It sounds like it will be a matter of educating myself to use a different combination of aids, which shouldn't be much of a problem. Riding is all about adjusting to the horse's response, which I do from moment to moment in every ride. But it might take a little while to overcome what are now for me probably ingrained patterns of use of the aids from years of riding.

My husband and I are presently training five horses (Thoroughbreds and warmbloods), all very athletic but all with different past experiences (some quite negative -- we do a lot of rehab) for eventing. I can imagine the bridle being a helpful training aid for all five, in different ways. I will certainly let you know if we have any surprising results!

Dena, Hollandale, WI, 7/16/03:

My husband and I have begun to use your bridle with our four Thoroughbreds and one Rhinelander. The results have been impressive, and in one case, utterly spectacular. Changes in the horse for whom I guessed the bridle might make the most difference have been nothing short of extraordinary. RHETT raced, and then had a long career as an open jumper. When we bought him, we knew he had been ridden badly (i.e. jumped with a twisted copper snaffle and martingale, and generally with a lot of rough handling that caused him to be extremely fearful) and would need a lot of rehabilitation to turn him into the kind of willing cross country jumper we enjoy. My husband has specialized for the last fifteen years in successfully rehabilitating horses with behavioral problems like Rhett's, so we knew it would be difficult, but we figured we would succeed in the end.

Well, after four years, Rhett is a lot calmer and more trusting, and does not ALWAYS try to rush madly at jumps, but his behavior and attitude remain very inconsistent. Also, while he is built quite nicely, his movement tends to be much shorter and choppy than his conformation would suggest is possible for him. We knew that this was due to some combination of physical/mental tension plus pain in his hocks from arthritic deterioration. Until receiving the Bitless Bridle, we had been riding him in the gentlest possible snaffle, knowing that he was terribly fearful of the bit. This was the best we figured we could do to help him in this regard, as well as riding him with little or no contact whenever his attitude made this possible.

Well, from the first moment that I rode him with the Bitless Bridle, Rhett's attitude changed completely and his movement improved noticeably. He is now much quieter over jumps, and remains relaxed and responsive to all requests for shortening and lengthening when we gallop. When we do ask him to slow or collect at any gait, he does so with a softness that is markedly different from the past. And he is now much readier to do an extended trot because he is more confident about reaching forward. Overall, both his attitude and his way of going have become relaxed in ways that we had all but given up hoping for. To sum it up, my husband said that with the bridle he was able to do more for Rhett in two hours than he had been able to do in the previous four years.

Our other horses have responded in much less dramatic ways, having nothing like Rhett's problems. Those who were already moving well and happily have nonetheless become noticeably softer in the poll, neck and withers. Like Rhett, they all respond to requests to slow and/or collect with a greater softness and less tendency to become stiff or resistant even when they are in the mood to really get rolling. We have not had time yet to work on dressage with the bridle, but with the little flat work we have done so far, we have not seen any changes in the way they bend.

I hope this information is useful to you. Thank you so much for your wonderful invention! It will become standard equipment on our farm.

Wendy (and NEVADA) 7/14/03:

Just wanted to let you know that I have had The Bitless Bridle for three weeks now and am very happy with it. I belong to a message board that has about 19,000 members and posted my experiences with your bridle and referred to your web site. I have just found out that one member from Georgia ordered and has just received her bridle! She contacted me to say that she and her horse also love it! I hope to get more people interested as it is truly a great product! Thank you.

Marianne, Sweden, 7/14/03:

We are two older ladies with one Icelandic horse each and have had problems riding them with the bit. Both horses are pretty "hot" and with very sensitive mouths. We have now used your bridle and are extremely pleased with it. Our horses are now very obedient and do not toss their heads and stop when we want them to.

In other words we are telling all our acquaintances about this bridle. Unfortunately we may not use the bridle when competing. Suggest you contact the Swedish Icelandic Horse Association (Svenska Islandshastfor-bundet). Address: SIF, Stromsholm, Ridsportens Hus, S-730 40 Kolback, Sweden, e-mail: svenska@icelandichorse.se or their magazine Islandshasten, Ms Marjolein van Leusen, Akarp 1080, S-280 20 Bjarnum, e-mail: tidningen.svenska@icelandichorse.se.

Richard and Katherine, Liberty, KY, 7/22/03:

We want to tell you how well we are doing with the Bitless Bridle we ordered recently. We breed Missouri Fox Trotting Horses, and were skeptical about whether we would be able to get them to gait with the correct collection using your bridle.

We have used it very successfully on a top mare, BO's MIDNIGHT CINDERELLA, who had previously had problems with the bits that are common in our breed. Cinderella tossed her head and fought the bit, but is doing absolutely wonderfully in the Bitless Bridle. In fact, she is doing so well that we plan to exhibit her at the world-famous Kentucky Horse Park for the Missouri Fox Trotter Breed Weekend in October. We plan to show her under saddle with your Bitless Bridle.

Suzanne, Erie, PA 7/31/03:

Subject: Bitless Bridle works miracles with a hot horse!

Thank you so much for your research, work and development of the Bitless Bridle. It truly is a wonderful product and is giving so many horses a well-deserved break from the unpleasantness of bitted bridles. If only we could make it a mandatory requirement for beginner riders and anyone under the age of 14, regardless of sport.

I am writing today to provide further proof of success achieved only with the Bitless Bridle. My previously abused mare demonstrated most definitely that she associates bits with evil, but will perform the same maneuvers or actions willingly in a Bitless Bridle.

Promise is a hot horse. She's a naturally flighty, delicate looking TB/TK mare with a very strong survival instinct, thus giving her hyper-sensitivity and a strong awareness of surroundings. Unfortunately, this nature was further aggravated by a first owner so abusive that she still carries scars and he went to prison. From her body language, I believe he would whip her if her transitions were wrong and for going too fast in the canter. Her 2nd owner did wonders at rehabbing her stable manners, but was overmatched under saddle and kept using more severe bits. She also rode with a heavy hand and pretty much drove the mare out of her mind with worry.

I bought Promise 10 months ago. Since discovering the Bitless Bridle 7 months ago, our flatwork has improved tremendously, but it is the jumping arena where the real success lies. As

best we can decipher, the bad man taught PROMISE to jump by running her at too large of a fence and then yelling at her to scare her over. This leaves me with a temperamental hot-head who bolts her fences, regardless of size.

Two weeks ago, we placed 3rd out of 12 in a Super Baby INTRO division of a local mini event (think walk/trot with ground poles for fences). In a snaffle, she was inattentive during dressage, fought the bit the entire way with her head straight up, jigged when she should have walked and canter bounced when she should have trotted. We were unbalanced, unrhythmic and less than graceful. However, in the Bitless Bridle, we successfully completed both the cross-country course and the stadium rounds with full attention, a steady (if brisk) pace and with control. She still rushed the last three strides before the fences, but our corners were round and lovely and that allowed me time to balance her and set up for the next line. She never put a foot wrong on cross-country, despite wide-open fields and distracting cows in the adjacent field.

Keep that in mind.

Two days ago, I finished a less than lovely dressage schooling session in the snaffle and laid down 4 trotting poles to work on suspension. I discovered that with the bit in her mouth, ground poles mean the bad man. She stuck her head straight up, snorted, rushed the poles, jumped over 3 and stumbled out over the 4th. This was repeated regardless of the number of poles or even the speed of the approach. She lathered herself up trying unsuccessfully to walk over a single pole.

Yesterday, I rode in the Bitless Bridle. This time, she was relaxed, calm and attentive, despite a deafening roar from torrential rain on the indoor arena roof. She quietly trotted through 5 poles, both directions. She happily went over a course of 4 small cross rails three times with only a slight quickening of pace. For the last round, I made two of the cross rails into verticals and made one fence out of barrels. No difference. She associates the BIT with pain and fear, not the fences themselves. This issue I can overcome with time.

Without your Bitless Bridle, Promise would still be in pain, either from a hackamore's pressure on her nose or from a bit in her mouth that is being forcibly closed by a cavesson attached to a too short standing martingale (the recommended option of one of the "trainers" at the barn). Because your bridle was available, I am now able to help my horse and provide definite proof of success to those around me of the "old school" mentality. For that, I can't thank you enough.

You may also be interested to know that Promise is a barefoot horse. She has been since I bought her and I have been greedily keeping shoes off of her for as long as her "German feet of stone" will allow. So far, she has never been unsound. It is only in the last month, with the summer ground being so hard, that her hoof walls began to peel, but they have not cracked and certainly haven't split or chipped. There are other horses in the barn who developed bruised heels out in the pasture, but they had front shoes on so who knows how that happened. Until she trots out lame one day, she will remain shoeless...and one of the few horses allowed to be turned out in the mud!

Suzanne, 8/2/03:PS: A few more notes on the Bitless Bridle and flatwork.

When I bought Promise 10 months ago, she was a darling on the ground, but skittish, distrustful, wary and not much fun under saddle. She carried her head too high, her back too hollow and, in stressful situations, would be about as smooth as gravel. She is too much of a lady to consider bucking, but she would spin on a dime if the wind blew. If she spooked, she

went straight forward for a couple of strides with her head straight up in the air, waiting to be hit in the mouth and reined back in.

In the 4 months before I discovered your bridle, some things cleared up simply because I wouldn't punish her for spooking or for rushing around and I rode with a light hand (my instructor says it's too light and I'm being not effective). As I got to know her, I came to realize she was so completely worried about what the rider was going to do to her, that she couldn't pay attention to the aids. She was a real trier and wanted to please, but she just didn't speak the rider's language.

That's when I decided to eliminate the bit. It was in researching hackamores that I discovered the Bitless Bridle and I knew instantly it was the product for us. Everything from the design to the user comments was right on the money. (You may want to add the phrase "hot horse" to your website so more Search results find you. There are precious few helpful sites out there and I know your bridle could alleviate many of the related problems).

Within two rides, I had an improved horse. I say two rides because her abusive past makes her suspicious of everything. She had to realize the bridle was not a one-time event before she began to trust again. An instant success after that. If she spooked and I didn't relax the reins fast enough and accidentally "hit" her with pressure, it didn't matter. It translated to a squeeze to her. Our walk/trot gaits became smoother and the canter (a real horror area for her) at least wasn't a blind panic anymore. She would move into a round frame far more easily and quickly than in a snaffle and was much more supple and flexible in lateral movements.

After I discovered she had a problem with her right TMJ and corrected it with acupuncture, her rhythm and tempo improved dramatically. Today, for example, one of the upper level dressage riders at our barn complimented her free walk in the arena, saying she was reaching forward beautifully and really over-striding. We were in the Bitless Bridle and in the hard packed outdoor arena (the arena she says is too hard for her shod horse's hooves!) at the time.

I am sorry to say that when competing in dressage in a snaffle (required), her gaits worsen as she reverts back to worrying about her mouth. I am purchasing the dummy bit that goes with the Bitless Bridle in the hopes of weaning her back onto the notion that not all bits are bad. It may not work, but it's worth a try. If not, my competition career will either take a hiatus or we will enter the world of Hors Concours.

Again, I cannot thank you enough for this superior product. It's quick to put on, easy to clean (I have the Beta) and she loves it. I was even able to ride her during a 2-week delay between when I suspected she had sharp teeth and when the dentist came. Given the energy level she acquires after 2 days of pasture turnout without additional exercise, she'd have been bouncing off the roof with a 2-week lay off. The bridle paid for itself for that option alone!

Yes, you may add my comments to your website and my e-mail address. Also, if any skeptics would like a few more details on the progression a hot horse goes through with the bridle ... none, it's all in the removal of the bit or even why a horse may act hot in the first place. I will always be willing to talk with folks about the Bitless Bridle.

Oh, next month, as a final test of the Bitless Bridle, we are competing in a back-to-back dressage show on Saturday and then another beginner event on Sunday. I will be riding all 3 solo dressage tests on Saturday in the Bitless Bridle and using our regular Myler snaffle for Sunday's dressage test. After 3 tests on Saturday, any show jitters will be well out of her system, so if her scores worsen with one of the gentlest bits available, what further evidence is necessary for folks to see the benefits of the Bitless Bridle?

Sara, 8/9/03:

I received my biothane bridle and reins last Wednesday, and immediately tried them out! I love the bridle.... but I absolutely hate the reins! Thinking that I was just being picky, I gave them to my husband to use on his horse when we went trail riding last weekend. He disliked them even more than I did. He complained that they were "hot" and even hurt his fingers after prolonged use. As a last resort, I let my daughter try them. She was unable to keep them from slipping through her hands. She said that they "made her hands sweaty and slippery". Is it possible to keep the headstall and return the reins??? I am willing to put the reins toward the purchase of another headstall, which has done wonders for two different horses that I have used it on!

Mrs. Michael, Haymarket, VA 8/11/03:

I met Dr. Cook years ago @ Fair Hill, and purchased a Bitless Bridle for my Arabian mares...certainly one of the smarter things I've ever done. Since then, I've recommended them successfully to two trainers, a farrier, two vets and countless 3-Day-Event and other riders. Now I'm interested in one for one of my Percheron mares, who looks rather like an oversized Arab.

Thanks very much; the Bitless Bridle has been more than well received by everyone to whom we've recommended it, and we're delighted with ours!!!

John and Holly, 8/14/02:

Subject: second bridle in 2-weeks

I received my new Bitless Bridle last week and have ridden with it three times in an enclosed arena. Well you were correct on how fast a horse will adapt to it. I am ready to proceed out on the trail. My horse (AGENT) a Tennessee Walker is very head strong, but he reacted positively to the new bridle instantly.

When we purchased him about 2 years ago he was ridden in a double twisted wire snaffle, since then he has been ridden with a long shank Tennessee Walker bit or more recently with a Wonder bit. My wife is so impressed with his reaction (she has never liked bits) and the fact that this worked so well with my horse, that we have just ordered a second one for her horse. We can't wait for it to arrive and have two pain free horses. Thank you for this great product.

Shirley, 8/16/03:

Subject: Tieback surgery

My brother was doing a search of my name on the Internet and said he found it on your website. I went there today and saw all the letters you and I sent back and forth. I wanted you to know that I am STILL using the Bitless Bridle with ANGEL and he loves it.

He is not "perfect" (in his wind) and still has some problems breathing in the humid weather but the bridle has improved his condition tremendously. I was happy to see others trying it for horses with similar conditions and particularly enjoyed the letter about the woman

who thought her horse was going to be a "pasture ornament" but ended up having great success with the bridle. I feel the same way with Angel.

Although I do have a second horse now, thanks to the Bitless Bridle, I still ride Angel all the time since he loves to work. I probably would have had to retire him otherwise but now he has a happy productive life and is doing beautifully.

Jerri, 8/17/03:

I use the Dr. Cook Bitless Bridle and my Paso Fino does just great in it. I am a novice rider, and people ask me why I would use such a thing ... It is wonderful ... the horse loves it. Dr. Cook is so nice and helpful in anything that you may have questions about.

Elizabeth, 8/18/03:

Subject: Well ... WOW!

I have to admit that I was skeptical that the apparently "miraculous" claims on your website could possibly be completely accurate. But after the past weekend, I'm a convert. First of all, SKIPPER (see my original e-mail to you about him below) was perfectly pleased to be bridled. No struggle, no nothing. That wasn't TOO shocking to me and Crys (his owner), since the bit had clearly been the problem there.

We took him to the round pen (for safety) and I got on. He felt, right off the bat, like a completely different horse. He was more relaxed, didn't trit-trot so much, and gave at the poll and stretched! He just LOOKED more relaxed -- his eye gentle and calm, no panic in him. And he FELT like a happy, normal horse.

The next day, Crys rode him -- and she was grinning the whole time! We have had no trouble w/ control at all -- in fact, both of us feel that we have more control w/ the Bitless Bridle than w/ the eggbutt I put him in, or even the twisted wire snaffle he used before. Because he isn't resisting and freaking out, but paying attention, he's perfectly happy to turn or halt or regulate his pace.

On Sunday, I had a lesson on Skip w/ my trainer, a very high-level dressage rider, this time in the large arena. She had never seen Skipper before the Bitless Bridle, unfortunately (I thought about putting him back in the bit so she could see, but found I just couldn't do that to Skipper, who seemed so relieved to be free of the bit). But she had me doing exercises w/ Skipper that simply would have been unthinkable 3 days earlier. Not only was he doing small serpentines at the trot, but he was dropping his neck and relaxing his poll, moving up from my leg INTO THE BRIDLE (instead of leaping off in a panic), and bending gently and easily. I was not only able to post to the trot (impossible before b/c when he felt my lower legs on him, he was GONE!), but after a while I actually found myself having to push him! Just being able to use my leg on the horse was a shock!

At the end of the lesson, my trainer went on and on about what a nice horse Skipper is, how when he gets muscled up he'll be great, that he's very willing and accepting, etc. NONE of these are words that it would have been possible for anyone observing Skipper in the past to come up with.

I'm not convinced that all horses need the Bitless Bridle, as my experience generally is that horses who are carefully trained are fine w/ bits. But I'm also open to being convinced. I'm going to try it on the QH I'm riding myself, BAILEY, who does not have major bit issues.

And I am thinking of starting my yearling (when it's time) w/ the Bitless Bridle, in order to give her a chance to learn without the additional stress of getting used to a bit.

All I can say is that for Skippy, the Bitless Bridle is apparently the best thing that has ever happened to him. We will complete the questionnaire in a few weeks and send it back to you - I hope it helps you to convince others! Skip sends you a big slurpy, clover-drooly kiss and says to tell you that you're his new best friend!

Donn, New Egypt, NJ, 8/20/03:

Subject: Bitless Bridle ends 'circle of pain.'

I have been meaning to write you for quite some time, 1 yr. or more! In March 2001 I purchased a 15h green 7y/o Arab geld. from an abusive owner in TN. The horse was severely underweight, had whip scars on his rump. his feet had not been trimmed in a LONG time, generally a mess. This young fellow had been quickly and roughly broken and left to stand around for a year prior to my inexpensive purchase.

When we got him home to NJ my husband was horrified and believed I had made a big mistake. Having owned and ridden Arabians for 25+ yrs. I assured him that this young geld. was a "diamond in the rough" as he had impeccable pedigree, etc. My husband's response..."good luck".... Well, I saddled him up and had been warned that he was very difficult to bridle. Out comes the snaffle bridle & the horse hid behind me, then head straight up like a giraffe, mouth clamped shut and big pleading eyes. Finally bridled him with patience and time. He rode OK but shied at everything. Very quick and forward, like most Arabians, I knew he was what I needed as I do endurance, competitive trail riding, hunter paces and a lot of training & conditioning on trail.

But the shying was awful even though I could not tell what he was shying at. Then I saw the ad for the Bitless Bridle and though he turned out not to be a BIG problem horse he did have issues. Let me give it a try and get passed the biting issue, at least, so the purchase was made.

Within 2 days this horse was dipping his head into that bridle, became so relaxed and even more forward than before and the shying was reduced by 98% that first week! Putting 2&2 together, I realized my "circle of pain" theory was correct. Bridle hurts me, I get scared, then it hurts some more when she pulls my bit, now I'm scared again, I shy, she pulls, it hurts.....and round and round we went. No more!!! Happy, happy, happy down the trail, looking at nothing!

TOPMARK has top 5 everything we have done since then. Most recently 4th place at the Watchung Reservation 25 mile Competitive trail ride on 8/17. Only guy in a Bitless Bridle out of 54 starters! Please tell people to get their horses out of these "medieval torture devices" ... I certainly do. Thank you so much for helping to make my happy fellow even happier & polishing that rough diamond into the GEM he is today.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Everything you tell me about your horse leads me to suppose that he is terrified of the bit. So I think you will find that the new bridle will calm him down wonderfully. Read the attached materials to give yourself more background.

Otherwise, read the manual carefully that comes with the bridle. Make sure it is fitted correctly. Start slowly in a confined area. Keep calm and breathe regularly! - Bob, 8/9/03]

Jonika, 8/21/03:

I recently purchased a Beta Bitless Bridle. I'm having some trouble with it. I own an Appendix mare and she doesn't respond well to the bridle. Every time I try to turn her, she thinks I'm asking her to stop, then she'll often back up. She doesn't do this in a bitted bridle, although she does get her tongue over the bit, and chew on it a lot. I'm pretty sure I've fitted it correctly. If you have any tips that might help please let me know.

[Dr. Cook responds:

I think you will find that this confusion on the part of your mare will pass as she gets more accustomed to the new feel of the bridle. In the meantime, use minimum rein pressure and make sure you release the pressure as soon as she responds. Try turning your horse with the weight of your body and a glance in the direction you wish to go, rather than by hand aids. Some ground training with the bridle may be advisable. It sounds as though your mare is very sensitive to the bridle, which is good, but that at the moment she is over-reacting to the aids.

Let me know how you progress and don't worry about the 30 day warranty if you are running out of time ... we will give you an extension. - Robert Cook, 8/21/03]

Jonika, 8/22/03:

I used the Bitless Bridle on another horse at the stable, and he took to it right away. So, I definitely believe it works, but the mare is very sensitive and hard to ride no matter what bridle she has on. I will continue to try it on the mare, let's hope it works.

Thanks for your help.

Mary, 8/28/03:

Well, here we go ... I've gotten my local horse organizations feathers in a ruffle over this bridle, because I want to show English in it. Some judges didn't see a problem with it, others are adamantly opposed to it. We are just now starting the battle with the Executive Committee to get this bridle accepted and allowed in the rule-book. Our organization's president almost got into "fist-a-cuffs" over it. Many are traditionalists and don't want to think "outside the box" and want to stay with conventional rules set up by USA Equestrian (formerly Am. Horse Shows Assoc.) I need to write a letter to our organizations' stewards committee and was wondering if you have any suggestions for drafting such a letter? Then I will need to attend a meeting as well. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Chantal, 9/6/03:

KOA tricked me :o). He was so willing to have the Bitless Bridle placed on him, he let me mount (of course I've been handing him a little piece of carrot just prior to that) and he picked up really quickly the subtle movements of the reins to do turns, stops and back-up's. This was all done in the arena.

I continued on with riding on the road with a friend and her horse (which is also a buddy of Koa's) and let me tell you, he was so relaxed, head dropped and did so well for the first 20 minutes of the road ride. After that, he would alternate when he wanted to stop (as I pulled on the reins) and when he just didn't want to and continued to toss his head. He also ate a lot more grass, etc. than he normally does. I guess he must have just felt "free".

I haven't given up hope nor faith and plan to continue using the bridle in the arena, road and trail rides. My boss (who is also like my Mom) Patricia Phares who has ordered two beautiful black leather bridles (one of which I'm borrowing) tells me that Koa eating on a ride is a very bad habit which I should break and also I shouldn't be or shouldn't have to be "pulling" back on the reins to have Koa come to a stop. If he doesn't want to, I should make him turn. Well, if he were in the arena (where it was safe to do so) or on the grass or dirt, I would be able to do so but on the road (where there are cars coming by) sometimes that is just not appropriate for me to do so and not worry if he'll slip on the road (due to his metal shoes) or worst yet, create an accident with an oncoming car.

Would appreciate any suggestions you would have since I'm planning to continue my use with the bridle.

Chantal, 9/7/03:

Koa and I had an absolutely wonderful two-hour trail ride this morning (three hours in total with the road ride and stopping for a rest at another ranch)! After the second day with the bitless bridle, Koa was an absolute gem! It was so easy to put the bridle on Koa and he allowed me to mount him with ease! I was able to control him from always wanting to eat while on a ride and he never gave me a hard time with tossing his head when I tried to make him stop.

I love your bridle and what it has done for Koa and me! I'm planning to use your bridle during my riding lesson tomorrow morning (this will be the third time/day I'm using it) along with my first time using a bare back pad. Since I'm such a "green" rider, I want to learn how to "find my seat" and be a better rider. You just can't imagine how ecstatic and thankful I am for what you've done with your Bitless Bridle. I'm at peace knowing nothing will ever hurt Koa's mouth ever again! Now both Koa and I will be able to truly enjoy our rides together! Mahalo (thank you) for blessing our lives! Aloha.

Patti, 9/8/03:

I purchased the leather B/B approximately 1 week ago. I have used it on my Arab gelding (SHAHK) and also on my Paint mare (ZANZI). I love it! There are so many positive changes that I see in both of my horses. Both of my horses are so in tune to my slightest touch of the reins. I barely have to touch the reins when asking them to slow their pace or change their gait. They seem very confident with their B/B. Specific things that have changed are:

1. My mare does not try to lock her neck
2. Brakes are quicker
3. There is no rising of the head when I ask for a halt
4. My hands are much lighter
5. Steering/Cues are much clearer
6. Walk is much more forward
7. My horses are more affectionate
8. My horses are more confident

These are just a few of the changes that I have seen in my horses. My horses acclimated to the bridle immediately. To make sure that the bridle would feel comfortable on my horses, I made sure that any long hairs and whiskers were cut, so that they didn't interfere with the fitting of the bridle.

My husband ordered a B/B for his Trakhener. The response is the same as with my horses. The noseband on the Trakhener (SEGEN) had to be kept a little looser due to his very

sensitive face. We have 2 B/B now. We will probably order a third one so that everyone will have their own. The people at the barn are very curious about this bridle. So far, a total of 7 horses from our farm have tried this bridle. 3 of them were my trainer's horses (Dutch Warmbloods). My friend wants me to size her horse and try the bridle. She has Andalusians.

I will write again and let you know how the bridles are working with all the different kinds of horses.

Thank you so much! P.S. I rode my Arab bareback tonight with the B/B. He was completely relaxed! His back was so soft and springy. He has never been that smooth. I owe it to the B/B. I know it sounds like a commercial, but it is true!

And now some correspondence with Patrica Phares' young daughter, who describes herself as a 'green' rider:

Aloha from Honolulu, Hawaii

My boss (who is also like a Mom to me) has made me aware of your bitless bridle and currently uses it on her horse, PEPPER. I have a 15-year old quarter horse gelding (14.1 or 14.2 hands) who, I've been told from numerous horse people and current trainer, that I could use a Hackamore with KOA. I'm currently using a snaffle/shank and only need to tug ever so slightly with my pinkies on the reins but mostly use the weight distribution in my saddle and stirrups to get him to move from side to side.

I'm a very "green" rider as well as new horse owner (March, 2003) and have heard so many theories and wanted to know what you think. I'm strictly a pleasure rider (some arena, road and trail rides) and am able to ride Koa 5-6 times a week for 1/2-hour up to 2-1/2 hours each ride. I'm currently using an OrthoFlex saddle on him (seems to be the only saddle that will fit Koa due to his high withers and slightly sloped/short back) and also was wondering what your thoughts were on using a "bare back" saddle/pad to ride.

The previous owner said he spent \$1,000 on someone training Koa. His trainer was local "roper/sorter" and know for a fact (from what other people have told me) that he "yanked and cranked" Koa and also because Koa gets very anxious when I try to initially mount him, then he just wants to begin trotting away. I've tried to work through this and it seems that giving him a carrot just before I mount helps so that no one has to stand by/in front of him and hold onto his reins so he won't back up or step forward when I mount. I've gained some of his trust because he is able to ease up from a trot to a walk in a matter of seconds...I guess he no knows that I won't do anything that will hurt him and don't just want to get on his back and RUN!

I've noticed on more than one occasion that when others try to get onto Koa, not only does he give them a hard time, when they are finally in the saddle, he really backs up, his eyes get really large and then wants to take off. I've spent numerous hours trying to build the trust between Koa and I and will do whatever it takes to ensure total comfort and happiness for him (as well as me too).

Though Koa is 15-years old, he was just gelded 2-1/2 years ago. Prior to that, he was up in the mountains running wild with the other horses before I purchased him. Koa still shows/exhibits some stallion qualities, which I'm told that I should be very cautious when riding near mares in heat. The previous owner always did say that even when Koa was his stud, he was mellow, and therefore, really didn't want to sell him to anyone. But after numerous nights of begging and crying my heart out, he agreed to sell Koa to me, with the understanding that if I ever did want to sell Koa, it would be right back to him.

I would truly appreciate any advice you could offer me. My boss/mom, Patricia Phares, is going to lend me her extra Bitless Bridle she purchased from you, to use on my lesson this Sunday. I want to see how Koa will respond to the bridle and if all goes well, you'll see a purchase coming by from Hawaii :o)

Mahalo (thank you) for your time. Aloha.

[Dr. Cook responds:

I think that Koa will give you all the encouragement you need on Sunday and will answer all your questions in the affirmative. You will find that he has already read the questionnaire that I am attaching, and, among other benefits, will now stand peacefully for you and others to mount. So go ahead ... read the manual and make sure you have the bridle fitted correctly ... then enjoy the effect. Koa will thank you, I promise. Let me know please.

The bareback saddle pad will be fine but I suggest you do not introduce this at the same time as the bridle. To change one thing at a time is good practice.]

Linda, 9/11/03:

I just tried the Bitless Bridle on my 3-year- old Halfinger that's never been ridden. He acted like an old trail horse that's been riding for years. There definitely will never be a bit in either one of my horses. Thank you, Thank you, Thank you!

Candice and Christopher, London, Ontario 9/14/03:

We have read the many testimonials on your site regarding the Bitless Bridle and would like to add mine to them. The mouth sensitivity of our thirteen-year-old Appaloosa, AUGUSTUS, whom we just purchased in April, has recently come to light. From the first day we rode him he appeared not to like his bit (at the time we attributed it to the simple fact that he was using a bit other than the Western style one he was accustomed to). As time went on, however, his problems failed to go away and only got worse, specially since he was being used in a schooling situation with riders who sometimes pulled on his mouth. The worst thing was that bit pain caused him to go faster, which would lead a rider to pull back on his mouth even harder. You can see the vicious cycle.

In an attempt to solve Augustus' mouth problems, he was switched from a standard snaffle to a Myler bit, which helped improve rider control and his comfort, though he still showed aversion to having his mouth touched, even with a hand. Despite the benefits of his new bit (which he still had to be coaxed to take by inserting a finger into the corner of his mouth), he would cross his jaws and move his mouth a lot in the crossties.

After being mounted he would inevitably walk off at a brisk pace before the rider was fully seated on his back. And, when anyone rode him, he would throw his head repeatedly and stop often to wipe his mouth on his foreleg. The frustration and annoyance for both horse and rider was so great that we were considering selling Augustus.

In a desperate attempt to solve the problem, we turned to the internet and searched for information on head-tossing and found the Bitless Bridle.

When the Bitless Bridle arrived in Canada after what seemed to be an eternity passing through customs, we tried it on Augustus the very next opportunity we had to ride. The leather was very supple, the bridle fit easily and Augustus seemed surprised during tacking up that there was no bit to fuss with. We led him outside to the mounting block and at first he

balked at the strange pressure on his face as Chris drew back the reins to mount, knocking over a bench. We stopped and walked him around from the ground, getting him used to the different pressures he would feel turning left and right and stopping.

Then Chris remounted, for the first time ever without incident, while Augustus snacked on some grass (another benefit of the Bitless Bridle). Riding was also a charm. Augustus did not get faster and faster on the trot except for a brief moment, perhaps out of habit, during which he was easily steadied with a gentle pull on the reins. Steering was much easier (the rubber grip reins were great) as horse and rider negotiated various obstacles in the riding paddock. Augustus' tail was held high for the entire ride and his ears were forward. He snorted happily four or five times.

The product worked almost instantaneously and we look forward to seeing what will happen during future uses. We'll keep you posted.

Incidentally, Candice rode her horse, JET, using the Bitless Bridle. He doesn't have any apparent bit problems, but he was easier to bring down to a halt and walk from the trot and did not stumble as he frequently did during previous outings. Candice has extremely soft hands and does not like pulling on horses' mouths, so the Bitless Bridle enables her to have more confident control without fear of causing pain. We will soon be ordering another Bitless Bridle for him as well! Thanks for a great breakthrough product and for truly caring for the well-being of horses.

Val and Bailey from Cape Cod, 9/18/03:

My 7-year-old Thoroughbred mare and I have been delighted with the Bitless Bridle! We've been using it for several months now and we'll never go back to using a bit...guaranteed! BAILEY'S movements are freer and she no longer tosses her head when we're riding. She also lowers her head for me to bridle her now. Before the Bitless Bridle, she would resist from having anything put on her sweet head, especially near the poll.

Thanks so very much for this miracle product!

John and Faye, 9/24/03:

We ordered one of your bridles and it really works. We use it on a twenty-year-old Arab/Standard-bred gelding and this is the first time in his life he goes with out shaking his head or getting all lathered-up. He is like a totally different horse. Thanks for a GREAT product !!!

Sabrina, 9/26/03:

I began using the Bitless Bridle on my 4 year-old quarterhorse just over two months ago. She had been "fighting" her bit - lowering her head to the ground, not wanting to be bridled, etc... I bought several different bitted bridles with no luck when I heard about the bitless from a friend. She immediately improved - no more bad habits and great control. I feel like I have a new horse that loves to go for long rides in the mountains. It didn't take her any time to get used to the new bridle. She stops and turns better than ever! Thank you!

Cari, 9/28/03:

Everyone is amazed that "BUDDY" (my Haflinger) is trained on a Bitless Bridle. He came to me neglected and abused and afraid to go left (a wolf tooth was still present on the left). Since I found out about your product early on in our relationship, he's gotten confidence and has shown us his personality. Once a skittish horse, whose original name was "Buck", is now one year later a well-behaved, sweet mannered pal who resembles more a "Charlie". One problem though, he's begun the bad habit of grazing while riding when on grass and I've considered going back to the bit for more control. What is your opinion on this?

Nola, 9/29/03:

I recently bought the Bitless Bridle for my 12 yr. old P.O.A. She is 3/4 the size of a horse. She has been fighting me for the whole six months I've had her to get the bit in. Thank you for the new Bitless Bridle. I rode her for the first time, for me anyway, on a trail ride. She did great, except for going down some rather long down hills. I live in Chiefland, Florida so it wasn't a mountain or anything! She just would not slow down. She put her ears down and just took off. I had all I could do to slow her down. Any suggestions about how I can control her on the down hills?

I have told everyone in our club about this bridle. They all seemed quite enthused. We have about 50 members. I really like the fact that my horse will nudge the bridle over her nose when I'm putting it on, instead of my having to wait for her to stop putting her head in the clouds...

Suzanne, 10/2/03:

I am Andrea and BARNEY'S instructor. I have really enjoyed riding in the Bitless Bridle. It is a truly amazing invention. I love the idea of nothing being in the horse's mouth and I am really impressed with how the horse carries himself. We did have it adjusted incorrectly for a few days causing some rubbing and resistance. Now we have it adjusted properly and the horse is back to his relaxed easy going self. Apparently someone else had borrowed the bridle and not adjusted it back to where we had had it and so on. Thank you ... and we will keep you posted on our progress.

[Ed: Subsequently, Suzanne wrote an article about the Bitless Bridle, see the reference below:

Case, Suzanne: "Bitless or Bust: A Dressage Rider's Journey." *Natural Horse Magazine*. Volume 6, Issue 2, February 2004]

Sarina, 10/13/03:

Well, what can I say that you haven't heard a million times already? Thank you for making such a wonderful product. I really was afraid to hope that it was really true, everything I had read on the site, and now I've seen for myself: It does exactly that which you claim. I am so happy! And I know my horse is too. He stops now, with no fussing, at the slightest touch. He used to fight terribly, and pull. Today he stood still when I mounted him. The stopping really amazed me. He really use to pull and fight and fidget. Hated to stand still. I knew it was the bit, and the trainers were saying to use something harsher! Yank on him and make him stop! Yikes, I can't believe these people. I sure wouldn't want somebody doing that to me. I knew there had to be something else out there, I'm so glad I found your bridle!

Anyway, today he stood perfectly still. With just the slightest pull, he stopped and stood, so relaxed and happy. No pulling, no fussing. Turning was very easy as well. And I probably rode him for no more than 10 mins in the bridle today, he picked it up that quickly. I know he's not in pain anymore, and it just makes me (and my horse!) very, very happy. That snaffle bridle he wore is gone. Brand new, too. He won't wear it again. I know that now he will look forward to going out riding and be even happier working. He relaxed as soon as he figured out I wasn't going to strap that hideous bit in his mouth! We really had a fun time today.

I do need to exchange this one he has though for a larger size. He's on the last hole and the chinstrap is a little more than 2" away from the corner of his mouth, probably 2 1/2". And I'd also like to get the Beta style bridle. I hear that's the easiest to keep.

By the way, my trainer wants to try it on her horses. And people were already looking at it when we were riding around today. Pretty soon they will start asking me where it's from, and I will definitely tell them about your site. I hope to see a lot more of these bridles on horses!!

I saw on your site that you had some returns for sale for lower prices. How much is a large sized nylon bridle? I want to get one extra so I don't have to keep loaning mine out. Please let me know how much for this and the large beta bridle in black, I'll give you my card number. When I get it, I will return the medium nylon I have.

Thank you very much.

Sandy, Sandspit, BC 10/14/03:

Subject: a good day it is!!!!

hi there folks. i just had to let you know how the Bitless Bridle works on my 9 year arab gelding. just got it last thursday and spent friday and sunday and monday on my pretty boy's back and found the ride to be the most pleasurable ever. i found him so much more attentive to my aids and the look on his face showed me he was enjoying the experience. BEN always played with the bit and seemed more agitated when we would ride. i would like to thank you folks for the Bitless Bridle and i must say i am pretty pleased with myself in believing it could happen. dr. cook is amazing!!!! thank you for letting me and my horse enjoy our time together that much more.

Susann, Sweden 10/16/03:

Thank You !!!!

A big Thank You for the extremely fast delivery for the "Bitless Bridle" I ordered 10/10/2003. 6 days for shipping it to Sweden - that was fast - I'm really impressed of your service AND I'm really impressed of the "Bitless Bridle" too. I will recommend you to everybody I know... Thank You again.

Retta, 10/23/03:

I received my first "beta" Bitless Bridle, and couldn't wait to try it. I have two horses, very different, in ages and training. The first sensation was of freedom, and control, both horses gaits were immediately improved, and they seemed more willing to move! They had

demonstrated some of the signs of bit discomfort, and I'd tried 12 different types, so this Bitless Bridle seemed like the perfect answer. I was concerned that it would take some time(for them) to get use to it, but they responded right away! I finally feel like I can begin a real riding relationship with my horses! Thanks!

Elizabeth, Russell Township, Ohio, 11/5/03:

I recently emailed you with a number of questions about the Bitless Bridle after finding it online. I told you I would order one as soon as I made a new saddle purchase first and could later then afford the Bridle. However, my horse started having some mouth problems while in his regular bridle with bit that were unrelated to the normal resistances I've experienced. As his teeth were coming due to be done by the dentist I scheduled a visit but the dentist was unable to come for two weeks. The horse was in obvious discomfort so I decided while waiting for the dentist to go ahead and order the Bitless Bridle to relieve the pain as soon as possible by removing the bit. I ordered the Bitless Bridle in Beta material and used it for the first time this evening.

In order to fully appreciate my horse's response you must know that he was due for his Adequan shot tonight which he receives every three weeks for severe right hock and mild left hock arthritis. By the time he needs the shot he is usually very stiff behind and has difficulty lifting his right leg when I pick his foot and drags his right leg slightly. The pain is enough to make him reluctant to work and after the injection is given it takes forty-eight hours for relief to be complete. I put on the Bitless Bridle and expected the usual reluctance beginning to ride him due to the hock pain and was wondering if this would overshadow the Bridle trial. In fact, I was quite surprised by several instantaneous responses.

Firstly, he seemed eager to move out and actually volunteered to begin trotting. Secondly, he completely stopped his teeth grinding, opening of the mouth and excessive salivation. As you may recall from my email he has done these things since I first bitted him when a colt and he is now twenty-two. Thirdly, this horse has always leaned on my hands and been off-balance on the forehand despite being schooled in dressage. He has been a horse that pulled continuously and constantly had to be checked in speed - my riding him has been a labor of love in that others would never have continued to work with him because the workouts are always so difficult. Over the years I have known he was uncomfortable and done everything humanly possible to change it but this thing with the bit was not overcomeable - until now!

For the first time my horse appeared relaxed, willing and happy in the bridle. Upon switching to the Bitless Bridle you say riders may experience a heaviness in the hand they are not used to - in my case due to Bebe's normal leaning the sensation was actually lighter in feeling in my hands. I could actually see him begin to understand he was free of the pain from the bit and stretch down loosening up as he normally would. I applied the same rein aids I usually use while schooling and at first he seemed slightly confused but quickly adapted to the cues even though they were no longer coming from bit pressure. I continued to do both posting and sitting trot but did not try the canter as I wanted to wait for the Adequan to set up in his system. While trotting I experienced a new feeling under me which I realized had to be his back rounding up from underneath and lifting me in the saddle!! How sad that after years with this horse fighting self-carriage I should now at this point in his life begin to feel it because of removing a bit.

When he was younger I tried riding him in the halter, a hackamore and a bosal but had to give up due to lack of adequate control. I could not give the proper rein aids and could not

get him back when he took off running. At no time did I feel a loss of control this evening, in fact, I believe the Bitless Bridle gives more security directing pressure from the poll and nose - a kinder pressure is applied thereby not promoting a battle in which the rider will always lose.

When I first entered the arena tonight my dressage instructor was there giving a lesson and I showed her the Bridle. She seemed doubtful about my using it. Unfortunately, she was not there long enough to see the result but I will be having a lesson this weekend and I look forward to her response after she sees how quiet Bebe is in his mouth without the bit.

Thank you so much for designing the Bitless Bridle relieving the horses we love of their pain. When I retire my aged horse and start another youngster I will do so in this Bridle so that we do not have to spend years in disharmony and discomfort together.

Elizabeth, 11/15/03:

Thank you for the kind comments about my email and to tell you the truth I didn't even realize the cute similarity between BEBE and BB! I did use the Bitless Bridle in a lesson with my dressage instructor who is also a judge.

She has accepted my use of the Bridle because she can observe no ill results and I have expressed my happiness with it but I can still tell she is skeptical in the concept of widespread use. However, she did comment that it would be good for young horses learning to adjust to the use of a bridle. I must say that it was very cold when I had the lesson and Bebe was extremely fresh (bucking no less) despite his arthritis to the extent I had trouble just keeping up with him - but at no time did I feel unsafe, in fact, I felt very free to be strong in my use of the reins knowing I could not hurt him in the mouth any longer. We actually rode out into the fields behind the stable after the lesson, which was my first trial outside in the Bitless Bridle and he continued to react very well - I know he appreciated the ease of grazing while I was mounted without the bit in the way!

I will also tell you that I had Bebe's teeth done finding he had some points on the left side of his mouth which was, indeed, the source of his discomfort prior to my Bridle purchase making me really glad I had not waited to get the Bridle as I first planned. I have yet to canter him in the Bridle due to having just spent the last seven days ill at home with respiratory infection. I returned to the boarding stable this week and I will be glad to fill out the questionnaire as soon as I have had more time under saddle with the Bridle.

Finally, you may find this funny but the best benefit to me personally apart from Bebe's comfort in using this Bridle is the blessed silence I have now while riding. For the first time in eighteen years I have quiet ≠ no grinding like chalk on a blackboard echoing all over the arena!!

Elizabeth, 12/7/2003:

I didn't want you to think I was neglecting to fulfill my promise to fill out the questionnaire you emailed me. However, I needed more time in the Bitless Bridle and I have been ill with respiratory infection since the beginning of November. I have a chronic sinus condition which seems to need surgical intervention at this point as several courses of antibiotics have not helped. I have been unable to ride at all for seven weeks only seeing my horse briefly between infections. I am on another antibiotic now. I know I mentioned I was disabled but who knew that orthopedic issues would be the least of my obstacles and that sinuses could keep me out of the saddle! This is my first winter in ten years working with my horse and I didn't know what to expect. I hope I can get this under control and start to recondition him in the next three weeks. I have yet to canter him with the BB which I look forward to.

I refuse to give up and hopefully sometime in February I will be able to answer the questionnaire. I hope you had a lovely Christmas and will have a wonderful New Year!

Elizabeth, 7/6/04:

I don't know if you remember our previous correspondence but you said I had "great pluck" for riding with disabilities. Well, I was ill all winter with respiratory disease, recovered then subluxated my previous knee joint injury in April, recovered AGAIN and began to ride my horse with the Bitless Bridle I purchased last Fall. I promised I would fill out your questionnaire and am eager to do so once I use it at the canter which I never got the opportunity to try before the illness.

I just moved yesterday to a private classical dressage training facility and will continue to recondition my aged gelding. I will then be able to eventually submit my questionnaire. I have not told my new resident instructor about the Bitless Bridle and will let it be a surprise in my first lesson a couple of weeks from now. I wonder if she will even notice at first since my horse still enjoys using it immensely! WE STILL HAVE QUIET when I ride - no more teeth grinding.

One thing I will definitely tell her is that using the Bitless Bridle has made me a better rider, in that I now must use my seat and legs predominantly to influence the horse's movement. There is simply nothing to "hang onto" up front as well as that I cannot use the pain of a bit to enforce a bend on his stiff side - my body must do it.

[Dr. Cook responds:

It was lovely to hear from you again. Of course I remember your 'pluckiness.' It seems that you have had to utilize this same strength many times over the winter but I am happy to hear that you are still in the saddle and that all is quiet on your horse's 'front.' Well done! I look forward to hearing how your new instructor views your tack. Good luck with the demonstration and may you soon enjoy the elation of a canter. Congratulations and best wishes. - Bob 7/8/04]

Elizabeth, 9/26/04:

I have finally begun to canter BEBE in the Bitless Bridle! I am at the new dressage training facility and have had several lessons with the new trainer, who did not seem at all concerned with the use of the BB. She did not object but she didn't have any real interest either, unfortunately.

I do not know why people are not more open to the use of the BB, especially when it works so well and they see me riding in it continuously. Perhaps it is because they all show and I do not and still there are those pesky rules about using bits in competition. The trainer at this facility has earned her USDF Bronze and Silver medals.

Your Bridle is such an outstanding product that I will never use anything else again on any horse I ride. When I have to permanently retire BEBE and purchase a younger horse I will use a BB even if the new horse does not have biting problems like BEBE has had.

I could not ride as I am, with my physical problems, without the BB because I can no longer always control the amount of pressure on the mouth because my balance isn't as stable as it used to be due to my injuries. In using the BB I can ride without worrying about hurting the horse's mouth. This has been proven true with beginning to canter BEBE. We are both relearning to balance ourselves and picking up the lead has been rough - he's kind of like a "jack-in-the-box" at times and I cannot hurt him if I fall apart and yank him unexpectedly.

I really want you to know that using the BB has made me a much better rider - I must use my seat and legs for the aids more than my hands - as I should. My seat and legs have become stronger and more accurate.

BEBE is now doing wonderful posting and sitting trot in basic dressage figures including serpentines. The BB has responded exactly as when I used a bit and I am able to achieve the proper head carriage without any difficulty. I was somewhat afraid beginning the canter as he is so strong about it but once I got going I had no fear as the BB felt very secure. For his part, BEBE is noticeably more willing to bend and carry himself in the figures. HE IS HAPPY. The facility is on a dirt road which I ride regularly for a change of pace. We have encountered motor traffic, nasty dogs (which actually came barking and nipping at our heels), bicycles and a farm next door with bulls - all with perfect safety in the BB!

Now that I have progressed to this point in working BEBE, I wanted to fill out your questionnaire but I lost it from your previous email some time ago. Could you please send another attachment so I can complete it?

Please don't ever stop making the Bitless Bridle!

[Dr. Cook responds:

Pluck, persistence and perseverance pays-off! Congratulations! I am as delighted with your success as you (and BEBE) have a right to be. Thank you for the cantering conclusion to your collection of e-mails. This makes a lovely story. I wonder if you would give me your permission to add the story to my Users' Comments at the next update? I have a mind to make a special division for feedback from courageous people like yourself who are riding bitless in spite of having various physical limitations.

Yes, it is disappointing that your new trainer does not recognize an opportunity for her further education. You can take a trainer to the 'water' but you can't make a trainer 'drink'

I am attaching another copy of the questionnaire. Thank you for your willingness to complete it.

I especially liked the last line of your e-mail! - Bob 9/27/04]

Olga, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 11/8/03:

I want to thank you for your product. I took over a horse that had a nasty habit of throwing his head around. He had been checked for teeth and jaw problems. On my very first ride on him he violently threw back his head and caught me above my left eye and split my head open, in spite of the fact that I was wearing a helmet. Consequently he was dangerous and could not be trusted at all. He absolutely hated flies and I made sure each time I rode him after the incident that he wore a fly mask and was sprayed with insect repellent. He still tossed his head and was very unnerving to ride. I came across your web site and thought that I would have nothing to lose and this horse would have everything to gain. I crossed my fingers and ordered a beta Bitless Bridle.

The very first day after I received the bridle I took him in the schooling ring and everyone was sure this horse would toss me on my rear end or worse. He was a little puzzled at first but quickly settled down and accepted the new bridle. I then used it consistently and his head throwing subsided and has now stopped entirely, even when the flies are bad, and here in South East Asia, they can be quite a problem. I have since ordered and received a leather bridle from you and am using it all the time. Had it not been for your bridle this horse would have finished up in a slaughterhouse.

However I have found that other people are very hesitant to try the bridle. They seem to think that there will be no "brakes" on their horses. I can only continue to use mine and show everyone what a change it has made in the life of one horse. I vow never to use a bit again on any horse. I am presently in the thinking process of taking on another horse and will also use your bridle on him.

Thanks once again Dr Cook, and keep getting the word out to all riders. I will keep talking up your product whenever the opportunity arises. Baytee baytak.

Kathryn, WI, 11/12/03:

First I would like to say Thank You for developing the Bitless Bridle. Perhaps you noticed a surge in sales of your bridle during the months of September and October this year (2003) in the Racine, Sturtevant, Franksville area of Wisconsin. This is because of the immediate positive results the use of the bridle has had among the people with whom my barn manager and I have shared it. This has turned out to be a very long letter, but I am so excited about the bridle and I have a lot to share with you.

My name is Kathryn Scheer. I live in the Racine area and have been involved with teaching riding and training horses for 30 years. I have concentrated on dressage for the last 18 years. In all modesty, I would say I have a good seat, good balance and soft hands on a horse's mouth. If you saw a tape of me riding you would say I really had no problems with my horses. I have scored in the upper 60's when I have recently shown in levels 1 and 2. I am bringing along three warmbloods whose ages are now 7,8, and 9. I started them all at age 2 or 3 years old.

Yet I have felt that true softness over the back, suppleness and willingness to go forward has always been missing from my rides. It would take me 40 minutes of "give to the bridle" exercises to get about 5-10 minutes of what I would call good, soft work from the horses. I really felt I was standing still in my training. Then one day in August this year (2003) my barn manager Patti Babe-Meershaert said sheepishly, "My Bitless Bridle came today." I said, "What? I've never heard of such a thing." Let me tell you a little about Patti. She rides strictly for pleasure, but seeks to find the best possible products for her horse to make his life more comfortable. She is also very talented at 'surfing the web'. Last year she introduced me to the Ansus treeless saddle. I have used it ever since on all my horses. So this year, unknown to me, she researched the options of a Bitless Bridle on the Internet and found your design to make the most sense.

So I took a look at the bridle on her horse and I was first impressed by the quality of the leather. The leather quality indicated to me that who ever developed this bridle was knowledgeable about the horse industry and really cared about producing a valuable product. Then I looked at the design of the reins as they are connected to the headstall and noseband. I knew instantly that this would work on any horse with great success. Why did I know this? You need to know a little history of one of my horses to understand why.

The largest of my three horses is a 16.3 hand Dutch warmblood gelding named NELSON. He is big-boned and is very sweet and loving, but if you ask him to do things your way he blows up. He is also very explosive and challenging around other horses. I say I earned a silver belt buckle on him because I was able to stay on the full 8 seconds of bucking \neq twice! Last year I finally sought help from a natural horsemanship instructor and she introduced me to a 45-foot lariat that I put over Nelson's head in a figure 8. It puts pressure on his poll and nose. The lariat tightens quickly and instantly releases pressure when the horse stops pulling. The

lariat has been the only thing that Nelson has respected. No bit or any amount of strong pressure on the bit produced an ounce of respect from him in the past. I had even thought, "I wish I could ride him in the lariat somehow" and then I saw your bridle! It works on the same principle.

I have ridden all three horses in your Bitless Bridle for only 2 months (Sept. & Oct.), but I tell you my horses are now soft, supple and forward from the first minute I get on their backs. During the fifth ride on Nelson with the bridle, I was almost in tears of joy because it was like heaven on horseback. He was so soft, willing and supple through his whole body.

A horse with the bit in his mouth spends all his time mouthing the bit or protecting his mouth from being pulled on by the bit. The horse locks his whole body in varying degrees of tension from poll to tail against the rider until the poor horse is too tired and gives up and that is what we trainers have called finally submitting to the bit. I readily admit that some horses are more tolerant of the bit than others and therefore don't show overt signs of tension, but it is there. With all the horse 'whisperers' out there, we need more horse 'listeners' that see what we have been putting our horses through.

I only rode in the bridle for a week before I was convinced of its merits and then showed up at my lesson with my instructor. He was rather defensive about it at first. He said he didn't realize I was having problems. Since that first lesson, he has worked with me as if I had a bit and is amazed at the consistent progress we are making, but he does not speak of the bridle at all.

I used the bridle for a month before I shared it with my students and a fellow instructor. I have always felt in a humorous way that women who ride dressage have masochistic tendencies because they keep trying and trying to get the horse to give to the bit, etc. They get off the horses exhausted and frustrated because they have only gotten glimpses of the glory of a soft back and mouth and floating gaits. But that split second glimpse of glory keeps them coming back to try again tomorrow. Now that my students have used the bridle, I see the women's faces beam with joy like a child's face lights up after its first ride. They feel success the whole time they are on the horse's back. They get off and say, "I can do this." After all these years of teaching, I now see that it is not the fault of the rider's hands that can't make a horse "accept the bit", but the fault of the rider's mind to not observe and listen to the horse trying to tell us "get this bit out of my mouth!" If people argue with this statement I say, "How good does a person's hands have to be when Olympic riders at Grand Prix still have trouble with the horses putting their tongues over the bit!"

I actually feel that if the bridle becomes widely accepted the whole quality of riding and the performance of the horses will increase tremendously. I have been able to relax more in my seat and legs because my hands, arms and back are not fighting the horse's resistance in the mouth. I have witnessed this in my students by the second or third ride in the bridle.

I will relate what I have observed on a consistent basis. It takes about four rides in the bridle for the horse to really feel comfortable in it. During my second ride on Nelson with it, he became quite angry. He was used to gaping open his mouth and using his neck and jaw to pull my hands forward with the bit especially in the halt. Therefore, he was the boss half the time. With the Bitless Bridle, he couldn't do that anymore and he was angry about it. I just quietly rode him through it. Also, if a horse has not been taught to lower his head from poll pressure, the bridle can be very confusing. I just go back to ground work to review lowering the head. Each horse relates differently to the bridle the first few times, but all have become happier horses and the owners are finally having fun.

So the next challenge is to combine "fun" with competitive riding. I have had more fun riding in the past two months than I have had in many years, but I also want to challenge myself with showing and not throw all my work away by not having my scores recorded. However, I realize the establishment changes slowly and I was drawn to horses in the first place by a fascination of the animal not by the thought, "If I ride a horse well, I can put a bunch of colorful ribbons on my walls". I have felt and seen the remarkable positive change in the horses and the riders in just the two months that I have used the bridle so I am convinced of its merits. Therefore, if I have been able to ride out my own bucking horse, I'll see what happens as I try to buck the established system of the dressage show world.

I spend the winters in Florida outside of West Palm Beach in the heart of the winter dressage community. It shall be an interesting winter. Wish me good-luck and if there is any thing I can do for your business just let me know. I thank you again for your dedication to the welfare of the horse.

Mary, 11/18/03:

The best thing I did was buy my horse - the next best thing was buying your bridle. I rode him in the paddock the first day to get used to it - him and I. No problems; just a little uneasiness on both our parts. Took him out on the trail today - second day - well there was not a problem. Had the same control as with the bit if not more. The best was - there was no bit in his mouth. I was not inflicting any pain on him - he followed me to the mounting block and we did not have a pulling match. Also he did not cough as he always did after a short canter. The only thing I do not like is the rubber reins - I think I got them because I was afraid that not having a bit I needed more traction on the reins. I will put my old reins on it. Let me tell you - thank you for this wonderfull bridle it is most appreciated by me and I think by my boy.

Kathy, 12/5/03:

I have several of your bridles for several horses. The biggest problem I am having is achieving collection with a horse that will collect nicely in a snaffle bit. By collecting nicely, I mean, will give and tuck without constant pressure on the rein. The horse is asked to collect and then remains soft.

With the Bitless Bridle to date, I am not having that success. Can you give some pointers on how to obtain collection through softness? Unfortunately, I can find no instructors in the area that even have had their students use the Bitless Bridle, let alone give any pointers.

However, one of my instructors did give in and recommend it to another student whose horse was not at all happy about having a bit in her mouth. She was amazed at the difference in behavior in that horse.

[Dr. Cook responds:

First, thank you for being a supporter of bitless riding. I have absolutely no doubt that you are on the right track and, regardless of whether you think you are achieving sufficient 'collection,' please keep going in this direction. I am sure that I don't have to tell you that true collection comes from behind and should have nothing to do with rein pressure. Sadly, false collection is something that can be achieved only too easily with the aid of a bit. True collection comes from months of steady training, with the development of abdominal muscles, hind-end impulsion, and proper athletic fitness.

The Bitless Bridle does in fact encourage you to rely more on your seat and legs than your hands, which is the way to go for true collection. The results may be slower to arrive but as the short-cut method of producing poll flexion through the pain of a bit is not what you are looking for, this is not a bad thing.

But I am a veterinarian and, though I have ridden a good deal in the past, I do not wish to fly under false colors as a guru on dressage. If you have not already discovered a treasure trove of good advice on this subject and many others, let me introduce you to someone who really can help. Dr. Jessica Jahiel is not a veterinarian but a certified instructor in dressage and combined training. She publishes a first-class, non-commercial newsletter, which offers free advice on all matters equine. Please go to her website at www.horse-sense.org and click on her wonderful archives. Now do a search on the word 'collection.'

I am attaching a questionnaire that may help. If you would like to complete it and send me a copy I might be able to offer some further thoughts. Also attached is an article on fitting. Are you sure that you have the noseband low and snug on all your horses? Having said above that you should not be using your hands to achieve flexion, nevertheless, a little painless leverage might assist! Let me know how you progress. - WRC]

Vivi, 12/16/03:

Back in late September/early October, I ordered a Bitless Bridle for my 21-yr-old retired police horse who was horrible with a bit. He threw his head (I had to add a martingale), he fought me and basically I was never comfortable riding him. I knew he wasn't comfortable, as he has TMJ from mildly neglected teeth.

Well, I tried the Bitless Bridle on him. When he first saw it I could read his mind "aw s#!t, another hellish ride fighting that bit." You should have seen the look on his face when I put the Bitless Bridle on him...first it was confusion, then it was glee (as if he thought, "she hasn't noticed the bit didn't go in my mouth"). I "drove" him around the paddock a few times, for about 20 minutes, and then took it off. That was one confused horse (couldn't figure out what happened to the bit).

A few days later, I tacked him up for a ride. Again, a look of "damned, here it comes" when he saw the bridle, but when I put it on him I swear that horse smiled... from ear to ear. We rode a short bit around my farm so he could get used to the new bridle & I could work out any quirks... there were none & he was happy as a clam. I continued to ride him every few days for short periods. He actually almost dives into his bridle.

Two weeks after getting the bridle, I took him on a trail ride with an unknown horse and to an unknown place. I kept my guard up in case of "trolls" under logs, but I've not had a problem ever since getting the Bitless Bridle. He doesn't throw his head anymore, I don't have to fight him (although I find he gets a bit exuberant now that he is no longer in pain), and I actually have MORE control over him than I ever did with a bitted bridle. This horse has gone from being a grumpy old man, depressed and miserable every time he saw his tack, to overjoyed and loving to go out on trail rides. I don't ever use a martingale anymore and often ride him bareback around our farm. Thank you for giving this old horse a new lease on life.

So, now I need to know, have you put together a Bitless Bridle for minis? Also, I have a yearling half draft that I'm beginning to work lightly and wondered if you had any inexpensive used equipment for him (he's still in a yearling halter, but just barely)? I can measure my minis and my half draft if you've started making bridles for these guys. I've got two harnesses for my minis, which include the harness bridles (with snaffle) & headstalls with blinders, so I would

need to replace the bridle/headstall with blinders. These are made out of nylon webbing... If you don't do the mini stuff, maybe you could offer a "fix" for my existing tack?! Thanks for everything.

Vivi:

Thank you for this wonderful bridle! I don't know if it came across in my story, but BUD, my 21 yr old, is a retired mounted police/park ranger horse. We obtained him as our farm is a foster care facility for a pot-belly pig rescue & we also do horse rescue work (on a very small scale). I've slowly been making changes to his tack, as well as his care (floating his teeth regularly, for one) and lifestyle and he's been slowly getting out of his grumpy attitude. Your bridle has been the single most significant change in his attitude- people who know this horse can't believe it's the same horse. And total strangers now come up to me and tell me what a great looking, even "cute" horse I have (no one ever noticed him before, they're blown away when I tell them he's 21 yrs old). He's now got the enthusiasm and love of life that I see in 2 yr olds! And we have tons of fun together.

I've got three other horses. Two 3 yr old Minis that I rescued last year and a yearling half draft (Belgian) that I rescued from a trip to the feedlot/meat factory. He was a PMU foal out of Alberta that was shipped to an auction in New Jersey with 80 other foals. He was one of 8 who didn't get bid on, and therefore was going to the OK feedlot to fatten up for the TX slaughterhouse. All three of these horses are starting their training, and I've got full harnesses with bitted bridles for the minis. After seeing what your bridle did for Bud, I don't even want to put a bit in any of my other horses, so I'm hoping you are going to get a mini bridle with blinders put together quickly... PLEASE!!! If you need, I can give you the email address & website of the man who custom made our mini tack- he's in Alabama & his prices are very good. Maybe you could work out something with him (I'm assuming one of the hold ups on the mini tack is cost effectiveness). Otherwise, if you need a test market on mini bridles for horses that have NEVER had bits in their mouths, please consider us.

I'm going to measure my half draft and see if you have some used equipment for him as he's still growing (larger and larger and larger...) and we're only doing very light ground work with him. We will be training him to drive as well as ride for pleasure. I can foresee my twins (one boy, one girl, aged 4) eventually using him in 4-H club horse events. My daughter has already been on his back (she's about 40 pounds) and he is just as gentle as they come...

Sharyn, 12/17/03:

I have a BB and my horse is "collecting" nicely in it, despite all the skeptical comments about lack of contact etc. Sometimes I think horsy people are very conservative. I am a beginner rider in my 50's so have come into horse riding with a less fixed view of things. Thank you.

Bitless Bridle User Comments, 2002

Gail Bauer, Egan, MN, 1/11/02:

I cannot begin to tell you how pleased I am with your product and with the care and attention I received from the staff member that assisted me with my order. First of all: I was at my wit's end to find a "gentle bit" for my 3 year old gelding. I have only had him for about 6 weeks, but in this time the only problem he and I were having with each other was at bridle time. I could tell that somewhere in his earlier training someone had traumatized him with a bit. When it came time to put a bit in his mouth, he would raise his head, and even though I am 5' 8", I could not begin to get the bit in his mouth easily. And he would not "accept" it. He is young and really seems to want to do as I ask but the bit was something that really seemed to hurt him. I have tried all "gentle bits" to no avail. I even went out and bought a hackamore and tried it. Well that was WAY too severe for this young gelding.

I was in tears and came home to call a trainer friend that I know for any hints or advice that she could give me. Unfortunately (or fortunately) as this turned out, she was not home so I turned to the Internet. I FOUND YOUR SITE! When reading about your bitless bridle, I suddenly felt like a light bulb went on in my brain! (This is the product for my gelding and me!) I was somewhat hesitant about spending even more money on tack but thought that your product might possibly be the last type of bridle that I will ever need. It echoes all of my philosophies of "training, not breaking."

I called and placed an order 1-9-02 after talking with one of your knowledgeable staff members. I paid extra for over night delivery hoping to have the product in my hands to try it for the weekend of 1-12. I could not believe my good fortune when the UPS driver was at my door at 9:00 am 1-10-02!! I could now go to the stable and see if this product was really everything that I was hoping for! Upon opening the box, I could not believe how well made the product appeared. Even though it was not "real leather", from a distance, it sure looked like it! It really looked like a quality product!

But the "proof would be in the pudding" so to speak. I went out to the stable right away and put it on BLAZN. (After reading all of the instructions!) I could not believe what a difference it was. . . in the very first wearing!! There was no confrontation, no hassle at all getting it on him. We rode in the arena at first and he was as settled as he has ever been for me. Granted, he and I are still getting to know each other, but what a difference your product has been IN THE VERY FIRST SESSION!! I can't wait to get out to the stable again this weekend! I had started to dread going out there because I knew that BLAZN and I would have to butt heads over the bridle. Anyway, again I thank you. I am a very happy customer and know that this is the ONLY type of bridle that I will ever be purchasing from here on out! I'm sure that a leather bridle will be my next purchase from you, but for right now, I couldn't be happier than I am with the product I have now!! A very Happy Customer and Believer in your product!!

Frieda, MN 1/12/02:

I've been using the bitless bridle for about two months and am quite happy with it. I did not try the bridle because my horse was a 'problem child' in any sense--he is easy to ride in a plain snaffle bit. His problems were primarily lack of flexibility from poor training (and years of being ridden by a 'cowboy' before I bought him) and heaviness on the forehand, accentuated by his muscular, quarterhorse build. When I started using the bitless bridle it was an easy transition for him and I was pleased to notice an almost immediate improvement in lightness and balance.

Anne, Lewis Center, OH, 1/24/02:

You have given me new hope and my mare a new life. For years now we have struggled with stagnant progress and increasing resistance. My otherwise sweet mare recently began to "haul" on the reins so monstrously that I was resigned to giving up dressage or shopping for a new horse. This heaviness was attributed to many things; several "trainers" that advocate lots of hand, her conformation being incorrect for the sport, the presence of melanomas behind her jaw and in her salivary glands, or just a hatred for my chosen sport! Even the kindest correct approach from my new trainer, while it encouraged my horse to try, eventually eroded into resistance and evasion.

So, naturally, we looked to a physical reason and assumed it was discomfort from the melanomas. What I couldn't stop thinking about was how nicely she would go on the trails with a loose rein, or in the side reins when she had more say in the amount of contact. There was none of the refusal to bend behind the jaw or lift the back that she displayed when asked to "collect" and go "on the bit". I announced to friends that dressage was over for us, and that we would now just enjoy trails and "bee bop" rides until the right horse came along for me. Friends who had seen the fights I'd been through were relieved, I'm sure, to hear that I was going to try reins and a halter and give up.

Then I heard about your website. Almost as a halfhearted last attempt, I ordered your leather bitless bridle. The testimonials on the site were all too good to be true, and surely full of exaggeration. Besides, I had already tried the halter and she had acted confused and unsure of herself.

After the first ride with your bridle I was almost holding my breath, afraid to think that it had actually worked. The most I had hoped for was a pleasant ride, with no fighting, but no real self-carriage either. I was amazed that she offered some nice round moments, and an altogether relaxed and happy ride. I was also surprised that there was any finesse possible in my communication with this bridle, let alone a feeling for both of us that there must be a bit involved there somewhere! SITKA, my mare, still opens her mouth to let the "bit" fall out when I remove the bridle! Anyway, with one ride under my belt, I still kept my mouth shut, convinced that the next ride would turn to the inevitable disappointment.

Two, three, and now four really wonderful rides later, I am now ready to sing. In my last session, this sweet mare was offering to try anything. We worked on things we hadn't been able to touch in years. . . shoulder-in, half-pass, half-turns, lengthenings and we were having fun! My husband asks me how I know, when I say she seemed proud of herself, but you riders out there know exactly what I mean. I know when my girl is happy and when she is miserable. It's as if she was shouting to me that she knew she could do it all along, if given a chance.

Now I don't hold out hopes of taking this grade mare to lofty heights in dressage, but the sweet elevated trot and that ever so soft and responsive contact I had yesterday was surely the pinnacle of joy for any level rider.

I want to cry when I think how long she suffered through the pain of that bit, then forgave and tried, and forgave and tried, and forgave and tried again. She has always been a cuddly horse in the stall, and it's heaven to be able to love her back in a way she most deserves.

Another thought . . . when I think about our early success in dressage (we were fifth nationally at adult amateur training level many years ago), it was easy to have believed that if I could just get the right combination I could get it back. She did it with a bit then. . . so why not now?? Your articles that show the growth of bone spurs over time in the sensitive mouth make a lot of sense to me. It's incredibly sad to me that USDF doesn't allow for bitless showing. Not to mention that they require double bits and spurs in the upper levels. Doesn't it seem to you

that the upper levels should be where less artificial aids should be displayed? Perhaps if I continue in dressage with this horse or the next, I can help to advocate the bitless bridle and the amazing way it is teaching me to communicate with weight and seat alone.

My sweet-hearted mare thanks you. "

[Dr. Cook's response:

What a beautiful story! By the time I had finished reading it I was close to tears myself but very, very happy. Thank you for taking the trouble to let me share in your delight. I am quite as pleased as you are.

Reports such as yours are so rewarding. They confirm me in my belief that I am doing more for the horse now in my so-called retirement than I was able to do during the whole of my full-time career as a clinical researcher at veterinary schools. Not that I am dismissing the work that I did complete, because if I had not done it I would not have been able to assess the absolute rightness of this last step.

I hope you will continue to keep in touch and let me know how the story develops. Anything you can do to persuade the FEI into openly accepting this bridle for competition would be most helpful. In fact, the bridle is already compatible with their current regulations and all (!) we have to do is to explain this to them! It should be possible and should not have to take another hundred years!]

Janet, Culpeper, VA, 2/1/02:

Subject: wind noise

I just ordered a bridle. I ride small Lusitano horses that have thick tongues and low palates. Biting them has been a frustration to say the least. One of them makes an odd noise when she flexes at the poll that sounds like a FLAP in her throat, almost like the subtlest sound of cribbing. You can imagine this mare's very resistant to flexing. Does this sound like anything you recognize? Also can you get the precise communication needed for classical dressage with your bridle?"

[Dr. Cook responds:

Yes, the noise you describe is familiar to me and is probably caused by elevation of the soft palate. Take a look at the website and click on 'Articles'. Then select the first title, "Bit-Induced Asphyxia." You will find this relevant to your problem.

Precise communication is possible with the Bitless Bridle and good dressage performances can be obtained. Unfortunately, at the present moment, the FEI regulations are being interpreted as meaning that a bit is required for competition work. However, the regulations do not actually say this in so many words and the FEI objectives are such that they would surely have difficulty in defending any disqualification on the grounds that a bit is not being worn. If you do not feel like fighting the regulations, you can still place a minimal snaffle bridle over the Bitless Bridle. Whether you attach a rein to the snaffle bridle is up you. There would be a bit in the horse's mouth but no regulation can insist that you actually use it!

I very much hope that you will keep in touch and let me know the outcome of the first trials.

Robert Cook, 2/1/02]

Janet, Culpeper VA, 3/2/02:

I had asked what you thought might be the problem with a Lusitano mare that I ride that resists flexing at the poll and makes a soft noise that sounds like the cribbing noise or a flap in the throat. This horse has a very small mouth and low palate and hates all bits. The best bit I

have found is the Robert Pinchles with the French link that swivels 360°. By turning the French link horizontal they get more tongue relief.

This mare is much happier in the bitless bridle and does flex some when she stretches down with her head and obtains good balance and throughness in the back. I am finding that the fine-tuned communication needed for dressage is happening with your bridle. After all if Nuno Olivera could do demonstrations with a string in a horse's mouth, communication must really be more about seat, weight and body position. Thank you for the bridle

P. S: I am a believer in the Strasser methods. It is good to see a vet supporting her beliefs. "

Janet, 3/15/02:

Also the noise has disappeared.

Janice, Saffron Walden, UK 2/04/02:

Subject: 17 year-old, forward-going, Thoroughbred mare, HOPPY. Ultrasensitive: Probably raced. Probably had a foal or foals. Lovely kind eyes, but misunderstood, thus bites and kicks when girthed or rugged. Used in riding school, but very unpopular as so tense. Starts panicking at the sight of a bridle - lowers head and very unhappy in her mouth. The whole time when riding opens her mouth and looks tense, especially in her head and neck. Knocked someone out by raising her head. When a man rode her, he tried to 'pull her up' at a gallop, as she had bolted, so she dumped him and he ended up in hospital.

I tried almost every bit known to man! I ride more Western style than English 'on the bit' style, so it wasn't really my hands that she didn't like. Whilst searching on the website for instructions to fit an English hackamore found your bridle.

After I had changed yards and HOPPY was settled and much calmer, & on a day when I was feeling brave, I ventured out hacking for the first time without a bit, encouraged by my friend, along grassy tracks with this uneasy feeling I was riding an ex-racehorse in a headcollar. I e-mailed you then to tell you how excited I was. Though it has taken a few more times for us both to get used to the bridle, HOPPY no longer sticks her head up in the air like a giraffe. She really does smile as she strides daintily along now and we are much more 'one' now as she is happy. Her head carriage is so low it's amazing. It took me a year to venture out in the bridle.

Janice, 2/27/02:

Just thought you would like to know that things are going really well with HOPPY and no bit - have today ordered a black leather version of the headstall. I have not ordered reins or martingale as I already have these and they will I hope match. She is so different now and much more 'controllable' as it's not like riding a giraffe!"

Janice, 3/1/02 :

I can't wait to receive the leather bridle - HOPPY gets better and better, just come home from a ride in the high wind and rain and she was perfect, head down, no jogging and she smiled all the time and is so relaxed sorry you must be so bored with my enthusing about the bridle!! I am going to lend the nylon one to my friend to try when the leather one arrives.

Barb, Springwater Farm, Spring Valley, Ohio, 2/4/02:

Thank you for that wonderful bridle!!! I just wanted to tell you how excited I am about your bridle. I am a trainer in Ohio and work with many breeds and riding disciplines. Most of the horses that come to me have been abused or mistreated in some way and have obstacles to overcome. Naturally one of the most common problems is the bit.

I do all my training with positive reinforcement and natural horsemanship methods. I love each training session and most importantly the horses do too. I've always used only the mildest bits and have brought back many "hard mouthed" horses. BUT no matter how positive the training is or how well a horse accepts the bit, a part of my heart aches whenever I have to put any type of bit in their mouth.

One of my clients saw your website and researched it as she does everything. She purchased the bridle and brought it to me to test for one week. I used it first on a very well schooled lesson horse. Perfect. I next tried it on a 2 year-old Friesian that I am gentling. I drove her with it in the long lines. Perfect. I then went to two 3 year-old horses that I am working under saddle. Perfect. In the past week, I have tried it on nervous horses, high headed horses, calm horses, excited horses; two Saddlebreds, three quarterhorses, three Arabs, one Paint, one Friesian & one Tn. Walker. I couldn't be happier.

I actually feel good when I bridle the horse and I can see the same expression with them. I find that the horses stopped better and their turning was just as good if not better also. I adjusted the bridle for my client who made the initial purchase and have received two messages from her that she is on a "bitless bridle high". She rode her "Walker on the trails and had better response and control than ever!!!

I have recommended this bridle to approximately ten people in just 7 days and have purchased and received my own bridle. I know I will order more in the future for my own barn. When I believe in something that is wonderful for the horse, I really sell it to my clients.

This is truly a wonderful breakthrough for the horses and I thank you for just that. I'd LOVE to see this get into the show ring. I might even try it out this summer. . . and if I get disqualified. . . so what? I will have made more of an issue for the general horse population to see!!!! (I know that you can use a 'dummy' bit . . . but that loses the most wonderful aspect of the bridle).

Michele, Mt Holly, NJ 2/10/02:

I have used the bridle with great success. I start dressage, hunter and Western show prospects. I have found this bridle to be an excellent training tool. For example, on a young horse that may shy and skitter, I don't worry about accidentally "snatching" on its mouth. The transition from bitless to snaffle is effortless as the mechanics of the pull is so similar. All of my lessons for beginning students are conducted in the bitless bridle. My horses thank me for this.

Corinne, 3/7/02:

I am a very happy user of your bitless bridle. My horse & I do dressage and would like to go to a few shows this year. My question is which bit to "hang" in her mouth for shows. Do you have any suggestions as to which bit may interfere the least? She has a soft palate displacement and so I have been considering the KK Ultra, which supposedly is designed to not interfere with the palate itself. They are very expensive (the one I've looked at is almost \$140. 00) and so I want to make the most informed purchase I can.

By the way, thanks to you and your bridle. My beloved horse is now happy to work as hard as she can. Before the bitless bridle, she resisted the canter work because I really think that she couldn't breathe properly in a regular bit. Now she's happy and willing and when I feel her rib cage expand between my legs, I know that she is getting all the air she needs and wants.

[Dr. Cook's comment:

As I explained in an article published earlier this year and now posted on www.bitlessbridle.com ('Bit-Induced Asphyxia in the Horse: Elevation and Dorsal Displacement of the Soft Palate', Journal of Equine Veterinary Science, January, 2002, pp 8-14) it is my firm belief that it is the bit (any bit) that causes dorsal displacement of the soft palate (DDSP). As this is the case, the answer to the above question is to say that there is no bit that I would recommend.

But until such time as the FEI regulations are changed to recognize this fact, I suggest placing a bitted bridle over the top of the Bitless Bridle. The actual bit to be used will, once again, be dictated by the regulations of the actual competition entered. Hopefully, a snaffle bit will be acceptable, in which case I would select the smallest, lightest and least offensive bridoon. Ideally, no rein should be attached to the snaffle ring, though if the judges insist on such a requirement (the regulations do not in fact, stipulate that reins have to be attached, though this is probably assumed!) the reins do not have to be used.]

Linda, Brookline, NH, 3/11/02:

For two plus years I have owned my Arabian horse and lived with head shaking, biting the bit and general crankiness.

We used your bridle on Saturday. He acclimated to it immediately (not that this would be any new news to you) and the improvement was drastic for the better. I am so glad we found your bridle. Thanks to you, this is the first time I actually was able to feel his head submitting to my hands. No more head tossing, a true delight to ride. Now I need to adjust myself to having the feel of his head there!

Linda 3/12/02:

I think that I am pretty "in tune" with my horse. I felt him relax, submit and actually enjoy our ride. I cannot tell you how much of a difference this makes. If I have to use a bit for showing this year I may just skip it :-)

Linda 4/12/02:

Thank you so much for letting me try the driving Bitless Bridle.

I used it first with Jeff Morse of Greenmeads Farm. He is a very well respected and widely known carriage-driving trainer in New England. He was very skeptical about it. (Remember we discussed how this area of the horse world is slow to change thinking?) Because my Arabian is "green" we simply long-lined him with it. I would have hitched the Arabian and driven with it, but there are other fitting issues with his current buggy that interfered with that.

Jeff and I were totally impressed as we got the same results if not better with the bitless driving bridle! I recommend down the line that you consider sending a prototype to Jeff. He has a barn full of all kinds of horses in training and could really be the person who has the clout and know-how to give it a great trial!

I used the bitless driving bridle at home on a larger horse that can only be driven in an open bridle. This more seasoned horse has driven his entire life in the bit. WOW! Huge difference in his stride, HUGE difference in his expression (I swear he was grinning) and HUGE difference in how he felt in my hands! The weight in my hands that I experienced riding in the bitless is even MORE pronounced driving with it. . .

Thank you very much again for letting me be a pioneer for you. My horses are thanking you too.

Liz, Lincoln, MA, 3/11/02:

I tried your bitless bridle on my 10 year old Trakehner gelding last week and am optimistic that it is going to help me overcome the "mouthiness" that has plagued him since I bought him.

My horse has always been tense on the flat and unwilling to flex through the poll and relax through his back. His tension manifests itself in his mouth -- he is always trying to spit the bit out. After having several equine dentists look at his teeth and trying every bit on the market to find one that might make him more comfortable (he has a low palette and a thick tongue), I had pretty much given up ever having a horse that was truly submissive. While we have made much progress, he has a very hard time focusing on anything but his mouth.

I found your bitless bridle by chance on the Internet and thought that if it made him more comfortable, it was worth trying it. So far, I've been very pleased. It has made him much more honest in his contact and much more forward. I rode with my dressage trainer last week, who is a classical purist and not one for "gadgets," and she was quite impressed. She thinks that it may help him find the relaxation and gain the confidence that he needs. She even asked me where I bought it as she could think of other students who might benefit from trying one.

Interestingly, while most people say that their horse has gotten lighter, my horse has gotten much more solidly into the contact. After spending the last few years driving him into my hand, I find it very refreshing to have him leaning into me a little! I volunteer at a therapeutic riding program and I am going to bring my bridle over there this afternoon. I think they will be impressed too. By the way, I also took my horse out and hand galloped him in the bridle in a big open field. Although he was strong, I did not feel at any risk of going out of control.

Cathy, Colton, CA, 3/15/02:

I've waited a while to write you about the success I've had with the Bitless Bridle because I wanted to be sure it really worked.

WOW! It does. When I read the claims I thought, "This sounds too good to be true. How could it solve so many problems?" I have a 11 year old Arabian that at times can be quite a hand full, especially in a group. The response I get is much quicker and with less of a battle. He has become much quieter and more relaxed. He has tested it a couple of times with a shake of his head and I just put alternating pressure on the reins and he stops quickly.

When I rode him in a group I was amazed at the control I had over him. I usually have to leave the group because he gets so excited but was able to stay on the whole ride. I could see others watching me to see how I did with him cause they knew I was riding in something new and it was only his third time in the bridle. (I did carry a bit in my saddlebags but never needed it.)

It's hard to get over that early training that you have to have a bit to control your horse but that thinking quickly passes as you see the results. The only problem I am having is that the rings on the sides of the jaw are rubbing the hair off and now I'm afraid I may have to stop using it for a while. Funny, a few weeks ago I was nervous using it. Now I can't imagine using anything else. Thank you for making riding fun again. "

Cathy, 3/16/02:

I'm pretty sure that the hair rubbing is from having to use a bit more pressure at this time. Like I said, my horse is a handful but I anticipate a much better response in the future.

Judy Gustafson, MD, Chimney Hill Equestrian Center, Salem, VA, 3/19/02:

Last weekend I hosted the Learner Judges Dressage program at my facility in Salem, VA. This program prepares participants to become dressage judges and was taught by Marilyn Heath, a very prominent "S" judge. We were short on demonstration horses for second level and so I rode my Dutch WB/TB mare who has been having problems with sticking out her tongue and not moving forward off the leg. I agreed to do a demo ride on her for the participants but, explained to the judge that I would be riding in the bitless bridle for only the fourth time) and asked for her indulgence.

The participants were all very impressed with how relaxed the horse was and how lovely she moved forward! Although the bridle is absolutely not allowed in dressage tests, I pointed out that this bridle was perfect for school horses to protect their mouths from insensitive or inexperienced hands. Since most of the participants are trainers themselves they were all very interested.

For myself, I currently have little interest in showing but instead a huge passion for training and seeing the resultant happy and relaxed horses. The ride on my mare in front of the judge and participants was the best I have ever experienced with her. I would like to thank you and I hope that this experience will enlighten some of the dressage community.

Judy 3/21/02:

I have enclosed some photo's from the judge's program that I hosted at my facility two weekends ago. This was my 4th time using the bitless bridle and it was interesting to find how easily I could position the head to encourage the horse to stretch down or to correct and raise the poll. The pressure on the reins is barely in ounces whereas before I felt as though I was holding pounds in my hands. The horse has completely stopped grinding her teeth and sticking her tongue out of her mouth. I quit needing my spurs altogether. I am now able to concentrate on my position as a rider and just allow my horse to carry herself.

I have now started using the bridle on the rest of my horses, beginning with the horses that I plan to use as school horses the Connemara pony and the 1st level draft/cross. I have also started using this bridle on the FEI horse recently imported from Germany. He was affordable due to his "ruined" walk very lateral. With becoming barefoot (along with the rest of our horses) and using no bit, his walk has become 4-beat, and he is calming down. So much is changing I cannot wait to see what happens next!

Judy 3/25/02:

I think it would be a great idea to advertise in the dressage magazines. You are welcome to use my comments and name. I would certainly emphasize the use of instructors using this

bridle on the school horses. Right now I feel that horses would benefit the very most with this bridle for lessons and daily work.

By the way, I just got off my horse after spending a lovely afternoon on an extended trail ride with the bitless bridle. I plan to use the bridle for foxhunting this fall. Good luck.

Judy 4/2/02:

I wanted to let you know that we had a riding clinic this weekend with a dressage instructor in which we rode in the bitless bridle. She was very impressed with the bridle and I got her to write down her thoughts regarding the bridle:

"As a dressage instructor and horse trainer, I have encountered many horses with tongue problems and neck tension problems. The bitless bridle works well to achieve all aspects of neck control desired of dressage horses. The rider can achieve flexion, bend, relaxation and self-carriage in all gaits. The lack of a bit requires the rider to use seat and leg aids effectively to balance and control their horse, and is this not our goal as riders?" - Catherine Sutton USDF Certified Instructor

She is interested in getting a bridle for herself now and also felt that if this were advertised in the dressage magazines, you would have no problem selling this to dressage riders.

The photo attached is my Connemara pony that was completely lame 2 months ago with navicular disease. He has since gone barefoot and is now just coming back sound and going very nicely as shown by a friend of mine, Terry Poff, who is having a dressage lesson on him with the bitless bridle.

Myself, Terry, and my daughter, Anna plan to enter the Celebrity Freestyle in Keswick, VA on June 15 in the mini-musical freestyle class in which the bitless bridle can be used. I will send the information to you along with a sponsorship form in case you would like to advertise at this show. "

Judy 4/14/02:

I couldn't wait to tell you how well things went this weekend with the Dressage judging program. We rode three of my horses in this session, all bitless. The senior judge, Tom Poulin, flew in from Chicago and was very open. The other judge, Jean Humphries flew up from Florida and was at the last session in March. She is much more rule oriented but since the senior judge allowed the bridle, she couldn't say anything. However, she did come to me afterwards and told me how much better the horses were doing since she was here just one month ago!

Also, A German dressage trainer and I had a very interesting conversation. She said she understood why I used the bridle with ARIANA who was the horse with the tongue problem but she wanted to know why I was now using the bridle on ALL the horses that were shown this weekend. I explained that if the bridle did so well for an obvious problem horse, it should do even better for the rest! She was very supportive and encouraged me to continue with what appeared to be great progress.

I really feel that the trainer and judges (especially those at the very top like Tom Poulin) are ready to hear about your bridle. Good Luck. "

[Dr. Cook's response:

CONGRATULATIONS and many, many thanks for all this good work. You are obviously making quite an impression with people of importance. This is wonderful. If there is anything that you think I might usefully do by way of follow-up, please let me know. The best strategy at this stage may be

masterly inactivity on my part, rather than to do something that looks like 'hustling'. Perhaps we can allow the passage of time to let the message sink in further before I start sending anyone proselytizing literature. But let me know if you think that I should do something.]

Judy 6/28/02:

I just wanted to send you a quick note to let you know how much we appreciate the bridles. Although I have three of the bitless bridles, I had to order another one to allow for my lending one out to riders who want to try it! The beta is wonderful for the everyday training. Also, my instructor is quite impressed with the bridle. She also happens to be on the state board for dressage in Virginia (VADA). Apparently at the last meeting there was heated discussion about "Judy Gustafson not only riding in the L-program bitless, but now she has pulled the shoes on all of her horses!" It appears to be a sacrilege to be such a rebel in dressage with imported German dressage horses. But the horses are going incredibly nice (which she pointed out) and who can argue with success? Am I famous or just infamous now?

Sarah, Bayfield, CO, 3/30/02:

I recently purchased a bitless bridle for my 17 year old Paso Fino, who I've only had for four months. I was using a mechanical hackamore on him, and wanted something more humane that would give me more options for communicating with my horse. The Bitless Bridle gave us both :) I will be ordering another bridle soon for my husband's horse. Thanks for such a great product :)

Catherine, USDF Certified Instructor, 4/2/02:

As a dressage instructor and horse trainer, I have encountered many horses with tongue problems and neck tension problems. The bitless bridle works well to achieve all aspects of neck control desired of dressage horses. The rider can achieve flexion, bend, relaxation and self-carriage in all gaits. The lack of a bit requires the rider to use seat and leg aids effectively to balance and control their horse, and is this not our goal as riders?

Nancy, Middleboro, MA, 4/13/02:

It's been way too long since I have dropped you a note to say hello. I have been enjoying my horses and showing off BUDDY'S new brain. I must say the red, white and blue bridle gets some attention . . . good attention too. Plus the added feature is no one can believe I am riding the same horse! There are just some folks that won't let go of that bit though'. I keep trying to convert them. I plan on doing more organized trail rides this year.

I trust that business is going well? I must tell you - I used my leather bridle that I got from you years ago that has the solid poll piece and I didn't have close to the control I have with the split poll piece. I had a good ride but I had to use much more pressure and pull then I do with the split poll pieces. I am thinking of selling the two bridles I have like that and getting a new one. Did you ever design one with a throatlatch strap for the trail riders?"

Nancy, Middleboro, MA. 6/20/02:

I have taken my live wire to a few trail rides this year. He has done marvelous and I owe it all to your bridle. "

Nancy, 9/3/02:

I was thinking yesterday as I was out riding . . . when you tighten up the noseband buckle under the jaw you must be very aware not to pinch any skin into that buckle as you tighten it. You might consider extending a piece of leather, biothane, or material on the underside of that buckle next to the horse's jaw and then the buckle would not be laying against the jaw bone? Does that make sense? Just thought I might offer that suggestion, if I might be so bold.

Thanks again for the wonderful bridle - love it love it love it. I took my kooky horse riding this weekend with friends - had a wonderful time. "

[Dr. Cook responds:

Thank you . . . keep thinking. I have passed on your idea to my colleagues and we will give the suggestion some further mulling. The buckle on the nylon bridle used to be particularly sharp and offensive but we changed the buckle to avoid this possible source of pain. I had never thought that anyone could actually trap a fold of skin in the buckle but obviously this is possible in your experience, which I respect.

Another idea that has been simmering in my mind is the possible advantage of cinching up the chinstrap so that it actually touches the jaw, though not in any way compressing the bone. Perhaps you would like to give this idea a trial and let me know what you think? I believe it might be especially useful for dressage riders and others who need an instant response from the aids. It will eliminate a delayed response.

Yes, the throat latch idea, suggested by Carole, can be applied to any existing bridle. Until such time that we have got our suppliers to produce a strap of suitable length and width, you could get any Amish saddler to cut a strap for you.]

Nancy, 9/3/02:

Funny you should think about that . . . is this a case where great minds think alike? Sorry . . . mine's not too great at times.

I started snugging the noseband up tighter on Buddy since he can be a handful at times. I have been riding like that for the past year and he IS much more responsive. There is no delay but at the same time one must not hang on the horse's face. I can barely put a finger in between the buckle of the noseband and the jawbone. The buckle wants to lay on the jawbone and that is why I suggested something underneath the buckle. I do have to pay attention not to catch a flap of skin in the buckle and a good English bridle has a tongue under the buckle next to the skin, so i thought why not this bridle too?

When you tighten up the noseband, eating does become a problem. My horse has more or less stopped the grabbing at leaves and branches as we ride, but if a horse should get a mouthful you would have to loosen the strap or pull it from his mouth, since they cannot chew.

I haven't seen any problems by doing this. One day I did get the noseband too tight and the horse spent the first 1/2 hour of the ride throwing his head and acting nervous. And of course it took me another 1/2 hour to figure out what the problem was. Humans can be so DUMB at times. But when I backed off the noseband one hole - he was perfect. Lessons to be learned every time I ride!

So to answer your question - yes it does work, my horse is quicker to respond. But there is a fine line between what is acceptably tight to the horse and what is compressing the nose . . . just ask the horse.

Jodi, Tower City, PA. 4/22/02:

Subject: Fantastic product!

I just wanted to let you know what a wonderful product you have, and my 6 yr-old TWH thanks you also! I have just returned from a weekend trail ride, where a friend has recently purchased one and let me try it out. I was previously using a Wonder bit and some of (what I took to be personality quirks of my horse) I didn't realize were problems until he didn't have a bit in his mouth.

1. No more agitation or nervousness
2. No more trail tree eating
3. No more shaking heads
4. No more pulling on the bit and therefore pulling my arms
5. No more shank grabbing and pulling
6. No more putting ears back at other strange horses riding beside.

These were all things I "thought" were his "personality. " Wow! I also saw improved gaits better stopping and neck reining. He was always reluctant and fighting when asked to be "pulled" to the left, and now he just does it. He was so relaxed and comfortable I couldn't believe. I kept asking a friend if he was sick or just tired!!

My friend gave me your information when I returned from a 6 hr. ride using your product and I have just ordered one for myself.

Thanks again.

Jodi, Tower City, PA, 4/24/02:

I received my Bitless Bridle yesterday already and I am very anxious to continue using it to see what else will be corrected. When I first got FRISCO he was a green broke 2 yr old and had some rearing problems. So I still use a tie down "just in case. " But I'm thinking if he continues this more than usual mellowness I saw on Sunday using your product I will try to wean him (and myself) out of it. "

Dale, Brandon MS:

Report #1: 4/28/00 Hey, y'all, Dr. Bob, (My very English 11-year-old daughter just came in, read the salutation over my shoulder and observed with genuine and delighted surprise, "I didn't know he was our friend!" I hope I have reassured her that I am demonstrating Mississippi's sweet-magnolia-flower-of-the-south hospitality; and that, at any rate, I do consider you a friend.) The bitless bridle arrived this afternoon, and Sarah had it unwrapped and on her horse's head before I could turn away from the class I was teaching. It took her a while to find reins both long enough and smooth enough to work -- years of riding Arabs in a sweaty climate have left me with a very large collection of cob-sized equipment and rubber-grip reins. Finally she dismantled a disused double bridle for its curb rein, which proved to slide well through the rings, and to be only about 10 inches short. Hmm. May have to order a pair of reins from you.

It's typical of their relationship that she was able to fit the bridle to MOONFIRE out in the middle of the pasture, putting it on and taking it off several times as she tried different reins. She said that each time she put it on he looked slightly surprised and made a moue, as though feeling around inside his mouth for the bit. Sarah wisely chose to just give MOONFIRE a chance to get used to the bridle. She worked him bareback at walk in the arena and then took

him for a trail ride with my other daughter, Tessa, and my student. I went along as well, observing from a small distance. One thing I noticed immediately was the expression on Moon's face. Always a sweet, curious mischief in the pasture or the stall, he often has a slightly hectored look when ridden. Not today. It was all good-humored mischief. He carried his head a bit higher than I'd prefer, but without apparent tension. Looked a bit like a blond Akhal Teke.

But Sarah said she felt entirely in control of him. "I think he just feels free without the bit," she observed. "He's coming round quite easily when I ask him. " Tomorrow we'll saddle him and see how he goes in more organized flatwork and over some fences. Just thought I'd give you a road report. "

Report #2: 4/30/00: I'm attaching a couple of photographs of Sarah riding MOONFIRE, taken this afternoon. 'Moon' is rising 7, a grade gelding used previously for roping by a very big man. It has taken us a year of structured work, chiropractry and magic to get him off his forehand and able to canter without bucking too often to correct his balance.

Today, working in the bitless bridle, he not only showed significantly greater hock and knee action but gave us some dramatically improved canter transitions without a single hop! Sarah was delighted. Any suggestions you might make would be very, very welcome.

Tessa asked me to photograph her on her 17-year-old QH gelding, PRINCE OF STARS, as she wants you to have before and after photos. I have only recently begun to allow Tessa to work in contact at walk; at trot and canter I still encourage a longer rein for this very able but not very refined jockey. This week we will try the bitless bridle on STAR -- who before Tessa fell in love with him had never been anything but a Western trail horse.

We are absolutely in love with the bitless bridle . . . and will be ordering two more as soon as possible. "

Report #3: 5/20/00 MOONFIRE is making great strides, quite literally. Learning fast and giving us much more elastic extensions in trot. Still out of balance in canter, but that will come. Popping over 3'6" from trot, with evident joy. As importantly, Sarah (my younger daughter) is showing tremendous improvement. The bitless bridle validates her almost spiritual connection with the horse, and has given her confidence.

On Friday I put her on my mare, RUBY, whose very sensitive mouth was badly spoiled by her previous owner and who requires a touch like satin through her rubber bit. Sarah has never been able to take up contact with her before, because she just couldn't manage the lightness required. But after a few weeks of riding MOON bitless, she has developed far more feeling hands -- and better legs! She worked RUBY as well as I could have done, perhaps better. RUBY will be moving into a bitless bridle and I think it will revolutionize our relationship. Sadly, this talented, willing, intelligent and very kind mare has navicular syndrome. My plan is to keep her going as long and as happily as possible, as I still have much to learn from her, and she likes to work.

As for STAR -- we are all eager to see how he will respond to the bitless bridle. This is Tessa's 17-year-old QH gelding, who unties every rope he finds, opens gates, grabs the hose and squirts whoever is in range, and completely owns our little herd. That he yields to Tessa's will at all is both miracle and testament. As soon as Tessa has completed her last exam -- Tuesday, I believe I will fire up the video camera and take some footage of the before and after. I do look forward to your comments.

Incidentally, I gave my students a lecture about bits last week, using all of the many bits I've collected over the years. I let each student feel their effects and demonstrated all the ways in which the bit impacts mouth, poll, chin . . . each student was appalled to think that we do that to our horses, and glad that I only let them ride in halters. I then had Sarah demonstrate

your bitless bridle. Converts were made, not least amongst their parents. When these youngsters are ready for horse ownership, I believe they will be your customers.

The same user posted the following item on a chat room list 4 months later, on 9/27/00:

You know, no discussion of bits would be complete without a visit to the Bitless Bridle site (www.bitlessbridle.com). This site will just confuse you, because it raises some very good questions about why we use bits at all. Dr. Bob Cook, the vet who champions this approach, has sound physiological reasons why we should not use bits, ever, and they are pretty darned convincing. We have one of these bitless bridles, and I love it for many uses! It's great on trail; wonderful to use when a novice with uneducated hands is going to be riding. Previously I had used a halter with reins for the new riders, but the bitless bridle is much more like riding with a bit. It gives you a marvelous sense of connection with the horse. Horses jump very freely in it, and a horse that has been fearful of the bit will learn to go forward into the hand in the bitless bridle. The greatest advantage of this bridle is more difficult to define: It changes your relationship to your horse. You are no longer the potential inflictor of pain, yet you retain leadership and control. This is kind of what the bonder would be like if you could turn it into a piece of equipment! There are also drawbacks -- well, just one, really. We find that we cannot use it all the time for dressage schooling, though it's been wonderful for restarting horses who were behind the bit due to previous heavy-handed riding. We alternate it with very mild happy-mouth type bits for flatwork, as otherwise we find the horse becomes heavier than we'd like. Dr. Cook says that this "heaviness" is normal and not a bad thing, and I really do trust his horsemanship I guess he's just a better rider than I am, and can achieve results that I cannot with this otherwise wonderful piece of equipment. The only other drawback is that it's relatively expensive if you think of it as replacing a bit. But if you more correctly see it as the whole bridle, it's pricing is pretty standard. Worth looking at!

[Dr. Cook responds: Sorry to disappoint, but I turned 70 in 2000 and, after one dose of spinal surgery, I can no longer claim to be a regular rider. Nevertheless, I have ridden a great deal in the past and, in more recent years, I have test ridden The Bitless Bridle]

Liz, Ireland, 5/2/02:

I thought you might like to see a response to the 'bitless bridle' that I posted onto the barefooted horses group on Yahoo where we have been discussing bitless bridles: . . . I started the bitless bridle theme, as I was a bit apprehensive over whether I was making the right move buying bitless bridles (\$78 each - headstall only). My horses are six months into transition to barefoot and I was a bit worried that also going bitless might be too much change, too early.

Well, I received my bridles from Dr Cook on Tuesday. I fitted both my ponies this morning and tried them out in our arena. It was great!! One of my ponies is a 4 year-old Conemara and she was no different to when she was in a bit. She is one of these ponies that does everything you ask her anyway. My other girl who is a bit feisty and who hated having the bit in was also very good. When I was fitting her she allowed me to put the bridle on without the normal backing off and raising her head. I made the adjustments to the bridle, then took it off to fit the reins and when I put it on her the second time she actually tried to put her head into the bridle! When I was riding her there was a small bit of confusion and one shake of the head but she settled within a few minutes. When bitted she would always put her tongue over the bit to avoid it. Today with the bitless bridle her mouth was still. Also, I can feel the brakes

are there if I need them. Don't ask how but you can just feel that they are there. I never felt safe with the bit, as I always knew that if she wanted to she would just put her tongue over and make off. Tomorrow we will hack out on the road. Now both my ponies are "Barefoot & Bitless" and we are all very happy! Thanks for all your responses.

Tina, Canonsburg, PA, 5/7/02:

I have a dressage horse that used to be a barrel horse before I got him. His lips were cut about and, with a bit in his mouth, he is nervous, a headshaker, badly collected and mentally unfocused. But with the Bitless Bridle there is a night and day difference.

This last weekend, I entered him in an FEI recognized show in Grand Haven, Ohio. The judges agreed to give me a score but explained that I would not be permitted to compete for a place. So I took part and was officially 'eliminated.' But my horse behaved wonderfully and I gained the highest score and an 'HC' whatever that means. Had I been able to compete I would have won the class.

I plan to request being allowed to take part under the same restriction in other shows during the season and will keep in touch. After all, by eliminating the bit it cannot be said that I am obtaining an UNFAIR advantage. Thank you.

Dave, Atlantic Hilds, NJ, 5/8/02:

I would like to tell you how well my horse took to your bridle. I have a double reg. racking horse & spotted saddle horse, 16.2 hands, 7 year old, with non-stop energy. When I got him he came with a 6-inch walking horse bit. Having read about your bridle I thought what the hell, I got a death wish, but nothing could be farther from the truth. The first time I tried it was out in our paddock, with our other horse - who thought we were going out on the trail without him - going crazy, running and charging. But I was able to keep my horse in total control. I have been riding him on the trail ever since and I could not be more happy.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU!!!!

Carol and Jet, 5/28/02:

Thank you for your email about fitting the bridle, especially the picture which was particularly useful. The bridle fits well, with plenty of adjustment both up and down if required. I have tightened the noseband and lowered it. Today we went out and all was well, so thank you very much for the extra help. Just to say, in case you need any more 'customer satisfaction' information: He is much happier without a bit. He used to pull against the bit all the time, and now although he still pulls, certainly not so much and partly he's a keen type of horse anyway. He's a 24 year-old, Welsh X TB, and I've had him for three and a half years, using him for hacking only. Keep up the good work, and thank you for a great website. " - Anne Sprake and 'Q', 6/18/02 "I have always hated bits, but the only alternative was hackamores, which, if you handle them correctly are do-able, but still not satisfactory. In a hackamore, my Appaloosa mare seemed subdued. She's a very spirited horse, and the hackamore on her face dulled that spirit. You could see it in her eyes. And she wasn't terribly comfortable in them (I had to pad them up a bit). I found your website, and I am so very glad I did!! I ordered the nylon bitless bridle, just to try it. As soon as I put it on my mare, she perked right up! Those ears came

forward, her eyes cleared, her neck lifted - she "woke up"! She moved out and forward with vigor and enthusiasm, and in no instance have I ever "lost control" of her. As a matter of fact, the bitless bridle has so improved her collection and balance that she can now strike-off at a gallop! She feels wonderful, I feel fabulous, and our rides together in the fields behind the barn are absolute heaven! We have always been tightly bonded, she and I, and now even more so. I will never ever use a hackamore, and absolutely never a bit, again! This is revolutionary, and I will tell my friends. (And as a certified equine massage therapist, I could attest to the benefits in the body from the use of this bridle.) Thank you so much!

Tami, Bend, OR, 5/28/02:

I have had my bitless bridle for a month now and wanted to let you know how it is going with my 4 y. o. 17. 2 hh Oldenburg colt that is very green, but has a great mind. First, he was extremely hard to get a bit into his mouth. Which was his one bad habit. With the Bitless bridle he drops his head. I didn't even have to coax him with carrots. Second, both he and I are totally relaxed because we know his mouth isn't being stressed out. He also tends to drop into a perfect frame faster once he picked up his rhythm. I have found that the correct adjustment on the horse's head is essential to get the best out of the bridle. My trainer has said that it is a good bridle for him. I have just given it to a friend of mine in the barn who rides in the barn who has a head tosser. I'll let you know her comments. I am very, very happy with this product.

Kristene and Chylo, Beverley, MA, 5/30/02:

FANTASTIC !!! I ordered the Bitless Bridle about a year ago. My mare HATED being bridled. She would throw her head up, charge forward, and shake in the corner of her stall. I tried a hackamore, but got the same results. I was resigned to just look at her, but then I came across your website. THANK YOU, THANK YOU!!!! It IS THE BEST bridle! She drops her head to be bridled. NO MORE of her throwing up her head, charging, or shaking in the corner of her stall. We now go out trail riding, and she has turned into quite the barrel horse.

I HAVE NO INTENTIONS of ever giving up my bitless bridle. All my other fancy ones were sold. I have a HUGE amount of confidence in this SUPERB piece of horse equipment. It took me 10 minutes to relax and just ride (I felt I had less control because there was no bit.) After 10 minutes I had more control than I have ever had! Guess it was reversing all I had learned. I know my mare will NEVER accept a bit in her mouth. She is now the quiet one on the trail, where she used to be all worked up, and stressed about getting the bit OUT of her mouth.

Thank you all for developing such a priceless piece of equipment. I had been wary of the price, but after all I spent on different bits and bridles, your piece was - BY FAR - much cheaper! This IS MY BRIDLE. I will ONLY use a bitless bridle from now on.

Again, much thanks!

Krissy & Chylo of Beverly, MA, 8/1/02:

I just want to tell you a little story that I found UNBELIEVABLE! Chylo, my QH mare, was EXTREMELY head shy and whenever I went to bridle her, she would throw her head up and shake in the corner of her stall. I have been using the bitless bridle FAITHFULLY and will never go back to a bit.

CHYLO has been doing wonders in this bridle and after 4 years of owning her and only being able to ride her for the past year (stress, anxiety, fear of people, being tacked up) we have done a 180° (turn)!

Well, we went to our FIRST horseshow a week ago. I was riding in Western Equitation and Western Pleasure and a Trail class. It was her first show (and mine!) and I had decided to use a show hackamore on her. Well, let me tell you, I LEARNED A LOT from this. In the equitation class, we didn't place because her head was way up in the air (even on a loose rein), not a pretty sight. Needless to say, I thought I could handle the trail class in the hackamore. Disaster. She WOULDN'T back or turn, she was too occupied with figuring out how to evade the pressure and we bombed that class too, MY FAULT.

My last class was Western Pleasure. I took my Bitless Bridle with me JUST IN CASE. Well, Chylo was all upset and worked up, not what I wanted by any means, I just wanted a pleasurable day. She was head shaking, the muscles were bulging, REALLY STRESSED OUT. I took off her hackamore and put on her bitless bridle. She IMMEDIATELY relaxed and dropped her head. I FELT the tension leave her body. We took 5th place in our Western Pleasure Class!!!! I was shocked, happy, and sad. Sad because all she needed to do well was HER bitless bridle and I goofed by putting on a fancy hackamore to meet and keep pace with the other western horses. NEVER AGAIN!

After all classes were taken, I asked the trail judge if I could take Chylo through the trail course just to show her it was okay. SHE DID THE WHOLE TRAIL COURSE IN THE BITLESS BRIDLE!!! She Backed, turned, everything!!! So, there you have it! I learned a lot! And, I will be ordering a leather bridle for the show ring!!! Truly, truly an unbelievable piece of equipment! On our next show, we will be competing in the bitless bridle. I figure we'll do okay since she was up against well-seasoned horses and she would have placed more if it weren't for me. Thanks so much and I'll be in touch with you on how we do in our upcoming shows!"

Randy, Canada, 6/3/02:

I received the bridles on Friday and on Saturday threw them on and entered a local show with excellent results; 1st in poles, 2nd in barrels, 1st in cattle penning. How do I get to make them in Canada so we don't get killed on the exchange rate!!"

Ysabelle Dean, Victoria, Australia, 6/21/02:

The BB arrived today. I am so astounded, I can't begin to tell you. I noticed in the manual that it says that horses may behave a little differently the first few times. I just didn't expect it to make such a profound difference - and on two completely different horses at opposite ends of the scale in terms of their training, temperaments and movement. They were just delighted with the whole experience, and they let me know in many, many ways. And these are horses that have been trained very gently and carefully, and their mouths have always been treated with maximum respect.

I won't say much more yet - it is early days and I am afraid it will all disappear when they settle down with this new thing in their lives. But I am hoping and praying they won't settle down - I really don't want to lose what I felt today. I will tell you all about it when I have ridden a few more times and I am sure that I am not just dreaming this whole thing.

Cheers - and thank you.

Ysabelle Dean, 6/22/02:

I have started my diary. So far it is "War and Peace" in length and only two days entered! I will have to edit it before I send you a copy. The 2nd day was as good as the first although I forced myself to be very critical and analytical which took some of the joy out of it all - but not the magic, I have to say! Next time I am just going to go out there and just RIDE and stay open to what I feel and just record that. So I hope you don't need my diary to impress anybody or prove anything because it won't be very scientific in content. "

Kim, Groveland, MA 6/24/02:

I am writing to you to let you know that I tried my new bridle today on my horse. He has a very sensitive mouth. His original owner was using a Myler bit and then I swapped to a full cheek. He has a habit of stopping too fast, hesitating on the street, and sometimes pulling on the way home. No really serious bad habits, but there was room to improve. Today he had not been ridden for 18 days and I did lunge him for about five minutes before we rode. I was going to try the bridle in my paddock first, but it was being mowed so off we went. I have never seen anything like this. He was a different horse. He has great ground manners but sometimes tests when being ridden. He didn't test at all; he never stopped, never pulled on the way home. I noticed that other people said their horses were lighter on the reins and I noticed the same thing. Very small corrections (were needed) with leg aids. All I can say is thanks. Next we are off to do some real work.

Pamela, Winchester, VA, 7/7/02:

Just thought I'd drop you a line and send you this picture - you were so very helpful in custom-making a bitless bridle to fit my large mule Madeleine! The bitless bridle works great - she doesn't lean on my hands anymore and is more relaxed, and keeps her head lower too. Control is even better than with a bit since I don't have to carry her head around now.

She appears to really like this bridle, no more giraffe act when I'm getting her tacked up. Thanks a million for such a great product. I'll be getting one for my other mule when he's old enough to ride!

PS: Please feel free to use my comments and/or the picture of Madeleine on your website or in other advertising - I really believe in this product and will stand behind my words!"

Barb (event rider and massage therapist), Elburn, IL, 7/19/02:

I could not find a satisfactory bit with which to gallop across country until I found The Bitless Bridle. Now my horses go to the jumps so well, with no backing off and throwing up of their heads. I have been able to do some serious dressage too. What a pity that the rules are so strict on the use of bits. The bridle seems to do everything to enable a horse to work correctly. I am passionate about this bridle. It has been awesome in every phase and even helps with horses that have a head tilt. The control is spectacular. Only one horse seems to evade the BB. On the first occasion I used it on him, he reared quite badly. But I am working on this. I think he has some (pre-existing) neck problem and resists poll flexion.

[Dr. Cook comments: I recommended that she tried pulling the poll straps back away from the atlanto-occipital joint. She reported back a month later with the comment below. It seems that the rearing might have been due to the 'D' rings rotating on the noseband of the leather headstall and the edges of the rings causing the horse some discomfort. We have since redesigned the bridle to use 'O' rings to avoid this problem]

Went to small unrecognized dressage show this a. m. Did two second level tests. Did the second one in bitless. Judge noticed he was happier and moved better in bitless! She is not a recognized judge, but is an upper level rider and at least it's been seen. His canter is really good by nature, but was absolutely exquisite after I changed tack. He scored really well with hardly any practice of the tests. He has also never done that level before.

It was his first time out after a year off for his feet to rehab in my best attempt at Dr. Strasser's barefoot trim. It was also my first time out in my new shirt (we didn't have to wear fancy show attire) that proudly says "Barefoot & Bitless". My goal is to start a group of event and dressage riders doing just that. My horse was such a good poster boy for it today. I was so proud of him. All of his schooling is done in your bridle. Used a soft rubber hot dog bit today (for the first test) and it went okay. I apologize profusely to him when I use it, but he seems to deal okay.

Thank you so much for the best feel I have ever had in the dressage ring. He will go to his first event in a year in two weeks. Can't wait.

Barb, Elburn, IL 9/8/02:

Regarding the horse we spoke of last month that wouldn't accept bridle and you wanted me to take off brow band and pull it back: Was somewhat better but when he threw his head it would keep going forward again at crown. However, in the interim I have tried the leather one on my horse and he was very pissy in it, quite to my surprise. Finally I realized that the corners of the Dee shaped noseband rings were digging into him, unlike the rounded rings that are on his beta. It was the leather one that I had tried on the other horse without the browband, so I now question if it wasn't the rings that were his problem. Unfortunately he is not right again, but when we solve his soundness issue (hopefully this month with a nuclear scan), I will resume testing. I am determined that he needs the bitless and I truly believe that one of the contributing factors to his unwillingness to accept it is poll pain that is originating in a hind end problem. Thanks again. You are truly a genius!

Emily, Redmond, WA, 7/22/02:

I just got my new bridle today, and when I put it on my horse, I was very careful to do so according to the fitting instructions. I made sure the cavesson/noseband was only about 1 1/2 inches away from the corners of her mouth, just like the instructions said. However, when I was riding her, she was doing well at the walk and jog, but when I asked her to canter, there was a substantial amount of resistance from her which eventually led to her rearing up. She calmed down easily and we were both fine, but I realized this may have been due to the noseband obstructing her breathing. I remembered that in the manual it stated that rearing could occur if the noseband was placed over the "fleshy" part of the muzzle. I then felt the part of the muzzle where the noseband lay, and it was soft on the sides where the nasal passages would be, but bony on the top. If I had moved it up higher so that it was completely away from

the soft area, then it would have been quite a bit farther away from her mouth, which I had read could lead to lessened control.

My question is, should the noseband be moved higher even though it would not sit low on her face as instructed? The rearing and resistance could have possibly been due to some other factor, but it made sense to me that she would have to breathe harder to canter and if her breathing was in fact obstructed, then this would lead to such behavior. I would greatly appreciate your expertise in helping me with my problem.

Thank you so much for your time.

[Customer Service responds: There is a possibility that your horse reared because the noseband was too low for his liking. 1 1/2 to 2" above the corner of your horse's mouth is the general rule of thumb for where the bottom edge of the noseband should sit. But since all horses are different, it is possible that your horse needs the noseband to be a little higher. A higher position lessens the amount of control that the bridle provides, as some leverage is lost. However, unless you have a very aggressive, strong horse, a higher position for the noseband may still provide perfectly satisfactory control. Some horses don't need as much leverage for control as others. I would experiment (in an enclosed area) to come up with a happy medium compromise between satisfactory control and a happy horse.]

Emily and NOVEMBER'S NOVALEE, Redmond, WA, 7/27/02:

Thank you so much for your helpful and prompt reply! I tried moving the noseband higher, and my mare seems to be quite comfortable with the bridle now. I also find that I have a great amount of control despite it being higher up.

I have been riding her with the bridle for several days now, and I cannot tell you how pleased I am. All the descriptions about the bridle which I have read from Dr. Cook and the customer reviews on the website were completely accurate -- I feel that I have much greater control over my horse now, as opposed to the bit. She hates the bit; I used to have to struggle during every ride to keep her from stretching her neck out and chewing on the bit and moving it around in her mouth, probably trying to avoid the pain. Even with my extremely light hands, she loathed the feel of a bit in her mouth and did everything possible to avoid it.

Now, she carries her head nicely, is much more calm and alert during rides, and even has much greater stamina. She also used to be very difficult when riding past the gate in any arena, and would try to swing her body toward it. Now, just a slight squeeze with the rein pushes her back on track and she keeps going the right way. Every aspect of riding her has improved immensely, and every problem I used to have with her is lessened. I believe that she will only continue to improve from now on.

My mare and I are a walking advertisement for the Bitless Bridle. Everyone at my barn stops to ask me, "What is that you're riding your horse in?" I plan to let everyone I can borrow my bridle so they will see its benefits and hopefully buy one for themselves, because I honestly believe that every single horse would be an even better, and much happier, horse, with the bridle.

The difference is absolutely indescribable. I literally cringe whenever I see a bit in a horse's mouth now. There is simply no need to inflict such pain and discomfort on these animals we love.

Thank you so much.

Clea, Bridgewater, Somerset, UK 7/23/02:

Having tried several types of bridle for my very strong but lovely horse over the years I decided to import one of your bridles. My horse has always been a pleasure to ride, but due to being badly broken in has always been extremely strong and unhappy in his mouth, and stopping has often been a battle, not my idea of horsemanship.

I am delighted with the bitless bridle, he is a completely different animal and took to it straight away, and I am now even jumping him in it. He no longer turns his head away when I go to tack up, I only wish I had found the bridle years ago.

Living in England, I have never come across any of your bridles, although I am aware from your website that Martin Pipe the racehorse trainer uses them. I work in the horse business in marketing and I wondered if you would be interested in having an English distributor? I would love to be involved in spreading the word about such a wonderful invention, which has such positive repercussions for equine welfare.

Brenda, Wacoma, WA, 7/24/02:

I just wanted to put my two cents in about your Bitless Bridle. I lease a 21 yr old retired racer/barrel horse from a woman named Lisa. I have used the bitless bridle on this mare since I was having "brake problems" with her in a snaffle. She would hold her mouth open, have her head high and be a bit scary to stop. With the bitless bridle she has no pain and does not fight me at any gait. Her canter has slowed, her head has dropped and her stops are reliable, consistent and easy now. Two other things that happened that were unexpected: she canters to meet me at the gate for a ride (Lisa has "chased" her down for the last 13 yrs). Also, this mare now tries to bridle herself, whereas before I had to stand on my toes to get a bridle on her high head!

I'm completely convinced this is the only way to ride (and treat) my horse. I will never go back to a bit. Your bridle has made my horse a safer horse to ride, and a happier horse too! Thank you!

Robin, Norcross, GA, 7/30/02:

My vet suggested that I look into using your bitless bridle when we both realized that my horse has a scar across his tongue from an old injury. We've been unsuccessfully trying to figure out the cause of a slight lameness problem for the last 7 years. My 11 y. o Arabian has always dragged his toes at the trot and hasn't ever really accepted contact with the bit during the 5+ yrs we've been training in dressage. At the most, he's flexed 2 out of 5 degree lame in one hind leg and 1 in the other. During some exams, only 1 in the bad leg and 0 in the other.

We X-rayed his hocks, and they show very little bony changes. We ultrasounded his pelvis and found nothing significant. We injected his hocks with only a 50% improvement. We've been debating blistering his stifles. Dr. Marcella always felt it was something in his trunk. I figured it was a recurring soft tissue injury or residual EPM damage. But my horse could always take good strides when he wanted, and we were running out of answers. Everyone, including five or more trainers, five or more vets, and two equine dentists, has looked for the cause, but no one recognized the scar until we had his mouth examined at a biting clinic.

At his worst, RIYADH would move fine for a few strides then ZING! He'd throw his head like he had something restricting his shoulder. Or he'd trot with his nose in the air showing his displeasure at being asked to go on the bit. Or he'd curl his neck with nose to his

chest going behind the bit. Or he'd rear when forcefully asked to go forward into the bit. All this time, I'd keep kicking him forward and ignoring his tantrums. Other times we'd have tug of wars with the reins. He'd push and let go. I'd regain my balance, and then he'd do it again. He was trying to pull me out of the saddle. And he would shy at anything and everything to get out of work. It was usually very difficult to get his attention. I was fortunate. He's always been kind to his riders while always telling us, "Stupid human! I can't do what you want me to do!"

Once I read your website, it all started to make sense. He displayed the exact behavior you described. He had a definite conflict between chewing on the bit and breathing when asked to work. He was enamored with the last new bit we tried, and believe me, I've tried a lot of bits over the years. It definitely stimulated his eating responses. He foamed for the first time ever. He loved it like a pacifier while we stretched at the walk. But it all went sour when I asked him to take contact at the trot and canter. Then he couldn't breathe and chew on it at the same time, plus it hurt, so he constantly tried to push it out of his mouth. His tongue was always curled up in the back of his mouth. I wouldn't be surprised if he experienced muscle cramps in it from all the contortions. Poor guy.

Since using your bitless bridle for the last month, peace has been restored. When relaxed, he still licks and chews and gets a little foam lipstick on his lips. Now his head is steady. He's quiet in the mouth. His mind is on his work. The arguments are over. He swings his back and rib cage while he moves freely forward. It's pretty awesome.

Our lateral work has greatly improved. With a bit, he could barely cross his legs. Now we consistently cross at the hocks. When his engaged suspension takes hold, even with me bouncing around on his back, he has steady, rhythmic, long strides. (I'm learning how to ride his suspension for the first time!) And there is no more toe dragging. Videos show he has a completely different way of going. He's actually bending his stifles and hocks now and picking up his rear feet. In the corners, he is actually engaged. He is correctly using himself for the first time in his life. And mentally he is so much more stable.

I've always been afraid of taking him on trail rides because of shying. My confidence in him has been restored. Recently, two of his buddies spooked and bolted past some lawn chairs. I asked Riyadh to stop and look. Then he calmly walked past them. He wasn't a bit unnerved. How about that? Seems the bit prevented him from thinking for himself. Now he has a clear mind.

My next task is to take him barefoot. I've removed the metal from his mouth. Next to remove it from his feet and go through the necessary transition. I am hoping it will improve his traction and restore his confidence. He's fallen many times because shoes are like skis in wet, bad footing. His connection with the ground will be restored.

Again thank you Dr. Cook for your creation. Your bitless bridle has given me a new horse and a new dancing partner. I appreciate your research and dedication. May many more horses experience your grace. "

[Dr. Cook's response: "Was it a Myler clinic that you attended I wonder? Perhaps you could give me some idea of the different bits that you have tried over the years. If so, is there any chance that you could let me see videos of the before-and-after situation? Evidence of this sort, if available, would be invaluable.]

Robin 8/1/02:

It was a Kangaroo Dewsbury biting clinic that we attended. Alixe Etherington, President of Dewsbury Bits, was the clinician who identified the scar as the reason he had a sensitive

mouth. She suggested we use a Waterford Boucher, since he could move the mouthpiece wherever he wanted on his tongue. Also the Baucher cheek piece would take some pressure off his tongue by applying poll pressure. Unfortunately, it only lasted a few rides as I stated.

I've also been very interested in the Myler bits. The only bit that he's shown acceptance by keeping his mouth closed is the Myler ported barrel. In all others, he constantly mouths the bit with an open jaw. He dislikes all bits that apply tongue pressure. Here is a list of what I've used: Myler ported barrel 5" Myler forward tilt barrel 5" Myler regular snaffle 5" Kangaroo Baucher Dewsbury link 5" Kangaroo Baucher Waterford 5" & 5 1/2" Centerline 18mm loose ring single snaffle 5" *Herm Springer Aurigan 20mm loose ring single snaffle 5 3/4" Herm Springer 18mm KK loose ring double jointed snaffle 5 1/8" Happy Mouth loose ring ported mullen 5" Happy Mouth eggbutt single jointed snaffle 5" eggbutt Dr. Bristol 5" full cheek single snaffle 5" loose ring French link 5" English hackamore rope knotted halter and lead rope The one bit in which we made the most progress was the Herm Springer 20mm Aurigan loose ring single snaffle in a 5 3/4".

Yes, I have a recent video from a clinic that will show you the before and after effects of using the Dewsbury Baucher Waterford bit then using the bitless bridle. Let me make a copy and I will send it to you. I'm glad to help your cause.

Robin 8/4/02:

I feel toe dragging is connected to the mouth. The Chinese bladder and stomach meridians both run from the head to the rear feet. Connective tissue also runs from the throat to the feet following deep ventral fascia lines.

As stated in the Myler brother's book in the appendix written by Dr. Joyce Harmon, the omohyoid and sternohyoid muscles attach the tongue to both the scapula and the sternum. If the tongue isn't relaxed, a horse can't lift their rib cage. If a horse can't lift their ribcage or swing it out of the way, they can't step through from behind. If they are out behind on a consistent basis, they will eventually drag their toes. Hock and stifle problems would follow as well as shortened middle gluteus muscles.

I have a massage therapy/bodywork background for humans and horses. My modalities are structural integration, osteopathic techniques, and energy work. My focus is to identify blocks in the proper flow of energy, remove them, and reestablish ease of movement. At times I've been very frustrated with RIYADH's progress. I often remind myself of the peeling onion analogy. We have made a lot of progress, and I hope we are now getting to the core. He definitely displays more life force now than ever before.

I just received the two Dr. Strasser books I ordered. In reading last night, heels and bars that are too high could be the main contributor to the rear toe stabbing movement I see in my horse. Will have to adjust and go from there. Even with your bridle, he still drags his toes on occasion. Sometimes, it's just hard for him to move properly. It'll be nice when his feet can cooperate with the rest of his body 100% of the time.

I've always felt that farriers are body workers because they so effect the way a horse goes. They wield a lot of power in their ignorance of a natural way of going. It's hard to blame them when they've only been doing what they've been taught to do for hundreds of years.

I will let you know when to expect the copy of the video. It does show the contrast between going in a bit and going easily in your bridle. I'm glad I have it.

Again thanks so much for caring enough to publicize your principles. When I first heard about your position and that of barefoot trimming, I felt they were extremely radical. But my experience is proving that these changes are necessary in order for my horse to be physically

and mentally comfortable. With popular books like Walter Zettl's, Dressage in Harmony, I kept wondering why harmony is so illusive. And why disease always pops up to block the way. I'm very much hoping that with the application of holistic principles harmony can be much more lasting. "Being in the world but not of the world" is a lot more challenging than I had thought.

Thank you again.

On 8/12/02 Robin kindly sent us a 35-minute video of her 11-year-old Arabian, RIYADH.

Robin 8/12/02:

Even though we are learning how to use the Bitless Bridle, there is a lot of improvement in Riyadh's way of going and his attitude. He has always backed off from the bit, so going forward is not his norm. The challenge is in getting him to go forward. If you notice both [of the trainers who are riding my horse] use long reins in order to get him to reach for the bit. At the very end (in the section where I am riding my horse), I finally get him through the back and using his hindquarters. I hope this meets your needs.

Thank you for developing and marketing the Bitless Bridle. We appreciate it very much.

[Dr. Cook viewed the video four times and made the following notes:

Filming covered five different rides on four different days (Rides #2 &3 were consecutive, on the same day). During the first two, RIYADH was ridden by two different trainers in a bitted bridle (Dewsbury Boucher Waterford). In the third ride, he was ridden by a trainer in the Bitless Bridle. In the fourth and fifth rides he was ridden by the owner in the Bitless Bridle.

Ride #1: Bitted bridle and a dropped noseband.

Even though on a loose rein, the horse was seriously overbent at the trot and the canter, the head being carried low, with the muzzle at knee level and tucked into his chest. Because of this head position, the horse's eyes were in such a position that he must have had difficulty in seeing where he was going. At the walk his head was a little higher but the poll was still lower than the withers and the highest point of the neck was the crest. A frontal view revealed that the head was twisted so that the muzzle was to the right of midline.

At all paces, the mouth was almost constantly open, with the jaw on the move. At the walk he was chewing on the bit.

Ride #2: Bitted bridle and a dropped noseband.

During this ride the horse was not so overbent though the muzzle was close to his chest from time to time. Head carriage was better though still not correct. The poll was lower than the withers and the crest of his neck was even more prominent than in the first ride. Though not overbent, the horse showed discomfort in other ways. In particular, the ride was characterized by intermittent head tossing, attempts to rub his muzzle on his forelegs, and striking at his muzzle with his forelegs. The headshaking interfered with cadence.

The mouth was open much of the time. Salivation was excessive and the tongue was on the move. At the walk, he was chewing on the bit and snorting. .

Ride #3: Bitless bridle

This ride followed ride #2 immediately, and with the same trainer riding. It was observed that the bridle was fitted incorrectly, with the noseband at the traditional position for a noseband on a bitted bridle (this is far too high for optimum bitless control).

Head carriage now correct, with the poll being the highest point. Nasal bone vertical to the ground most of the time. Mouth closed most of the time. No headshaking observed, the only hint of a shake being a momentary fleeting rotation.

Ride #4: Bitless bridle.

Same fitting problem as above. Head steady at the trot. Mouth closed. Head position good. No salivation. Ears pricked. One head toss and a quick tuck, otherwise no headshaking and no striking at muzzle with foreleg. Rider comments on good feeling of impulsion.

Ride #5; Bitless bridle

Same fitting problem present again, nevertheless, towards the end of this ride, the horse achieved a lovely flowing trot. Nice head bob at the canter. Otherwise, observations as for ride #4

During a telephone conversation, I mentioned that the video indicated to me that the bridle was not fitted correctly. The noseband looked too high and so I suggested that Robin should check this point . . . and yes, it was too high.]

Robin, 8/26/02:

It was a very good thing we spoke yesterday. I rode RIYADH yesterday with the noseband exactly 1.5" from the corners of his lips, and we had a wonderful ride. It sat just in front of his molars, like a dropped noseband. It felt very much like riding in a bit. He stopped pushing against the headstall. All my light rein aids were accepted. We had a great time together!

FYI, the nose rubbing on a foreleg and bringing a foreleg up to the nose may not be just from a bit. It was very hot here yesterday (92+ degrees), and his face was sweating as we rode. Sweat was dripping down his face around his muzzle. He repeatedly stopped to wipe his face on his knee. I think he takes this action because he doesn't like his muzzle and lips to get wet. Whether it is because he drools with a bit or because he sweats with the bitless bridle makes no difference. He wipes his face clean when it gets wet. {But see my response to this below}

Something else to add to our discussion about rearing and a bit. Alixe Etherington of Dewsbury Bits warned me about using a single jointed snaffle bit that was too thick for his mouth. She said the maximum size to use on Riyadh was 18mm. She warned that if I would use a thicker bit, it would cause him to rear. Because of his scar, he would avoid tongue pressure. Because his mouth

is too small to carry a bit thicker than 18mm, a 23mm bit would be pressed into the roof of his mouth, which would cause him to rear. The two times he did rear when being ridden by Allison Faso, he was wearing a 20mm bit.

Because of his tongue scar, Alixe said Riyadh would always "play with his bit" and his mouth would always be open. I should never expect him to keep his mouth closed with a bit. I would be marked down by dressage judges, but I should just accept things the way they were. Riyadh would always have an unwilling attitude about work.

There have been times when he's been so adamant about getting the bit out of his mouth that the cavesson rubbed his jaw's skin raw from opening and closing his mouth. Many of my trainers said he was trying to get his tongue over the bit, but he never did that I know of. As I said, he would repeatedly slide his tongue up to the back of his throat and down under the bit. Often times, he would just hold his tongue in the back of his throat with his jaw open. He hates bits.

Robin, 8/21/02:

It was wonderful to talk to you yesterday. I'm very much enjoying my bitless bridle. We're having fun together. Thank you for giving me my horse back, so I wouldn't have to retire him or buy another horse.

[Dr. Cook's response: I was interested to read that until you set the noseband of the Bitless bridle at the correct height, your horse was 'pushing against the headstall. ' Was he tending to lean on the bridle I wonder or was it just that you needed to use more rein pressure than you wished?]

Robin:

He was leaning on the bridle and wanting me to hold him up rather than carrying himself. This is something he never did with a bit as he was usually curled behind it. And yes, I had to use a lot more rein pressure than I wished as evidenced by the blisters on my ring fingers. Bumping him with the reins would not back him off.

Over the years, he's become a passive aggressive personality. He's learned to ignore my nagging until I vary the aids to the point that it makes work interesting. It's going to take time to undo the damage done by the bit. He's got a great memory. "

[Dr. Cook: The bit is responsible for setting up facial neuralgia and it may well be that the pain from this will not resolve overnight, even though the cause has now been removed. Neuralgia is exacerbated when skin temperature rises, so some residual discomfort from this source may continue for a while, especially on hot days. But I would hope and expect that the tingling sensations or frank pain will gradually regress, so please let me know if this occurs.]

Robin 8/26/02:

I agree that Riyadh had/has facial neuralgia symptoms. I can touch Riyadh's face now without him moving away. In the past, he would rarely allow anyone to touch his face (frontal bones between the eyes) or mandible. The face wiping could be caused by residual pain as you suggest. As the nerves repair, I would expect that he would be less sensitive & defensive over time. We shall see. I look forward to the time he'll be more comfortable with himself. With the heat, he seems more neurologically sensitive all over his body.

Thank you for the time it took to explain this to me.

[Dr. Cook's response:

I was happy to hear that Riyadh is performing even better, now that the bridle is fitted correctly. Thank you for the extra feedback . . . always useful. I was interested to read that previously, your horse was 'pushing against the headstall. ' Was he tending to lean on the bridle I wonder or was it just that you needed to use more rein pressure than you wished?

Please give me some long-term comment in due course on the muzzle rubbing and leg striking sign. I suppose it is possible that this is just discomfort from sweating but there is an alternative explanation, which I believe to be more likely. The bit is responsible for setting up facial neuralgia and it may well be that the pain from this will not resolve overnight, even though the cause has now been removed. Neuralgia is exacerbated when skin temperature rises, so some residual discomfort from this source may continue for a while, especially on hot days. But I would hope and expect that the tingling sensations or frank pain will gradually regress, so please let me know if this occurs.

Thanks for the further comments on the rearing episodes and the open mouth problem.]

Robin 8/27/02:

Thank you again . . . how very interesting. I was fascinated with your observation about his head shyness and skin sensitivity. This supports an observation made by someone recently to the effect that since using the BB they have been able, for the first time, to turn a hose on their horse's head.

I haven't tried hosing his head yet. He's avoided head hosing all these years and so have I!

Robin 9/6/02:

As my horse was becoming more and more distressed over his work and life in general (when bitted), I see better mental and physical health and better environmental adaptability (now he is bitless). With better health comes more cooperation. With better cooperation, he recognizes me as a leader instead of an antagonist ("a nag"). We're having fun together.

Ursula, Germany, 8/1/02:

Since last year I am riding three Thoroughbreds using your bridles only and I am very happy with them. Even in long-distance-races and mass starts it is absolutely problem-free to keep my horses under control."

Laura, Alberta, Canada, 8/4/02:

Hey there! . . . Well I am finally getting back to you about the bitless bridle I purchased almost four months ago. I have a six-year-old Appaloosa with DDSP. I wanted to find an alternative to surgery and an all around more humane way of riding, so I thought I would try your bridle on him.

I love it!!!!It is amazing how well he has taken to it and how much happier he is. I currently do eventing and I was a little concerned about doing cross-country in this bridle. However, I found I had more control than before and way less head tossing and fighting when he gets a little strong. As for the roaring that had been present with a normal bit and bridle. . . that has virtually been eliminated, which was the best benefit of all. He is completely quiet when cantering in a dressage frame and seems to enjoy it more now that his breathing isn't obstructed by a bit.

However, the thing that surprised me the most is how well he will became "round" in this bridle for dressage. This was the thing that I was most skeptical about. But I found it makes him quite supple and able to work over his back. At first I did find he was a bit heavy (in my hands) but after a few weeks in it he became much lighter and uphill.

I have to say this was the best investment I have ever made for my horse. He is much happier and no longer avoids being bridled. It makes me feel better knowing that he is more comfortable and generally is happier doing any kind of work.

I have recommended your bridle to everyone I ride with and have had many questions about it whenever I take him to a show in it. I have had people also suggest using it on the school horses at my barn, to help young and novice riders avoid pulling on their horse's mouths. My trainer is amazed with how quiet he is in it and how much it has helped his DDSP.

We were both curious if your company would be interested in having a distributor in Canada. I really feel that there would be a large market here for a humane alternative to a bit

that works as well as this. If you are interested, you can e-mail me back. I am really glad that I found your product and will most certainly continue using it. Thanks so much. "

Having been a guest on his Radio Show I sent Dan Sumerel, of the Sumerel Training System, a Bitless Bridle for him to test ride. Here is his report:

Dan Sumerel, Lynchburg, VA, 8/4/02:

Well, I rode my horses with the bridle. All went well.

I notice the side straps of the headstall were sticking out as I rode, so I ended up tightening them WAY up. Had to tighten the noseband up all the way on two of my horses and almost all the way on the third.

I really liked it! The horses responded very nice, and with no resistance. No sign of resentment when asked to give to the bridle. Very easy to get a head-set and side pass was more responsive. I am pleasantly surprised. And please understand I DO NOT USE BITS. I use a standard halter almost all the time. Whenever I work with a runaway horse I always ride it in a halter to demonstrate to the owner that the bit is NOT the issue and if I can ride the horse successfully without the bit, my point is made.

I think you have a good tool here, since it does offer a degree of leverage, beyond the plain halter, and many people are just too STUCK in their thinking to ride without SOMETHING on the horse. Many people ride many horses (me with SUNNY for example) with NOTHING on the head, but most people are nowhere near that point yet. I think your bridle is a great tool and I will happily recommend it when appropriate.

I would like to see you make it in sizes so my little Arabians would not have so much extra strap and material to flap around. I can trim it, but I always like to use things more to the middle of their adjustment when possible. The quality of the bridle seemed first rate! I was also sent a set of reins with the bridle that were very easy to grip, but bigger and bulkier than I would use (I use little, thin English reins) so I returned them to your office.

This may be more feedback than you wanted, but I tend to notice a lot and wanted to let you know what I saw. Thanks again for the bridle. I will use it.

Dan Sumerel, Lynchburg, VA, 8/10/02:

Used the bridle again and it was wonderful. No complaints, only success. And the horses seem happy. Thanks.

[Dr. Cook replies:

I am so pleased that you have found your first experiences to be of interest.

Bowing out of the cheek straps is something that occurs if the chinstrap is not cinched up sufficiently snugly. But even if some bowing occurs and as long as it is not excessive, it doesn't alter the function. With the leather bridles, the design is slightly different and bowing seems to occur less frequently; the noseband is suspended in a loop of the cheek strap rather than being stitched to the cheek strap.

So reverting to the beta headstall, the trick is to get the noseband level correct and then cinch up the chinstrap as indicated. I have suggested in the past a space of one flat finger between the chinstrap and the back of the jaw but, for even better control, there is no reason why the chinstrap should not be cinched up until it touches the jaw. Not pressing on it, you understand, but just touching it. Such a fitting is not recommended with the idea that the chinstrap's function is to prevent the horse from opening its mouth because, in the absence of a bit, there is no incentive for the horse to open its

mouth in the first instance. Unless the bridle is being used by a trail rider who wishes to allow her horse to graze occasionally, there is no need for any slackness in the chinstrap.

If you raise the noseband by shortening the cheek straps in order to avoid bowing (rather than by tightening up the chinstrap), you will lose some degree of control. With a compliant horse (or when the rider is a first class horseman like yourself) this loss of control will be of no consequence. But with a strong horse it might lead to some loss of control in some hands.

I loved your comment about how to deal with a runaway horse! I shall be tempted to quote you on this point when challenged about how 'dangerous' the bridle is, not having a bit.

Reins are always a very personal choice. We do offer reins but most people prefer to use their own reins anyway.

Don't apologize for providing feedback. I am happy to have all I can get from someone like you. It is, as my son would say, 'gold dust.' I am delighted to think that you will continue to use the bridle, and look forward to all the feedback you can give me.]

Donna, 8/6/02:

I wanted to write in and tell everyone how wonderful this bridle has been for me and my 12 year-old QH gelding. My horse was a reining champ when he was 7, and was always in a high port bit. Trail riding is all I do these days and I wanted him out of the high port and into something easier to pack.

However this horse has never been a beginner horse, some of his stunts included: rearing bucking jigging and I thought some of his problems came from the bit. I changed to a medium port and it was a mess. I could buy a different bit everyday and spend a fortune and still not find the right one for him.

I got on the Internet and started a search of hackamores and found that there are as many choices as bits. There was, however, some info on "The Bitless Bridle." After reading everything on the site, and going in some chat rooms to discuss it with other riders, I decided that I should try it. It made sense, and it had a money back guarantee.

Once I got the bridle, I had my husband come out with me to the ranch since I was trying this out on the trail (don't have a round pen) and wasn't really sure how he was going to act. I rode him first in his bit, which he hates and then put the bitless on and his head came down and he was totally a different horse.

I read all the testimonies and have to say I thought it was too good to be true. I have been having a great time trail riding with him since. I have had him in it for one month now and he has never bucked or reared or jiggged, even though I ride him out by myself (always been nervous without a buddy).

Happy Trails Again.

Janellen, 8/26/02:

I purchased two of your Bitless Bridles about two years ago and have been very, very pleased. In fact, I have so enjoyed the biothane bridle that I have not taken the leather one I ordered out of the box. Thank you for your contribution to a responsible and caring relationship with horses.

It would be wonderful if you could be a speaker at the TETRA convention. . . (Texas Equestrian Trail Rider's Assn). I would love for the Bitless Bridle concept to be made clear and presented to more people. "

Alexandra Suess, Vienna, Austria 8/27/02:

Here I am back with you again with my first report on using the bitless bridle. I received it four days ago and tried it out immediately. The headstall fits very well and I fitted it according to the user's manual. I was already composing my mail to you while I rode the first minutes, so great were my feelings!

My horse behaved as if he had never been ridden with anything other than the bitless bridle. Our communication was perfect. Pace and trot were a marvelous experience. I tried shoulder-in and half pass and everything worked perfectly. But when I did a transition to canter, I was desperate. He shook his head. He kept tossing it up or diving really deep into the sand of the arena. He nearly stumbled and it was not only ridiculous, it was dangerous. I then decided to ride as energetically forward as I could, slightly touching him with the whip. He made a couple of snoring noises and he sneezed (sometimes I think he has the features of a headshaker) but suddenly everything worked. I could ride flying changes and collect him at the canter very well.

I also lunged him with the bitless bridle headstall and realized how happy it made him. He is normally difficult to lunge and tends to panic. But with the bitless bridle he was nearly falling asleep, feeling very, very relaxed.

This euphoria lasted until yesterday. I was convinced that I had found the ultimate solution. I must report that the horse never felt heavy in my hands and that both of us were relaxed and not at all exhausted after our training.

But yesterday I experienced a bad backslide. Very soon after mounting the horse I realized that I could achieve no flexion whatsoever to the left. This annoying situation became worse, the longer I tried. I used my leg aids intensely; I tried to sit more on the left; I rode shoulder-in on the left hand, but nothing worked. He kept looking to the right and riding through corners became quite impossible. I then tried to bend the horse's head with the rein but the resistance was enormous.

Deeply depressed I brought him back to the stables and found quite a deep wound on the spot where the cross-over straps meet. I do not know whether this wound is a result of my trying to bend his head to the left, or whether his reluctance to bend to the left resulted from a painful feeling. *[Ed: Further information established that the sore area was due to left rein pressure]* He has always been much more difficult to work on the left hand and this has prevailed with the bitless headstall as well.

The headstall, nevertheless, definitely proves my trainer wrong. She kept explaining that the horse is reluctant on the left because I fidget too much with my left hand. I am however right-handed and this makes the bit so unpleasant for him. I always had the experience (with a bit and with the bitless bridle) that I have no weight on my right rein and all the weight on my left. Remedies like shoulder-in, half-halts, halts, etc. never really helped.

Well, I am of course desperate now, wondering how it came about that my horse was wounded by the straps and why it has become virtually impossible to achieve any flexion on the left hand. I am very much convinced that the bitless bridle is the best invention ever made for horse and rider and I am going to loan it to other riders who want to try it out. I am however eager to learn whether you can suggest any solution to my current problem. This sudden tossing up of the head, especially in canter, leads me to believe that he might have the headshaking syndrome or a spinal problem. Since the symptoms decrease after energetic riding this would speak against the headshaking syndrom, which would become more apparent after

the horse is warm. I must however admit, that there are always phases of a couple of days when the symptoms are very slight. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

[Dr. Cook's response (after receiving from Alexandra a completed questionnaire that allows me to get a more complete picture of a horse's problems with and without a bit): Your responses are most helpful. On the basis of what I now know I come up with the following suggestions.

But first, how much do you know about the history of RAMAZOTTI, your 8 year-old Belgian Warmblood, prior to May of this year when you first got him? My guess is that the previous owner could tell you quite a lot. As you will know better than I, most horses turn more readily in one direction than the other but obviously a complete refusal is another matter. Perhaps this has something to do with the strength of the aid (see below). I think that the soreness on his jaw is the effect of abnormal rein pressure rather than the cause of the refusal.

As your horse tosses his head, sneezes, and dislikes having a hose played on his head, I would say that your horse definitely has facial neuralgia and has probably had this problem for some time. Removal of the cause (the bit) will undoubtedly help but don't expect too much too soon. If a horse has had neuralgia for years it is not going to disappear overnight (or in four days) when the cause is finally removed. But I would certainly anticipate and hope for improvement in time. The fact that his headshaking does not always get worse with exercise does not rule out the diagnosis. I agree that most horses do get worse when warm but a few do work themselves out of it after they have been going a while.

Refusal to turn left without a bit suggests to me that your horse may only be willing to respond to the left cue when the pain in his mouth is enough to take priority over some pain elsewhere. So, yes, I would agree with you that there may be some problem in his spine (neck or back). As common things commonly occur, have you checked that the saddle is not the cause?

Perhaps this situation with turning is comparable with the difference in flexing at the poll, with and without a bit. A bit is very effective at persuading a horse to flex (rather too effective) and if a rider has been depending on achieving poll flexion with sheer force, they will be disappointed with the BB because poll flexion will not be achieved anything like as readily, using the same approach (as opposed to the correct use of seat, legs and balance).

To get further information, ask yourself, does he turn to the left on the lunge or long-line when there is no weight on his back? Please let me know. Does he lunge as easily counterclockwise as he does clockwise?

Incidentally, when you have lunged him in the past, have you done so with a bit in his mouth?

So my suggestion is to go back to some ground work for a while and also see if you can locate a physical reason for the lateral stiffness. I shall be most interested to get further bulletins. This way we can both learn.]

Christina, 8/30/02 :

I just got my bridle and the pony loves it. It's about time someone reinvented the bridle. I thank you and 'TWO BITS' thanks you!!!! It is so nice to train an undeveloped horse with out having to shove something in his mouth or put unneeded pressure on his nose, forcing him into position. And I am sure he appreciates it. It really shows in his demeanor. He is so willing. I guess I'll be able to say he has a virgin mouth now!!! Thanks again.

Patty Thomas, 9/3/02 :

I absolutely love the bridles. When I bought my Mustang last year he was in a Tom Thumb, and the owner told me that the bitless would NEVER work on him. He had it on the first week he came home and has had it on ever since. I am sponsoring an older gelding whose owner only rides a couple of times a year, and when she does she just hauls on his snaffle. So he has learned to put his head up and "ignore" the bit. With the bitless he has his head down and he's happy. Thanks again, and give Dr. Cook my thanks along with Comstock's and Grimmy's!

Lei, 9/5/02:

Here is a photograph of your bridle helping me get a second at Open Preliminary at Loudoun Horse Trials last weekend.

Lei, 11/14/01:

I'd like to tell you that I love my bitless bridle, but not as much as my horse does. I compete my Trakehner, CADET GREY, in preliminary and intermediate level eventing in your bitless bridle. He is much braver in his bitless bridle. Its too bad they won't let me go dressage in it, but at least the schooling in it has helped me improve his dressage at the shows. -

Mrs Alix, England, 9/9/02:

Thank you - you have given me my horse back!

I have a four year old TB x Hanovarian whom I have owned since she was a yearling. I am in no way an expert horse woman and was unsure as to whether I was up to backing her myself but felt I would take it a step at a time and ask for help if I had a problem. We have a fantastic relationship and I backed her myself in April. We hacked out quietly together but by June we were starting to have a few problems: she was getting a little nappy, she would sometimes lean on the bit, would jog coming home and was generally pushing her weight about (and at 17.2HH there is a lot of weight!).

After a lot of searching I sent her to an 'expert' for schooling. I had seen this guy work with horses, I knew people who worked with him and knew he had trained with Monty Roberts for a couple of years so felt he would be very sensitive. He specializes in young and problem horses so I thought he would put my horse back on the right track, but do it in a kind and sensitive manner.

After 3 weeks I went to collect her. She was very unhappy. She swung her quarters around at him when he went to tack her up, she had sores on the corner of her mouth, when I rode her she leant on the bit the whole time and had almost no steering. When I got her home, I couldn't catch her very easily, she was a nightmare to tack up, she napped worse than before, bucked every time I asked for an upward transition, and ever after about 15 minutes riding with the fattest snaffle bit I own, vaseline on the corners of her mouth and bit guards, the corners of her mouth were bleeding. I was devastated. I felt so awful what I had allowed to happen to my beautiful, gentle mare.

I left her alone for 2 weeks then started riding her for 5 minutes bareback with a head collar and reins attached - she seemed much more settled. I then searched the internet for information about hackamores as I thought this was going to be the only alternative option, although I was less than happy about using one as I had heard how harsh they are. Luckily, I happened on your website and liked what I saw. I am lucky enough to work with one of your

ex-vet students and she gave you a glowing recommendation and said she would trust your opinion on all things equine, so I ordered one.

The difference is phenomenal. My horse is happy to be ridden. She strides out with no hint of napping. She turns and stops with the lightest aids. She is polite to tack up because she does not dread what is going to happen. We are having fun together, and to me, that is what it is all about. I cannot thank you or praise your bridle enough. They should be in every tack room in Britain.

Thank you again.

Maureen, 9/10/02:

I bought a Bitless Bridle quite a while ago. Since then, I've moved to a different barn and also bought another horse. Both my horses are very happy with the bridle and I have no trouble on the trails here in Colorado, even with my green broke horse.

The other evening three of us were riding out on the trails, one horse for the first time. All the horses were wearing bitless bridles and one woman made the comment that we'd make a great photo advertisement for the Bitless Bridle. I agreed, then thought I should write and let you know how many people are using one. So far, seven horses are now being ridden in the bridle at the farm where I keep my horses, and an eighth may soon be added to the list.

A growing trend.

Mary, 9/17/02:

I ordered the biothane bitless bridle with rubber reins. I LOVE IT! Today we were finally able to test it out on our TWH. We were unable to use it when we got it a couple of days ago due to an injury to my horse's leg. CHEYENNE was not very pleasant under a walking-horse bridle. In fact, he reared up and flipped over because of this discomfort. We had recently purchased Cheyenne and had very little information on his habits. We know he is quite fond of people and is very friendly when not under tack. This is why we purchased him.

Today I tried the bridle hoping it might solve Cheyenne's problem. IT DID! My trainer got on him and couldn't believe the difference. I have been working Cheyenne on the ground without bridle and just using a halter with the long lines.

He did not like me using the bridle with the walking horse bit. I expect from here on we will only have more improvement in Cheyenne's training. Thank you and thank you for a great product.

Carlotta, Arizona, 9/21/02:

The Bitless Bridle is amazing! I got my draft-size headstall yesterday and went out as soon as I could to use it. OZ, my stout, strong, 17. 2 hh Percheron, seemed to really be comfortable with the bridle immediately (anything that makes eating treats easier is welcome in his book!). He readily responded to halt commands at the walk and trot, but my primary reason for purchasing the bitless bridle was due to problems at the canter where I was having difficulty getting OZ to turn. Typically he would stiffen his neck and brace against me refusing to turn or listen to leg aids. With the bit I would end up turning his nose so much to the inside that his shoulder would fall out and he would stop cantering.

Well, with the bitless bridle turning was no problem, whether cantering to the right or left! I believe the pushing action of the bridle made it easier for him to maintain his balance and keep his shoulder underneath him. He did not give me any problem when I asked him to keep cantering in circles. No trying to pull me towards the barn either!

He is usually more difficult cantering to the left and while he still leans to the inside more cantering a circle to the left he was able to canter several consecutive circles! Importantly, typically after cantering with a bit in his mouth OZ is winded and breathing rather heavily. Not so with the bitless bridle! I was amazed at his ability to recover in the absence of a bit! Stopping also was no problem!

On a side note, with a bit in his mouth, OZ drools a lot! I like to give him treats to reward him for good behavior when riding (this works best for OZ and me) but he would have all this "cookie-covered" drool all around his mouth when wearing a bit. Again, not so with the bitless bridle! After eating treats his mouth was clean!

I love this bitless bridle and so does OZ. Of course, we have only used it once and have more testing, but after our first ride, I am glad to say that the bridle works just as specified on the website! Thanks so much Dr. Cook!!

Julie, 9/26/02:

I just wanted to give you some feedback about my experiences with your bridle as it may help others. I purchased a Bitless Bridle about 18 months ago. My 5 yr horse had been previously bitted, but was not happy in his mouth, evaded and ran back from the bit and headshook a lot, in spite of expert advice on biting and veterinary attention to his mouth. Clearly, due to his sensitivity in his mouth, and his low tushes, anything other than a soft rubber straight bar was not going to work. As he could evade this so easily, and the plan was for my 11 year-old daughter to ride, I was a bit concerned about the brakes out on a hack, thus I acquired a Bitless Bridle. Initially, he would not settle into the Bitless Bridle either so I put him into a very soft neoprene padded endurance hackamore. The headshaking stopped within days and we were able to get on with hacking out with sufficient brakes.

However, my youngster is also a very nappy type, so although the endurance hackamore gave us brakes, there is no side (lateral) control and he often shot out sideways and up when he didn't fancy the path ahead. He also chomped a bit . . . on nothing, as there was no bit in.

However, after a couple of months in the hackamore I re-tried the Bitless Bridle with a simple straight bar bit not connected to any rein. As my youngster is very mouthy, he's happy to chomp, but as it's not used there's never any pressure to run from. The time in the endurance hackamore seems to have provided the bridge between conventional biting and riding truly bit pressure free, but with lateral control.

One final point, and this is really the point I want to make as it is so useful to know. My youngster will rear and spin round to avoid going down a path he doesn't fancy. I have found since using the Bitless Bridle (with pacifier bit in situ for him to chomp his feeling out!) he can't get right up. I sit deep and back, open my arms, wide and low with a firm contact and push him into a circle to reface the direction we were going. I assume the poll action of the 'O' straps pushes the rear energy back down and we use that energy to push on forward, without too much of fight. Once youngsters get into the rearing habit, it's very difficult to get them out of it and it does take some commitment from the rider. I do feel your Bitless Bridle may be very helpful in extinguishing the rearing habit and is very, very useful for nappy type horses. I am now extremely happy with my Bitless Bridle and I am glad I have persevered as I feel it has made my

rather challenging little horse a much safer ride than he could have been, had it been left to conventional biting. -

[Dr. Cook's comment: If a horse has developed facial neuralgia from pressure of the bit on bone, this pain may not disappear overnight when the bit is removed. For a while the 'memory' may remain.]

9 year old Christina, Chestertown, MD, 9/26/02:

I have just had my third riding lesson. My pony is called JEZEBEL. I used a bitless bridle. It was great. Jezebel likes the bitless bridle and goes where I want. I think kids would like turquoise and green bridles with black buckles.

Gina, 9/27/02:

I have been using the bitless bridle since this August, and can hardly believe the difference in my six year old Paint mare, GRACIE. For the 2.5 years I've owned her, she's been fussy and defensive about her mouth, and having white nose/mouth, tends to get very badly sunburned in the summer time, and wind burned in the winter. Now her fussing has stopped, she is more confident to move forward, and even thrusts her head into the bridle when I hold it out to put it on.

We do jumping, dressage, distance riding and some western riding. She has improved in every single area with this bridle. I didn't think a piece of tack could make this much of a difference, but it has. The best investment I have made for my mare, ever. It has taken the worry out of riding, and put the fun back in it! Her gaits have smoothed out, they are much more confident, and she is starting to live up to her name!

Thank you so much. This is was a relationship-saver between my mare and I!

Sarah Getchell, 10/2/02:

I wanted to tell you that BANTRY and I won our open preliminary division at the Plantation Field event in Unionville in September (wearing a bit for dressage). We ordered the video, and if it's any good you can copy it if you want. I thought you'd be glad to know that the Bitless Bridle finally got a blue ribbon! Talk to you soon.

Lynne, 10/3/02:

Subject: Love this bridle!

A friend of mine told me about the Bitless Bridle and convinced me to buy one for my Quarter Horse gelding. I figured that I had nothing to lose with the money back guarantee, and watched the calendar carefully, fully expecting to send the thing back and receive a refund.

It has been several months since I received the bridle and put it to the test, and I have been more than satisfied with the results. They are:

- I have a horse who no longer evades bridling. I used to have to slowly release the cross ties and hold onto his nose to keep him from turning and running to the end of the barn. If he didn't try to escape he would raise his head and get a fearful, wild-eyed look. He will now stand loose in the yard while I remove his halter and slip on his Bitless Bridle.

- I have more control while riding than I did with either the snaffle or curb bit, and I am more relaxed knowing that I am not hurting his mouth.

- He will "give" to the Bitless Bridle pressure as he did for the bit. He will come up round and work off his back end.

- I have been able to line-longe him successfully for the first time since I have owned him (5 years). This is a major improvement over our experiences with the halter or bitted bridle, which were near disasters every time (pulling out of the circle, backing-up like a freight train). I just removed the reins from the rings, brought the rings together and attached the longe line snap to them. As soon as he feels the end of the line and the pressure on his head, he will come in until the line goes slack. I have never been able to longe him with slack in the line before and certainly have never been able to canter him on a line without dirt skiing. As an added surprise, I longed him in a field, not an arena. . . no boundaries and plenty of opportunity for escape. Yes, I'm crazy. :-)

- And confidence in the Bitless Bridle!

Thank you for a great product!

Marian, UK, 10/3/02:

The leather Bitless Bridle arrived safely on 23 September, thank you. I rode out with it 26 Sept. and did a 10-mile Sponsored Ride, on Sun 29 Sept. JASPER, my New Forest Pony, was quite laid back about it (he had been on a Parelli course !) and even though he wanted to catch up with the horses in front of us it was straightforward to keep him in check (No battle). I have continued to ride out using the bridle and have had no problems and find steering easier.

Nickie, West Des Moines, Iowa, 10/3/02:

I finally got a chance to take my mare out on a ride with the new bridle I purchased from you. She did great. She was her normal hot self (it has also been a month since I rode her) but she did not get as agitated when I made her slow down or stop. She was overly wound-up due to another horse "calling" her the whole time, so it really surprised me. Usually she will toss her head and then hit the bit of course, and then become more and more agitated, but without the pain she stayed at an even level. Thanks for such a great bridle.

Although, I wish you had the reins in about 2'+ longer lengths (I ride with them as split reins and that would be the only thing that would make these bridles any better. -

Kathy, 10/3/02:

Subject: Bitless Bridle has cured the jiggling!

My 22 year-old Arab mare no longer jigs! I bought your Bitless Bridle about 6 months ago for MISTY. She is a high energy horse despite her age (she doesn't know she's 22!) and has always been very jiggy and didn't relax and walk out well. I'm not sure exactly why the Bitless Bridle works, but she walks out great and does not jig anymore! I love riding her. I used to jig off and on for hours and it was no fun. I would get her to walk for a few steps and she would go right back to jiggling. Not anymore! I have noticed that she drinks from creeks and cattle tanks much more readily now also. I used to worry because she rarely drank when we were out trail riding. We usually ride from 2-4 hours up in the mountains. Riding her in the arena has

been great with the Bitless Bridle also. Shoulder-in, leg-yielding at the trot, and backing have become easier and much more relaxed. I just love it. I hope my new 6 yr old mare will respond as well as Misty has. Thanks for developing such a great bridle!

Sharon, 10/6/02:

Just a note to let you know that my horse TWISTER and I won the AERC 50-Mile National Heavyweight Championship. We placed 9th overall. We couldn't have done it without the Bitless Bridle. He ate, drank and relaxed the whole ride. There are several good pictures of him in the bridle that I have if you want to see them. Just let me know.

Stacie, Vancouver Washington, 10/17/02:

From: "Warrior Horse Gyr!"

Here is a picture of my draft horse in his Bitless Bridle. I do medieval reenactment and this picture is at a local event. The bridle has worked really well. He responds to it a lot better than he did with the numerous bits that I tried. Even when he has spooked I have been able to stop him.

The only thing I would change is to make sure that anyone ordering a bridle for a draft horse can get a custom browband. The one you sent with the bridle wasn't even close to fitting and I have holes on the noseband that go to the very end of the leather. There are even different sizes among the draft horses and mine is in the extra large draft category!

I am so glad to have the bridle! So is my horse!!

[Dr. Cook responds: Thank you for your delightful e-mail and splendid photograph. Your horse definitely wins the prize for the largest horse yet ridden in the Bitless Bridle! What is his height and breeding? May we add your comments to our collection?]

Stacie, Vancouver Washington, 10/17/02:

Wow! Thanks for responding to my email!! I am SOOOOOO glad you came up with this bridle. Thank you, thank you, thank you!!! SOLON loves it. I had been riding him around in just his halter simply because he was so unhappy with any kind of bit. I tried them all. Snaffle, low port curb - but after being frustrated and just popping his halter on he responded well, his ears were forward, he was very happy. So I heard about your bridle on the Draft Horse Forum. And called the very next day. What a dream bridle!! You are so cool!!

Solon is a just turned five-year-old purebred Percheron gelding. He is over 18. I hands and apparently still growing (I already use a 55 gallon drum as a mounting block to get on him! Boy is that a site to see). He weighs in at around 2100 pounds. I am using him for medieval reenactment with a couple of medieval groups. I tell everyone I can about this bridle. It simply is the greatest. And yes, PLEASE use my comments and picture on your site. Everyone out there should know just how incredibly great this bridle is no matter what size the horse is. And Solon is a big boy!!

Joan, 10/21/02:

My mare won 'Best Rookie Horse' at the 25-mile ride this weekend in her new Beta Bitless Bridle! We were fourth overall in the lightweight division w/ 52 riders total for the competition.

My mare was very excited during the entire 25-mile ride and I had to rate her speed the ENTIRE ride because if you finish too early, you are penalized. As a result, the hair was rubbed off two spots on her nose where the noseband sits. I never have to keep such a hold on her during her training rides, just during the excitement of the actual competition. I was considering putting fleece around the noseband for protection, but I wanted to ask you if you had a better suggestion?

[Dr. Cook responds:

Carole passed on your good news and I want to add my congratulations. I am delighted to hear about your triumph.

A sheepskin noseband wrap is on its way but you might also double check that the noseband is placed low enough (1.5" from the corner of the mouth to the bottom of the noseband) on your horse's head and also snug enough (one flat finger only between jaw and chinstrap). If either of these items is not correct, riders may have to work harder to control their horses than necessary and this can result in hair rubs. Best wishes for further success]

Teddy, York, PA 10/22/02:

I wanted to thank you for your information and instructions when I came down to buy your bridle. I have used it four times. My gelding (16'3 hands) has always had an iron mouth and, in my opinion, never did like a bit. I have tried several different kinds. More recently his head kept going higher as he evaded the bit.

Well, I adjusted the Bitless Bridle, mounted in my ring. The first thing noticed was a drop of 6 to 8 inches in his head carriage at the walk. The second session, we did walk and trot work and started to work with collection. He dropped his head and for the first time he was reaching down into the bridle. By the end of the third session we were trotting circles with a nice bend, body relaxed and head stretching downward.

The fourth time, I could not stay in the ring any longer and we went for a trail ride. I do not think I have ever seen my SHEFFER so happy and relaxed. We walked trotted and cantered with out any resistance. He was paying attention to my leg and seat and was very light in my hand.

I am delighted. Thank you.

Lorna, 10/26/02:

I will NEVER put a bit in my horses mouth again!! WE LOVE THIS BRIDLE!!! I bought a bridle from you a while back, and I don't know how I lived without it now. I have a Hanoverian who always threw his head. I tried tie-downs, which he broke, martingales, no help, etc. From the first time I put the Bitless Bridle on, he has not thrown his head once. We went (bareback) through an orange grove he had never been through before, & his manners were perfect. No tossing, no rearing, no prancing, all of "his" problems were gone. We are both much happier. I ride dressage with him, and he neck reins fine with it. I will never put a bit in his mouth again. Thank you for the wonderful invention.

Kathleen, Tucson, AZ, 10/28/02:

I recently purchased a Bitless Bridle and my success with my horse is excellent! Today I ordered another one. I heard about your bridle from the AERC Ridecamp listserv. Your bridle is exactly what was described to me. Thank you for the great product. My mare is a typical story that you must hear often. I purchased her 3+ years ago. She had been over-bitted with a heavy port bit by her previous owner. I started with a snaffle, she responded very well. So control and response are not issues for me. I was looking for a good trail bridle for long hours of use that gave as much freedom as possible to my horse and to me --with quick response if needed. You have the answer with your Bitless Bridle. I feel like I ride with a small halter. The horse is in contact with me, she can drink and eat without changes, and it looks good too. "

Susan, 11/8/02:

I've been meaning to write this for a while. I want to tell you how much my horse and I love our Bitless Bridle. It is by far the best piece of equipment I have ever purchased . . . and there has been a lot . . . many bits, (now hanging on the wall), saddles, blankets, halters, bridles etc. I feel so good about using it because I know that my horse no longer has fear-based reactions when I use the reins. And he responds better and with much more subtle cues. There is no reason for me to ever use a bit or hackamore again and I am so glad! Thanks so much.

Nancy, 11/13/02:

I will be delivering the bridle to my friend this week. I will be sure and take her picture after we fit the bridle. She will be thrilled - she has a very nice Lippitt Morgan - being 77 she doesn't have her balance any more and her horse is very appreciative of the Bitless Bridle and she has complete control of him with your bridle. We were a tad bit concerned when she first thought about using the bridle, being a Lippitt he can be a touchy at times. . . but he has become so good - much quieter for her. Surprised us all . . . I will email the pictures, hopefully this weekend.

If the Nor'easter holds off until Sunday afternoon I am planning on going to a trail ride in the morning . . . me and my (TWH) "headbanger" horse . . . haha! I still have to say thank you for the brain installation. I have made remarkable progress with this horse these last few years. And I had been working at it for 7 years (previously) with this horse. There are no words that can express the debt of gratitude that I owe to you for encouraging me to keep using this bridle. When I tell you that this bridle was the answer to my prayers - I mean it!!

Talk with you soon - I am thrilled that you are able to make a difference in a whole lot of people's and horse's lives.

Nancy, MA 7/17/03 :

How are things going with the bridle? I get inquiries from time to time - have had great fun talking with people about their horses - most love to just talk on and on about their horses. . . which is fine - I enjoy the stories. . There are quite a few characters in this vast universe of life. . . haha.

I am still loving my bridles and so are my horses. . . I did have a little disagreement with a vet/chiro that I had come out for my old horse - he was having trouble chewing and turns out

his jaw was mis-aligned due to incisors not allowing the molars to make contact so therefore he was putting tremendous pressure on the jaw to chew his food. . . to make a long story short - the dentist filed down the excess incisors and the molars came together but the jaw was still out so had the vet/chiro out the fix that problem - well - she did not want that horse ridden in the Bitless Bridle because it would put too much pressure on the poll and jaw. . . so I tried riding him in a bit and all he did was open his mouth to evade the bit so consequently it knocked his jaw out again. . . so had the chiro back again and told her - so much for that theory. . . I am going back the Bitless Bridle. . . and he has been fine every since. . .

I have one in my truck now and when I go places and people are riding I ask them if they want to try one on their horse. . . haha I have a demo bridle - the one you so generous gave to me - and I loan it out to anyone that would like to try it. . . in fact - one lady has it now and it's spoken for to two others next week. . .

Well - just saying hello and letting you know I am still one of your fans.

Nancy, 3/1/03:

You will be pleased to know that my wild horse got 3rd place in pleasure trail horse division of Northern Walking Horse. We didn't have to work very hard for that ribbon but the fantastic part about it is the fact that he was able to get out there and compete at all. We had a good time doing the little bit that we did.

Anette, Oslo, Norway, 12/5/02:

Thank you a lot for the totally fantastic Bitless Bridle! I tried it today and I have never enjoyed my hack more! It was so much fun, and all I can say is thank you . . . my pony was safer and happier, and I am not putting a bit in his mouth again!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Thank you soooooooooooooo much!"

Anette, 12/14/02:

I have now set my bitless bridle to the top shelf! Why, Bob Cook, how can you make such a thing. . . fantastic!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Andrea, Wisconsin, 12/10/02:

I bought a Bitless Bridle last year and LOVE it. I would love to get rid of all my bits, but don't know who would ever want to ride in one after learning about bitless! Let everybody know that my hypoxic, navicular paint horse doesn't roar in his Bitless Bridle, and both my gaited horses gait better and more freely in them than with the torture devices known as "walker bits". I'm sold. Thanks again -

Beth, Leavenworth, Kansas, 12/28/02:

I got a cob-sized Bitless Bridle in leather for my 9-year-old APHA, PETEY. Petey has been a pain in the neck since I got him - he seems to have attention deficit disorder , if horses can have that. He would buck whenever I started to canter, he would throw his head up and down and he wiggled back and forth and refused to go straight. I figured part of this was due to

equine uvietis in his left eye, which made him rather spooky. Anyway, every time I rode him, I was a nervous wreck, I never knew what kind of mood he was in.

I found your website by chance, and got the bridle a couple of weeks ago. Today was the first day I had a chance to ride Petey, so I tried it out first in the arena, then out in the woods on a trail. He seems to pay much better attention to me, his ears listen to me and he no longer weaves back and forth. He stopped immediately with no pulling at all. All my nervousness and fear disappeared after about 15 minutes with the bridle ≠ I didn't try using a bitted bridle over it, I figured, lets see what happens, and it was all very good.

So far, I am quite impressed, and if this keeps up, I'll order another one for my 18-year-old quarter horse, Willie (who is a good as horse as can be, except he takes off after going over a jump). I am going on a 3 hour trail ride tomorrow with some friends, who are dying to see if Petey really does act differently with this bridle. I think they will be impressed. Thanks very much.

Bitless Bridle User Comments, 2001

Lyle, Renfrew, PA, 1/8/01:

I have used your bridle now for two months on ANGEL BEAR, my 4-year-old TWH/cross racking mare and I love it. It is terrific and I am telling everyone. It has solved so many problems. In the past, whenever I requested a half-halt or a stop, I had a fight on my hands. She would toss and shake her head and would not stop. I was advised to use a stronger bit but I felt this was the wrong way to go. With the Bitless Bridle she is no longer headshaking and she stops on a dime. Now I want another bridle for a new pony we purchased at Xmas.

Flora, 1/8/01:

My horse never seemed to object to the bit but you can tell how much happier he is without it. Even the other riders in the barn have noticed the difference."

Claudia, Germany, 1/11/01:

I got the bitless bridle at the beginning of the year and tried it with my Icelandic mare. It works fantastic when we ride in the countryside.

Molly, TX, 1/12/01:

We have a 6-year-old Lippitz Morgan mare that has a shallow roof to her mouth. With a bit she slings her head, foams at the mouth and is constantly chomping and champing on the bit, leaving bite marks on it. We tried a Hackamore and a tie-down but she did not respond well to this. With the bitless bridle, however, she is perfectly content.

Sabine, Qualicum Beach, BC, Canada, 1/26/01:

I LOVE IT! More than I ever imagined. I am still trying to get over the "No Bit" mentality. I tried it on two of my horses and WOW! They were ever so light and relaxed. The slightest touch of the reins and they bend and flex so beautifully (not to mention the awesome breaks). I am heading out for our normal weekend mountain trip and I am just upset I can't afford one for all my horses right now. I am tossing my brand new Myler bit and every other full cheek snaffle I have. We have been looking for something like the bitless bridle for a very long time and I am so glad to have met you at the expo. I was sold on the whole concept after hearing your lecture but you can forget your 30 day trial guarantee because you are NOT getting my new bitless bridle back ;0) "Just got a call this morning from one of my clients, Jana Schmidt, who is absolutely delighted with the Bitless Bridle she just received in the mail. She is going to order another one for her young horse. And since we're seeing her during the Practicum with my students, they'll all be able to check it out. She likes it so much, she's riding her mare twice a day now because it is so delightful--and Jana is an excellent rider, having trained long with one of our natural horsemanship instructors in the area. She says her horse absolutely loves it (kind of reminds me of a kid with a new toy...).

Heather, Hopkinton, MA 1/26/01:

I just received my bitless bridle yesterday. On the first try it looks like it will be my problem solver. My horse went great in it.

Heather, 3/11/01:

I can't thank you enough for designing and marketing this product. It is the answer to our prayers. I could just go on and on about this bridle. I haven't been this excited about something since I bought my very first horse. Thank you from all of us but most of all our horses thank you. -

1/29/01: The following is an extract from Dr. Jessica Jahiel's free weekly electronic Q&A newsletter 'HORSESENSE' (available at www.prairienet.org/jjahiel), published here with her kind permission.

From: "Kerry" Subject: hackamore or bitless bridle?

Dear Jessica,

I recently bought a hackamore for my ex-racehorse Thoroughbred who was very strong in a bit and hated any pressure on his mouth. He works beautifully in the hackamore, is much more controllable and seems much happier now. I have also, though, been hearing things about it being more severe than a bit and should only be used by very experienced riders. Why is this? Does it disturb their breathing?

It has begun to make me feel worried that it may be causing harm to my horse. I always try to keep a soft contact and don't ask him to go on the bit. Please could you give me some more information about hackamores and how high on the nose they should be placed. The one that I have is a mild mechanical hackamore which has a wide padded nose band and a curb chain connected to metal parts on each side which have short shanks...Thank you. Kerry

Dr. Jahiel's reply:

Hi Kerry! You've actually got several questions here. I'll start with the last one first. The design of your particular mechanical hackamore makes it relatively mild for a mechanical

hackamore. You can make it even milder (and better) by taking off the curb chain and replacing it with a soft leather strap. You can then improve it again by taking a piece of sheepskin or synthetic fleece and making a cover for that strap.

Mechanical hackamores are not kind bits. The one you have is probably the single **LEAST UNKIND** mechanical hackamore, but even though it isn't blatantly cruel, it's also not terribly useful. The problem with any hackamore is that it is not designed for lateral control, much less lateral subtlety. It's a control mechanism based on longitudinal control of the horse - from nose to tail, or, rather, from nose and jaw and poll to hind feet! You can't be subtle with it, you can only stop with it, and do very crude steering.

Having said that, though, let me say also that you are on the right track! Many bits are cruel too, either by design, because they are poorly made, because they are damaged, or because they are adjusted badly. Some bits cause pain because they don't fit the contours of the horse's mouth in a way that lets the horse relax and carry the bit comfortably. Some bits are well made, in good shape, adjusted properly, and fit the horse's mouth properly UNTIL the rider takes up a steady contact! Many single-joint bits are in this category. And then there are the bits that would not cause any pain if the rider were only competent. There are any number of horses that are greatly relieved and very happy when the rider stops using any kind of a bit.

The hackamore noseband should be high enough to rest on the bone of the horse's nose rather than on the cartilage, and it should be adjusted so that it doesn't drop onto the cartilage when the reins are slack - and when the reins are taut. If you place the noseband too low, on the cartilage, then yes, it can indeed hurt the horse and interfere with its breathing. But I would guess that your hackamore is adjusted correctly, since your horse is happy and calm.

Don't worry about "on the bit" - I suspect you've misunderstood what it means, anyway. Think about "on the aids" instead! It's a better and more accurate phrase. Both phrases are about balance and communication - meaning that you are in constant gentle communication with the horse, and he with you, so that you have a calm riding dialogue. "On the bit" in dressage terms refers to a particular carriage of head and neck that the horse develops **AS A RESULT** of long-term progressive correct training; it can come **ONLY** from such training, and is not something that can be attained in any other way. People tend to look at a horse that is "on the bit" and try to duplicate the only thing they can **SEE** - the head and neck position - but they shouldn't try. It doesn't work because it can't work. "On the bit" is not a frozen position, it's a live communication that is not just the result of a process and style of training, but is part of the training itself. You and your horse are just at the very beginning of this training. Keep him comfortable, happy, and able and willing to respond to your quiet signals quickly and cheerfully - and you'll have a horse that is truly "on the aids", listening to your legs and seat and balance and breathing, not just to your hands.

Of all the mechanical hackamores available, yours is the only design I could ever recommend. I have one in my barn - it's something I've used for years, for casual trail-riding. I used it because it let the horse go without a bit whilst still retaining enough freedom in the jaw to eat grass comfortably during breaks on trail-rides. ;-) But it was very limited and limiting - all the rider could say with it was "slow down" and "stop", which makes for a rather limited conversation. My mechanical hackamore is gathering dust on the barn wall right now.

There are other options you can explore - an English jumping hackamore, for instance, is less coercive than the mechanical hackamore, and allows the sort of lateral control that you would get from two leadropes and a halter. It's not much, but it's better than nothing. Or you could use a drop noseband with rings (adjusted higher, like a normal cavesson) and reins attached to the rings - this gives you a milder equivalent of a Western sidepull. Or you could

use a Western sidepull - but the sort with a wide flat noseband rather than the pieces of lariat, which are quite severe. Or you might try something else entirely:

There's a very interesting bridle available, something that you might want to try, if you want to ride your horse without a bit AND you want to be able to school him and supple him and help him develop his physique and understanding. I find myself increasingly impressed with the Bitless Bridle (you can see photos at the bridle's website, www.bitlessbridle.com). This version of a bitless bridle is unique in that it actually promotes lateral communication and thus allows infinitely better communication overall, and allows you to work on the lateral as well as the longitudinal suppling of the horse. I would recommend it over any mechanical hackamore, because it doesn't limit the rider to longitudinal control of the horse. Once you can add lateral control, as you can with this bridle, the inherent limitations of the mechanical hackamore are no longer an issue - and you still don't have to use a bit.

Katie and Mary, Exeter, New Hampshire, 2/2/01:

Hello, my name is Katie Norton. I am a student of Amanda Hanson, who's father, Dave Hanson ordered a bridle from you. While using it on my Thoroughbred mare, I found her to be extremely soft, supple and willing to work. At 17, she has lost some of her topline, and she was sucking back off the bit, making activating her hind end near to impossible. Thanks to the bridle, and the lack of bit, my mare, MARY, is moving freely, and like the hunter she is supposed to be. Her flat work has improved, and her dangerous habit of bucking and spinning has now been dropped to almost non-existent. She is happy to work and finds no evasions. Thank You."

Jane, Warwickshire, UK, 2/12/01:

I've been meaning to email to let you know that I'm getting on very well with my bitless bridle! I use it on two horses, one 4-year-old and one 9-year-old. They go really well in it and though we only go out pleasure riding at the moment I feel perfectly safe and the horses are happy! Hope to do shows and driving as we progress.

Janice, 2/12/01:

I would like to provide you with some feedback. I'd best start with a reintroduction of myself and what provoked me to purchase your product. I wrote to you back in December regarding the benefits of purchasing the Bitless Bridle for my severely abused rescue mare, EVE. She is a nine year old, unbroken Arabian broodmare that has begun training under saddle. She has sustained previous muscular injuries on the right side of her neck, from the poll into her shoulder. These injuries require therapeutic warm up exercises to her neck such as bending and stretching of her entire neck in both directions. This must be accomplished before and after mounting.

One of the greatest difficulties I knew I'd encounter is "how" can this be accomplished without causing her to tilt her muzzle upward from pulling the bit or even when using a halter. She needs her entire head vertical to the ground during this exercise, not tilted. I just could not apply these techniques with conventional bridles or halters.

The design of the Bitless Bridle intrigued me because it applies gentle even pressure to the entire head not just to the mouth or lower jaw. The Bitless Bridle accomplished this unusual therapeutic exercise even with the encumbrance of a running martingale.

EVE has other difficulties that are related to her years of abuse. She is terrified of humans and she is very sensitive physically and mentally. These factors individually and collectively cause this mare to panic, especially while being ridden. Training sessions can be moving along beautifully when all of a sudden she may hear or see a human within 700 ft. and this perfectly controlled mare will suddenly become fraught with terror and panic. Her only thought is to escape. She also panics when you apply the bit or when you're asking her something new. Steady light contact with the bit is fine. That is until you use more than a pinky of pressure, then she panics.

So imagine during a perfect training session she begins to panic because she heard someone approaching on foot, way off in the distance. The first natural response in this situation is to pull gently on the reins and verbally try to calm her, right? Wrong! She loses it the moment you increase pressure on the bit. Usually you have to slacken the reins, grab the horn and just let it ride out. The big difficulty I run into is saddle slippage. I've tried a range of styles, types and tree sizes and widths and every one of them slips. She is so small and dainty with flat, well-rounded, wide withers that everything just rotates with such ease.

Since I received the bitless bridle I have used it twice, once for lunging and most recently for riding. She has not had a training session since mid-October 2000. I lunged her sometime in January for 15 - 20 minutes with a lunge line and biting rig using the Bitless Bridle. Normally the pressure of the bit causes her to panic. She will continue to panic upwards of 10-30 minutes for each direction. Free lunging also causes such a reaction.

On this particular day she did her panic lunge three times around on slippery frozen uneven footing in the pasture. On her fourth turn she realized the bridle was vastly different. Then an amazing thing happened! She stopped and tested the bridle in both directions a few times, visibly relaxed and calmly "walked" off on cue. She was pure precision. Every cue was instantaneous, she was collected and balanced.

Oh the sheer irony of it all. She's perfect and we aren't in an equitation class. Nor, is there anyone there to see it. For the very first time she was able to do a spiral pattern in each direction going outward and then inward again. We finished inside 15-20 minutes.

The first time I rode her in the Bitless Bridle was 3 days ago. There's a foot of snow on the ground and its melting on this 50 + degree day making things slick. She trembled as I eased my foot in the stirrup but did not move. I took my sweet ol' time mounting/dismounting, repeating things and rubbing her all over and generally encouraging her to accept me and try to relax. We did a lot of standing and walking. She did quite well, even managed to point her ears forward and listen. The true test of this Bitless Bridle, I knew, would be during a panic episode. I'd always believed if I could catch her early enough I'd be able to bring her under control but that just wasn't possible using a bit. A bit only incited further panic and loss of control.

In short order, we found a large patch of ice and slush under the snow and did some fair amount of scrabbling. By the time she grabbed a purchase she was in a full panic and her 10 month-old colt is having the time of his life racing past, body slamming and nipping his mother. Her colt stands the same amount of hands as his dam. Anyway, she's wiggling out when the little trouble-maker sneaks up behind us and nips her butt. That caused another scrabble.

She was fairly unhinged by time she found all her feet. She surged forward, I eased back on the reins, she hip-hopped and I felt like she was rounding out her back to buck. I released, she moved forward and I eased back again and she stopped dead in her tracks. She gathered

together some semblance of thought and I helped her relax as best she was capable and we continued. She had two more moments that were over before they'd begun. We finished up far-a-field. We stood there a good long time just relaxing and praising her to no end. I dismounted and she never moved.

I was so impressed I had to take advantage and dismount 3 more times and by golly she just stood there. I went nicely overboard on the praise to the point she was relaxed and was enjoying herself. When I scratched her behind her poll she gently rubbed against my finger tips reminding me of a cat. As for me, I was having the time of my life, I was so happy just to be riding and I was so incredibly relaxed. I credit the foot of snow for the fearless, relaxed attitude. I figured if I came off I'd only be making snow angels instead of seeing them.

Kathy, Algoma, WI 2/23/01:

These bridles are fantastic. I would like to use them on all four of my horses. The bridles are working great ... They have given me a lot more confidence riding my mare. She is working better in this bridle than any other bridle she has ever worn. Thank you.

Chris, Waynesville, OH 2/28/01 :

Hello, Dr. Cook! I'll have to add my testimonial to all the others you have about your great bridle! I am new to horses. Almost two years ago I acquired my first horses ever via wild horse adoption from BLM. We have been delighted with the experience, so much so that my husband and I adopted two more at the Wild Horse Workshop 2000 (sponsored by Least Resistance Training Concepts, from whom I first heard about your bridle).

I've tried to read and learn all that I can about gentle or natural horsemanship. But there are limitations to how I can train, due simply to my lack of experience. Fortunately, the lady with whom I have been taking riding lessons is also a wonderful trainer. So, a week ago we took my mare over to her stables and the three of us have a training lesson every day.

At the same time, there was a former-rescue Arabian mare at the barn, whose owner wished to sell her. This mare is very sweet but having trouble with stops, leaning on the bit, and always hypersensitive to any rein pressure. Her first instincts were to run away very fast... Well, I liked this horse from the first time I met her, a year ago. She is mine now.

I wrote to my friend Janet Tipton at LRTC and said, well, now I have a Mustang and an Arabian that need tack, can you recommend a good place to acquire bits and bridles and stuff. She said that Sharon and Willis Lamm, the founders of LRTC, have been using your product on their horses, and that Janet had just ordered one herself. I looked at your web site (very well done, too -- I thought it indicated that the product would also be high quality) - and placed my order.

You know how sometimes events seem to converge on one point? The same day that the sale of the Arabian to me was finalized, my order from you arrived. So I slipped BTRA'S new bridle on her, her old leather martingale, the new reins, etc.... took her into the arena... and I had a new horse in more ways than one. She stops. She is flexible. She listens. She doesn't run away or try to "squirt" out from under, or have any other fearful reactions to rein pressure. She is far less anxious when she is being tacked up. She has become so responsive that I find I am able to direct her movement with just my eyes... and this is because she is in a relaxed and trusting state, and so am I.

It wasn't long before everyone in the barn wanted to borrow the bridle. First they tried it on a large warmblood gelding with an "attitude" at riding time. No more attitude!!! THAT sure made everyone sit up and pay attention.

So next they tried it on a younger horse-in-training. This horse had been mistreated by a previous owner and trainer and really had a sour, actually dangerous, outlook on further training. But he likes that bitless bridle and has made wonderful progress in a very short time... after little to no progress the previous three months.

Another horse arrived at the barn at the same time the bitless bridle did. He was starved, had been abused, isolated in a pasture with no other horses and little attention from humans. His teeth have of course also been neglected and there was no way to put a bit in his mouth. But, his longevity at his new home is contingent on his ability to become a reliable lesson horse before the summer season rolls around. So what the heck... they tried the bitless bridle on this horse and the barn's owner is letting his little ten-year-old daughter ride him for a few minutes each day. He responds to both the bridle and the little girl beautifully. His future and security seem very bright. (Lesson horses at this stable are very pampered and well cared for.)

My Mustang will be started with the bridle in about a week and I am extremely excited about that! The concept of shoving a metal bar into her mouth, when she trusts me and loves me so much, felt wrong in my soul all along.

All this to say, that you have a growing number of fans, me in particular. I am setting some money aside and hope to buy a leather bridle from you shortly.

Thanks for a fantastic product!

Debbie, Troutville, Virginia, 3/15/01:

I received my bitless bridle and put it to work on a fiesty Saddlebred mare. I certainly could tell no difference in control from the bits I have used in the past, except the downward transitions were quicker in response. The mare seemed more pleasant with our schooling and sidepassed to the right extremely well, which is something she normally resists animatedly.

Though she tossed her head from time to time, I think she liked working in it. I sure did because I am no longer supporting her with my hands and I don't have to feel guilty about being in her mouth anymore. I'm sure I will be wanting to order more, as I have 10 school horses who will be ever so grateful.

Please tell me, which type of showing are these bridles allowed if any. I would love to premiere this seasons local shows not only shoeless but bridleless as well.

William, St Fairbanks, Alaska, 3/16/01:

Been using a bitless bridle for two months, on three Arabians, for varying durations. All took to it immediately. Arab #1 showed initial improvement, then started 'leaning' on it after a few uses. He's back in a mild three-piece snaffle.

Arab #2 couldn't be judged, due to other issues. Arab #3 showed significant improvement, with no loss yet. Final judgment is reserved until he's trail ridden. The improvement is in three areas: Canter, reduced (eliminated?) martingale, reduced and less severe 'spooking'. Training sessions are more enjoyable and productive now The bitless bridle has a definite place in the tack room and training pyramid. It does not replace the bit, but it may delay the time when it's needed for advanced work (1st level dressage?). It does feel like there

are things a bitless can't do, but it's not significant and as bitless has few disadvantages, it's an overall improvement over a bit.

Christina, DeFuniak Springs, Florida, 4/10/01:

Once again I thank you for your time and effort. After my trials yesterday with the bitless bridles I am sold! My mare (who is very sensitive and has been abused by harsh bits) loved it, my mother's gelding was very flexible, my husband's gelding had better brakes, and (to me surprisingly) it even made my old gelding more round!! I didn't think there was a bit or other accessory in this world that could make him even better than he was."

Sharon, of North Carolina, an endurance rider, 4/10/01:

Subject "Simply Amazing, Absolutely Fabulous"

Well, its been 6 weeks and I've given it every challenge I can dream up. Taking off in a pack of 50 endurance horses beginning a race at full speed, slowing down from a group of horses moving along the trail too fast for me, spooky places, leaving trail buddies, English or Western, you name it. I just can't lose control. No fuss, no fighting, no yelling and cursing. FATE, my beautiful Arab does exactly what he's told, willingly.

Using a bit I could never slow him down or stop him if he wanted to move on. I often felt out of control and just hung on for dear life. He just clamped down on the bit, stuck out his nose and took off. He wasn't a bad horse but when the herd was leaving he was going with them. Using the Bitless Bridle my problem is solved. I have total control of his head and he does not take off or fight me.

With the bit he spent a great deal of energy dipping and bobbing his head in aggravation. Usually the first 5-6 miles of a race/ride where spent getting him to stop that behavior. Changing bits didn't help. From the first ride with the Bitless he stopped the behavior. He is more collected and rounded holding his head naturally collected but not overly so as he sometimes did with the bit.

The proof however is in the pudding as they say and we've had lots of good pudding. On our first trail ride I took my Global Positioning System (GPS) device as usual so I could keep track of our speed and distance. I asked for the canter which was consistently 15.3 MPH for the last year. I looked down at my GPS because I felt like we were going faster (and much lighter) than ever before. I was amazed to find that we were cantering nicely along at 16.3 MPH!! A full mile an hour faster without any extra effort on his part or asking on my part. Amazing. His working trot went from 8-9MPH with encouragement, to 10-11 MPH, also with no extra effort on his part or mine. He just settles into that faster pace on his own and stays there. Of course not fighting the bit and keeping his mind on the trail improves things immensely.

The best and most tasty pudding however, is the actual endurance rides themselves. I used to start every ride with shall we say GI distress. The thought of the start with all those horses taking off and me out of control got me in a nervous jumble. No longer a problem, now we go the speed I want to go, period.

This season we advanced to 50 mile rides and have been finishing in the top 10. I won the last ride (25 miles in extremely rough mountains) and won the 'Best Conditioned' award.

Now, a lot of this is having a truly wonderful horse, but using the Bitless Bridle has freed both me and my horse from anxiety and needless worrying to concentrate on our training and endurance rides.

I have promised FATE that I will never put another bit in his mouth again. There is really no reason for it. I have been telling everyone I know about the Bitless Bridle and many are skeptical. They feel it wouldn't work with their horse, or they just don't want to change. There is that initial fear of not having the bit. We are so indoctrinated to believe that the bit is control. A greater untruth has never been told.

Thank you so much for the bridle. It has changed my life and certainly improved my horses life and well being. I will soon be trying it with my Walking Horses! I can't wait!"

[Dr. Cook responds, 4/11/01:]

It has never occurred to me to do this but had I sat down to write a trumped-up testimonial for the purpose of promoting the Bitless Bridle, I would never have had the courage, even though I know it to be justified, or the sheer creative imagination, to write anything half as good as your glittering gazette. Thank you for taking the time and trouble to give me this splendidly encouraging feedback. Yours is the sort of letter that makes the struggle avaleth! May I add your letter to my collection of 'User's Comments', when I next update the website?

Apart from your wonderfully supportive comments of a general and qualitative nature, you have also given me, for the first time, some quantitative evidence that I had previously lacked. I know in my bones that removal of the bit saves energy, lengthens the stride and, therefore, increases speed but prior to your letter I had no data to support this statement if I was challenged by scientific skeptics. Now, thanks to you, I do at least have a starting point for the defense! It even suggests the basis for a properly monitored research project in the future.

I would very much like to know more about your experience with the GPS. From what you tell me, and your use of the word 'consistently', it sounds as though a horse's speed at a given pace is more or less hard-wired into his system, with the result that he will hit the same mark on different occasions with remarkable regularity. This is certainly what I would expect from the regularity (and even the conformity between different horses) of stride rates at the gallop. So an increase of speed, even by as little as 1 MPH, is probably significant. Racehorse trainers would love to know how to do this!

I will look up your telephone number and give you a call about these matters if I may.

Many congratulations on your double triumph in your last ride. This speaks volumes for your whole approach, not forgetting the contribution of FATE.

May you discover further delights with your Walking Horses. Again many, many thanks for your letter.]

Sharon, 4/11/01:

I know that 1 MPH doesn't seem like a big increase but if you're riding 6 to 8 hours in a race that's usually won or lost by seconds or minutes that is a significant decrease in ride time. Increasing his trot by 2-3 MPH is even more significant to me because that is the gait we are in for most of the ride.

If I average his old 8 MPH I would finish the ride in a good time of 6.25 hours. If I average 10 MPH then I just finished the same ride in 5 hours! Definitely the difference between finishing and winning and I haven't even cantered.

On second thoughts maybe I shouldn't let everyone know about this!! Just kidding. I would be happy if I never won again and the horses were happier. Endurance riders take such great care of their horses, much better than themselves. It would really be wonderful if they had enough trust in their horses and themselves to just try the bridle. With a 30-day free trial what have they got to lose?

I love the idea of a controlled study. Maybe there is some grant money for this sort of thing. If I can help in any way please let me know. I would love to be in on the study somehow.

I have a ride this weekend, 55 miles in the mountains of VA. I will try tailing FATE this ride on some of the extreme inclines. Its the one thing I haven't tried with the bridle yet but I don't expect any problems. I'll let you know how it goes.

[Dr. Cook responds, 4/12/01:

Thanks for your further e-mail. I hope you don't think I was belittling the 1 MPH difference. As I implied, in flat racing, trainers would give their back teeth for an edge as big as this! But your further figures are indeed very interesting, especially in view of what you say about the trot being the most common gait.]

[Dr. Cook, 4/15/01:

It was good to talk to you on the telephone just before Easter. The additional information you gave me about your experience with The Bitless Bridle was fascinating. I found your observation especially interesting that, as soon as you took a bit out of your horse's mouth, he started drinking during endurance rides, something he had never previously done. Naturally, I was delighted to hear this for, as you know, it is so important that an endurance horse should drink plenty of fluids. No wonder that you won the Best-Conditioned Award and that the examining veterinarian quipped "Did he even go out?"

Since our conversation, an explanation has occurred to me as to why the presence of a bit should discourage a horse from drinking. A horse drinks by dipping his chin into the water, pursing his lips and sucking water into his mouth through an almost straw-like aperture at the midline. As when we drink, a vacuum is created by retracting the tip of the tongue with almost closed lips. The mechanism is the same as that employed when we fill a hypodermic syringe. When enough water has been drawn into the mouth, the lips are closed completely; the tip of the tongue is returned to the front of the mouth and placed in contact with the incisor teeth and the hard palate; the jaw is shut and the teeth of the upper and lower jaw are placed in contact with each other; and the fluid is pumped by positive pressure from the mouth into the gullet across a closed larynx. In other words a swallowing movement occurs! The whole sequence of movements can be done smoothly and easily AS LONG AS THERE IS NO FOREIGN BODY IN THE MOUTH, BREAKING THE SEAL AT THE LIPS.

Judging by my own experiments (you would have been amused to watch me doing these!), the presence of a bit makes it difficult for a horse to purse its lips in the first instance. Secondly, because the lips are not completely sealed ('set') at the corner of the mouth, air gets drawn into the oral cavity when the tongue is retracted, either destroying the vacuum completely or making it far less efficient. Thirdly, because the lips are not sealed, it is either impossible or at least difficult for a horse to generate the necessary pumping mechanism required for swallowing. From all this I conclude that those horses that manage to drink with a bit in their mouths are not consuming as much water as they otherwise would and that there are some horses, such as yours, that find the whole process so difficult that they do not drink at all.

Some of the same principles apply during eating and so would also explain why you have noticed that your horse eats so much better in The Bitless Bridle. Obviously, during prehension of solid food the horse must open its lips and so an airtight seal at the lips is not required. During mastication, however, it is as well for the lips to be set and during swallowing, an airtight seal at the lips is essential.

You commented that when FATE had a bit in his mouth, his stride at the trot was short and choppy but that since using The Bitless Bridle his stride has become much smoother. Also that you no longer have to ask for collection because his topline is automatically more rounded, his back less hollow

and he is now better muscled. I was fascinated to hear you add that, as a result, you yourself now get less backache during endurance rides. As you said, all this is 'miraculous.' Of especial interest too was your observation at the trot that, because his stride was longer, you now SEE his front feet for the first time. This viewpoint from the saddle provides a useful yardstick for all riders to judge the efficiency of their horse's stride. It is a test that I shall certainly suggest to others in future. Should it be called the Becker test or is this something that is already well-known?

You mentioned that, in the past, when he was on his own during a competition, FATE tended to lose interest and become rather 'dull', brightening up only when he saw another horse. But that now, he remains bright and active even when he is going solo. I wonder if this is because the bit was causing him some pain (eg. chronic bone ache in the lower jaw) and, when he was on his own, he focused on this, forgetting about it to some extent when he had something else to distract him? Have you any other explanations?

I was pleased to hear you confirm my impression that, according to your GPS data, a given horse will select the same speed at the trot and canter with remarkable consistency from day to day. It sounds as though these speeds can be relied upon, almost as a constant, for that particular horse. I think you said that, except when in very mountainous terrain, the same speed is produced with no more variation than 1/10 of an MPH? This is very important and quite remarkable information. I would dearly like to learn more about this and if you can help me gather some data this would be wonderful. If you can put me in touch with other riders that have been routinely using the GPS on their horses, who know their horse's speed 'constants' when ridden in traditional tack, and who might be prepared to switch over to The Bitless Bridle, some extremely valuable data could be collected.

I very much look forward to hearing from you again. I hope that your most recent ride was just as enjoyable as the others and that The Bitless Bridle performed well when subjected to the tailing test?]

Sharon, 4/24/01:

Sorry to have taken so long to get back with you. Its been a bit crazy here. I did indeed do very well at the last ride. I placed 5th in a place that can only be described as Hell. Fifty five miles of mountains, unbelievable rocks, heat, and 14 straight miles of packed gravel road at the end. He lost two shoes and gallons of water but drank like a champ with his new bit. He kept active and alert. He went from 8th place to 5th place in the last five miles passing the three others like they were standing still. Hurray! I talked with several riders at the ride and they were interested in the study of the bridle. They did want more info on how it would work. I sketched out the basic plan but couldn't provide details like mileage, terrain, etc. Perhaps you could set down the guidelines and specifics as you want them and then I can recruit further. One of the big questions was whether they get to keep the bridle when the study is over. Most already had GPS's. One friend was very interested. She has a new horse she doesn't know well, would like to try the bridle but doesn't mind going back to the bit because she will be using a bit in dressage training. The other thought that came up when I was talking to my crew about the study is to have a GPS company sponsor the research. You might get some free devices to use and some money to run the study right. Sounds like a perfect match to me. This is a market that the GPS people haven't even begun to tap. They may even be able to get some feed back to improve there product for horse sports. Let me know what you think about it all and I can begin making follow-up calls. PS-The Becker Test? Sounds good to me. I don't know if there is already a name but it made me laugh."

Sharon, replying to my questions as to whether she was riding her new horse in the BB, 9/4/01:

Of course I am riding her with the BB!! Is there anything else? Only practiced with her on it once and then went to an endurance ride. It's as wonderful as ever.

TiPat, 4/11/01:

I am a big fan of your bitless bridle (if not the biggest). I have owned a confirmed problem horse for almost two years now. I answered an ad for a cheap 15 year-old Icelandic and after two phone conversations decided to buy him and at least give him a shot. His owner was so desperate to sell quickly that she practically gave him to me. It was with the agreement that I was under no circumstance to try and ride him until he was in my possession at my home and that I would never hold her accountable for his actions. She described him in her ad with words such as "spooky, hot, and spirited", and during our phone conversations and subsequent meeting, described him with more colorful words like "hell-crazy, dangerous, blown mind, and untrainable". I appreciated the fact that she wasn't trying to sugar coat and was giving me her honest opinion.

On my visit the horse was very tense and standoffish and would not make eye contact with either of us. My heart went out to him and I signed a thorough release agreement upon purchase. She also sent me home with a severe Icelandic bit with 8 inch shanks and a double jointed mouthpiece. She added to that a dropped noseband that I was instructed to keep very tight and even suggested that I shave his chin so that he would know it was there. I was told to ride him with his chin tucked into his chest or I would "lose control". She also warned me to never let him run to his hearts content or he would "lose his mind."

The first thing I did upon my return home was to decorate my fireplace mantel with his old bit, and toss the nose band in the trash. The only bits I used on my horses were a full cheek Waterford and a full cheek snaffle. Our first month together was uneventful, and I only worked on the ground, grooming petting and saddling. I could see that his nature was not to be "hot" or "spooky" but just the opposite. He still tried to avoid human interaction, but always walked calmly away, if he couldn't walk away he would turn his head away. I finally decided I needed to meet the "demon" inside and tacked up for our first ride.

He stood stock still while I mounted. It was like climbing onto a stone statue, he was so tense. His neck was stiff and held vertical and his ears pinned. I hadn't yet even taken up the reins. When I touched the reins that lay on his neck he quickly turned up the driveway and within 50 feet was at top speed and didn't stop for two miles. All the while I let him run and just talked soothingly and petted his neck. If I made even the slightest contact with his mouth he would pin his ears flat and add a little burst of speed. When he tired enough to slow we continued on with our ride with me making as little contact as possible. Every time I picked up the rein he would panic and speed up.

Over the next 8 months I put many, many hours of trail riding into him. My emphasis was totally on relaxing him. I never asked anything more than to go where I pointed him. I kept our rides long and used his own exhaustion to slow him down. I handled the reins as little as possible during our rides because he still would panic and shut down mentally if too much maneuvering was asked. (simply changing direction could sometimes be too much). His reaction while panicking was almost always to run away. Luckily I live in an area where running away is usually not immediately dangerous. We had come a long way in 8 months but I was at the point where no matter how much he trusted me I felt like I was riding Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He could be sweet Dr. Jekyll 90 percent of the time, but whenever I had to make more than minimal contact he would get overly anxious, and turn into Mr. Hyde. His problem was deeply

ingrained and trying to communicate when he was in his Mr. Hyde state was usually counterproductive or impossible.

Out of desperation I started riding with his halter and lead rope attached and draped over his neck. I found that when he started a panic attack I could usually stop it by using the lead rope to stop his forward momentum rather than the reins. But maneuvering still required reins and that's when I decided to try your bitless bridle.

From the first time I rode him in it he was a different horse ... unbelievably more relaxed and controllable. Since starting with the bitless he no longer gets anxious when I take up contact. Trying out your bridle was the turning point in our relationship. I finally had a horse that I KNEW I would keep. I was no longer just trying to fix a horse with an uncertain future. I have never used a bit on him since then. I even bought a second bitless bridle for my other completely trustworthy horse. I see no need to ever use a bit again! I'm enclosing a photo that I took of him a short while after introducing him to the bitless. Saddle bags and a dog on board would have been out of the question previously.

Thank You.

Elizabeth, 4/11/01:

Five minutes before the start of a 25 mile trail ride, my leather bitted bridle broke. The only spare bridle I had with me was your Bitless Bridle. It worked out great ... I came in second!

Brooke, Raleigh, NC, 4/17/01:

The following is a collection of comments regarding the Bitless Bridle from NC State College of Veterinary Medicine. In asking for these reports, I also requested that people include how many other people were exposed to the bridle by their using it. There are still others who would like to try it, but since school is almost out we will probably not get it passed around to everyone before next fall... Thanks in advance.

#1. I used the bridle on a recently started 2 year old Paint filly. She had been going in a side-pull bridle. The bitless bridle was very effective on her. The main differences from the side-pull were slight variations in reining angles when doing lateral work. Approximately 15 people were newly exposed to the bridle during my use.

#2. I used the bridle on an 11 year old Appendix QH that competes in combined training events. He responded well to the bridle. We jumped in it as well as practiced our dressage aids. I found that he responded to all of the aids in the same way. The brakes and steering felt virtually the same. I sort of had the feel that I could keep him on the outside rein (even though I know this would have felt completely different to him). Getting him collected was more of a challenge, but we managed to get that after a few rides. I had to use a lot more push from behind and use half halts (which were more effective in this bridle) in order to get him rounded. I would definitely consider investing in one of these bridles. It was great for jumping because it kept me from getting in his mouth, yet he still had good brakes. About 7 people were newly exposed to the bridle at my barn.

#3. I used the bridle on my 9 year old TB gelding who competes mainly in hunters with some fox hunting as well. I found that he responded very well to the bridle. I was able to trail ride him in it as well as jump in it. In every situation I felt that I had as much control as if I had a bit. He actually responded better to aids for backing up in the bitless bridle than he did in his regular snaffle. The only problem I had was him putting his head up- but we were able to work

through that. One other girl used the bridle on her 13 year old Morgan cross who does jumpers and combined training. She used it only once and found that he liked to put his head up and avoid the bridle. She didn't work him much in it, so wasn't able to tell me if they'd gotten his head down (he also raises his head in his bitted bridle). 2 others were introduced to the bridle and were really interested in it.

#4. I used the bridle on my 3 year old QH gelding that is beginning his jumping training and does some dressage. We ride mostly in the pasture and he recently has begun running away with me occasionally. I rode him in the bridle for 3 weeks and he still ran away with me. Other than that, I found he really liked the bridle and responded well to it in all other circumstances. 4 others were introduced to the bridle.

#5. I rode my 7 year old TB mare in the bridle for a week and found that she worked well in the bridle. Getting her on the bit took a little more work, but once she understood the difference in signals, she responded quite well. Thank you for providing us the opportunity to use the bridle- I am strongly considering purchasing one.

#6. I ride 5-9 year old Arabian crosses for competitive trail riding. I really enjoyed the bridle and the horses seemed to like them as well. However, I am wary of the comfort of the bridle over long rides. We ride sometimes for 4-6 hours and I think the straps would not be comfortable over the mandibles for that period of time. I do think I might get one for shorter rides and for training. I I people were introduced to the bridle. Thanks!

[Customer Service comments:

This user's fears about the bridle possibly being uncomfortable when worn for long periods have been proven to be unfounded. In fact, the Bitless Bridle is particularly popular with endurance riders specifically because it is so comfortable for the horse over long periods of use.]

Alix, Kirkland, Washington, 4/24/01:

I bought a <synthetic> Bitless Bridle from you several months ago and just love it to death. My mare went from being unrideable to being put in training as a child's mount. I recently started using my bridle on another horse and he too is responding wonderfully with it. I also use it for ground work on my 2 year old stallion with great success.

Betty, Nicholson, PA, 4/31/01:

What a 'great' bridle. As you can see (in the two photographs), everyone is happy. Myself and PJ's SURPRISE on an Easter ride and Nicholas (6 years) trail riding."

Mark, Washingtonville, NY 4/31/01:

I bought one of your bitless bridles a few months ago and use it on my Icelandic. I love it! From the moment I put it on it was just terrific. I have been riding with it, all the way - exclusively, ever since. I can't thank you enough. It is just a wonderful invention. I was never comfortable with putting a bit in her mouth. She adapted to it immediately. I do Natural Horsemanship and its really great. ...Thanks again, it's a terrific invention.

Susan, New Tripoli, PA 4/28/01:

Dr Cook - you are truly a saint! I found your product on the internet by accident, and started reading about your bridle. Everything you wrote sounded so logical and correct. How could I loose? With a money-back-if-not-satisfied guarantee how could I go wrong? I told my best friend and riding partner about this product, and I could tell she thought I was crazy.

When I received my bridle she looked at it and said, 'let me try it on my horse.' She went up into the ring, went through her motions, and was so impressed that we then went on a trail ride. She was even more impressed when she saw how happy her horse was, and how much control she had. We came back to the barn, I tried it on my horse and I had to order another because she bought mine from me. That bridle actually didn't fit my horse; I had to order a larger size so every thing worked out for the best.

We now never use a bit. We both agree on how much control we have over our horses, and how happy they are. My horse is an ex-racer and hers is a Thoroughbred but has never raced, so at least you know that my horse - in particular - has not had the best of life. We can run in fields and know that we have so much control it is unbelievable! We are not sure how this all works, but you can bet we are singing your praises from the highest mountain tops. Many people are interested, and we have encouraged everyone to use ours before they might buy one of their own.

Thank you again for your wonderful product. Please feel free to give my e-mail address (cavsdream@aol.com) to anyone who would like to e-mail me regarding the use of this bridle."

Susan 8/29/01:

Postscript from a letter to Gretchen Fathauer about success with the barefoot horse... "I even went one step further. I now ride with a bitless bridle by Dr. Cook. I have turned on many people with this concept and they have purchased them also. Our horses love them. Never will my horse wear shoes or have a bit in his mouth again!!!!!"

Susan 9/9/01:

You will be happy to know that I am still using the bitless bridle and never plan on putting a bit in my horses' mouth again. I have praised your bridle so much that four other people that I have let borrow mine to try, have purchased them also. None of these people are going to go back to a bit, nor did they ever suggest that they were. I ride on the trails and take dressage lessons, and my horse does wonderful. As my instructor tells me "now put that horse on the bridle" and I can! I even ride a horse at the barn who usually has a bit in her mouth and she is happy and under the same control as if I had a bit in her mouth. My friend and I even rode in a dressage schooling show with them on, and even though they were not "legal" the judge let us go and we did really well. I have even convinced a gaited horses' owner to purchase one. She did and loves it very much. I have tried to explain to all who tried this about the bit in the mouth and how it breaks the seal for their breathing, and the poll and whole head pressure, and they all seem to understand the mechanics and the simple reasoning behind this. What a great product! I am so glad I found you on the web. Many people thought I was crazy when I told them what I bought, but those were the same ones who ended up buying one also. Thank you Dr. Cook for this wonderful product."

Susan 5/18/02:

Just wanted to let you know that I am still using the bitless bridle. In fact, since I do dressage the show requirement is to have a bit in the horses' mouth. I have a show coming up and decided I needed to put the bit in and practice. It was horrible. I felt like I betrayed my

horse. He would not go forward, he would constantly "dive" with his head, and open his mouth. What a disaster. I tried a second time some days later and the same reaction. I was truly upset that I had now just destroyed all that we had worked for. So I took his snaffle and hung it on the BB. Even though he has a bit in his mouth, there is no action on his mouth and he did quite well with this setup. I realize, and it has now been proven to me, how detrimental the bit can be. As soon as this show is over, off with the bit. I had also taken a clinic with the BB and the clinician commented about how this bridle does not help the horse relax his jaw [Ed: Open his mouth]. Why must we mechanically do that? For the sake of not arguing with her I made no comment. I wish the dressage people would lighten up with their starchy ways. Dressage means training. As long as the equipment is not detrimental and inhumane to the horse, why not this product?

[Dr. Cook's response:

How very nice to hear from you and thanks for the further feedback. The process of returning to a bit can be most convincing, as others have found and now you have discovered for yourself. If you need to use a bit for a show, I think the best way is to place the simplest of snaffle bridles over the top of the Bitless Bridle. You can add a rein to the snaffle ring if you wish but you don't have to use it. The FEI regulations demand the use of a double bridle with curb chain but perhaps you can get by with a snaffle in certain classes? I have long been puzzled by why it is presumed to be a good thing to have the jaw pulled on to such an extent that the mouth is opened. If this is what is meant by "relaxing the jaw," I don't think much of it. The important thing is to truly relax the horse. An open mouth is not a relaxed horse. Neither is a horse 'relaxed' that has been pulled into a position of poll flexion by pressure on the reins. Collection comes from the seat and legs, driving a horse forward into the bridle and not from pulling the head back into the bit. With the help of people like yourself, perhaps pressure can be put on the FEI to get the rules changed or so interpreted that the present rules permit the use of the bitless bridle in competition. In the meantime, a good strategy is to tell the judges that you do not want to compete for placement but would like to be given a score. This way you can use the BB and show everyone how well your horse performs when a couple of mouth irons and a chain are removed.]

Rose, Westminster Equestrian Club, MD, 5/1/01:

I have a Quarter Horse that I have owned for 12 years. At the first trial of your bridle I took him out in company with three other horses that he knew and we had no problems. We were out for three and a half hours and he performed wonderfully, even at the canter. He was so good and I was so excited. He is a known kicker so we are always the end horse on a trail ride. However, a week later, I took him out again for his second trial, this time with 12 horses that were strangers to him and I found I had no control at all. It was horrible. I tried circling him and see-sawing the reins but got no response, not even from verbal commands. I finished the ride with blisters on my hands.

I am upset that it didn't work and would like a refund. I have spoken to many others who are using the bridle and they gave the bridle rave reviews, all except one girl who had a similar problem.

[Dr. Cook responds:

There are, of course, many reasons why a horse might fail to respond to the aids and not all of these are due to some inadequacy of a bridle. A poorly fitting saddle, for example, may cause pain and be responsible for a horse running away.

As far as the bitless bridle is concerned, the most common explanation for inadequate control is incorrect fitting. If the noseband is not low enough on the head or is too slack, the degree of control is reduced. However, in this case the first experience with the bridle was eminently satisfactory, and so the noseband adjustment was presumed to be correct.

Another explanation for a sudden instance of poor control, especially if this occurs after a previously satisfactory experience, relates to the position of the crossover straps. If, in fitting the bridle, the crossover straps are accidentally placed UNDER the chin strap at the time when the chin strap is cinched-up, they will be more or less locked in this position and control will suffer.

An alternate and possible explanation might be the undetected presence of sharp enamel edges on the first upper cheek tooth in this particular horse. As the bridle's mechanism depends on a noseband that is adjusted low on the head and cinched-up snugly, this could result in a horse's cheek being pressed against a sharp tooth, causing pain and, thereby, accounting for loss of control.]

Ken, Durham, NC, 5/9/01:

I cannot begin to tell you how well my horse responds to cues now that we are using the Bitless Bridle. He is like a new animal -- turns with the slightest cue, stops on a dime, stands when mounting, and is generally happier and more attentive to my commands.

My friend Sharon Becker introduced me to the Bitless Bridle. As you know, she is using one on her endurance horse. I watched the reaction of her horse and the difference it made in her endurance rides, and knew that I had to try one for myself.

I have a 9 year-old Appaloosa trail horse. Placing him in the Bitless Bridle was an interesting experience. He first simply stood there as if waiting for me to add the bit. When I asked him to stand so that I could mount, he didn't move a muscle. Historically, at that point he was always fidgeting with the bit and not paying full attention to me. Now, I have his total attention.

Once we began our ride, he immediately took my cues. His attentiveness increased 10 fold. The next time out, when I brought him to the post for saddling, he immediately dropped his head, almost as if he was asking me to put the Bitless Bridle on him! No more do I have to ask for his head or negotiate with him to accept the headstall. It is simply astonishing the immediate difference I experienced!

Sharon told me of the trials you want to run -- testing the performance of your horse with a bit versus the bitless bridle. Sounds great in scientific terms, but I think that you will find riders like Sharon and me who have now promised our horses that they will never have to experience a bit again! Thanks!

A contribution from a user to an Equestrian chat Room based in the UK, Heather Moffett, Devon, UK, 5/17/01:

Have any of you come across Dr. Robert Cook's Bitless Bridle? I had heard of it, because Jessica Jahiel in the US recommended it, but I hadn't yet experienced it. Christina Turrisini, an EE member, is over from Denver on a course this week, and is a friend of Dr. Cook's. He kindly sent me over two to try. I have had great problems with my Arab gelding SPANISH SILVER, since he contracted a respiratory virus several years ago. If you try to ride him in a bit, (and I have tried lots) he makes this awful noise, as if he is trying to inspire air over the bit. If I ride him in a headcollar or a hackamore, he doesn't do it. So I was looking for some bitless alternative. Sadly, I haven't ridden SPANISH for over a year. He was lame for five

months, having ruptured a hind fetlock joint capsule. Anyway, working student Della had been lunging him for me in my absence to attempt to get him a bit fitter to try this bridle when Christina arrived. I tried the larger bridle on MILLIE, our warmblood this morning, but she didn't go a bundle on it, which I had expected. However, I hopped on little SPANISH this afternoon, and he loved it, as I was sure he would. No horrible noises (I had him scoped and the vets can't find anything wrong). The bridle looks a bit like a Scawbrigg bitless, but there is a strap on either side like a throatlatch, which crosses over under the jaw, passing through two rings attached to the noseband, another two rings on the end of the straps being affixed to the reins. Very clever and simple. I will never ride SPANISH in a bit again. Despite having not been ridden for so long, he hadn't forgotten anything. He did all his lateral work in walk, then in collected trot, a little stiffer than usual as you would expect, but beautifully light in the hand, and then finished off with a little piaffe. He was able to bend and flex perfectly in the Cook bridle, unlike most hackamores, which stick into the side of the face. Well worth trying if you don't intend to compete in competition dressage, if your horse is unhappy for any reason in a bit.

Leonard, Silverthorne, Co, 5/24/01:

This is just a quick thank you to you all! I received my new Bridle yesterday. It is fabulous to say the least! I ordered one on the recommendation of my good friend Christina in Indian Hills, Colorado who showed me hers and swears by its success.

Who says you can't teach an old horse new tricks? I've got a 12 year-old Quarter horse gelding named ZANEGREY who is great in every way. He's got a wonderful mind and is the best, most reliable companion for every task on the ranch we lease. His only knock was that he was a little "pokey." But not anymore! I've been using a hackamore on him, mainly because we ride up into the high country to check fence, open irrigation and sort cows. While I'm busy I want to let him graze without worrying about him choking on a bit! I also dislike bits in general but to my amazement, I have found that I've been holding him back all this time?

The headstall fit perfectly and I immediately noticed a change in ZANE'S response! He's ready, willing and more than able to get going, it's like he's born again! He acts like a horse half his age and is so eager but I still retain full control at all times. His breathing is more regular and seems more focused while under saddle.

I can't thank you enough, this is a wonderful product and the quality is top notch. I purchased the heavy leather version, it is well made in every respect and I can tell that it will hold up for years to come. I've got to also thank Christina for showing me your product. I in turn will now show my new Bitless Bridle to all my friends! My ranching partner even noticed a difference in ZANE. It was the best two hours riding I've had in years and now I really look forward to getting under saddle whether for work or for play.....Wow!

Thanks again.

Leonard, 5/29/01:

I am so amazed at the difference your bridle makes! Each outing with it becomes more natural and less stressful. Is your company public? I'd be interested in investing? You have a wonderful product in all aspects and I can see only good things to come for you as the word gets out. I alone have three people interested in going to your Bitless Bridle since putting one on my Quarter horse! and that's in the last three days."

Ruth, Brunswick, Maine, 5/29/01:

I am increasingly impressed with this product. I gave a talented student a dressage lesson in it the other day on a horse who isn't really back in work as yet, and the leg yielding, free forward movement, regularity of pace, straightness and FLEXION were superb! Of course, the additional facts were that the rider's body aids and balance were superb, so everything was received into the hand coming from behind. But it was easy to rate the horse whilst retaining true self-carriage.

All of my horses are Morgans, some over 16 hands. They are not "ponies" in the breed sense of the word. I use them to teach the advanced levels of Pony Club, an organization that uses the word "pony" to mean riding horse, as distinct from equines for other purposes. I have spread the word around to many of my professional friends. We do stadium jumping, dressage and cross-country riding under a fairly strict sequential curriculum. This bridle is very useful for demonstrating that "on the bit" has little to do with a bit!

Thanks.

Jessika Muller DVM, Zurich, Switzerland, 6/1/01:

I tried out the bridle with a friend's horse (a 20 year-old gelding and with her for 16 years now). He is very relaxed and willing to work with the bitless bridle. I was really impressed. He seems to enjoy it. From a distance it almost looks like a "normal" bridle and some of the other riders in the stable were quite surprised how well one can ride a horse without the bit. My friend has used it regularly on her horse for about three weeks now. I'm very interested in any more research results about your bit-theory. Have you started the GPS project now? Is it allowed to race with a bitless bridle in the US?

[Dr. Cook responds:

A research project using GPS equipment is underway. Each racetrack in the USA makes its own determination with regard to whether or not a bit is required for flat racing or steeplechasing. At present, I know of no track in the USA that permits use of a bitless bridle. The Bitless Bridle has been used for steeplechasing in England]

Sarah Getchell, Hamilton, MA, 6/6/01, Part of an article entitled "Once Bit Twice Shy" written by Sarah Getchell for the Groton House Horse Trials Program:

To the rider who tries the Bitless Bridle and is instantly won over, the scientific explanations of the bridle's benefits suddenly pale next to the extraordinary experience of riding in it. An improvement is immediately noticeable. A transformation that bears experiencing far better than it bears describing; those who have not yet experienced it have a wonderful discovery to look forward to. Some riders may fear that losing the bit means losing control; what usually happens is that the horse becomes more manageable and responsive, and the sense of partnership and trust between the horse and rider flourishes.

At Groton House Farm, we believe in The Bitless Bridle. We find that not only does it encourage the horse's natural movement and thereby improves his attitude, but that it fosters in the rider better position and balance, greater effectiveness of the aids, and increased confidence. We think every horse and every rider - could benefit from it, and we hope it will one day be as common as the bit is now." -

Ann Getchell, Hamilton, MA, 6/11/01:

We have just come back from the Bromont event in Canada (site of the '76 Olympics). Sarah used the bitless bridle on cross-country for the first time, as well as in show jumping (which she has done before). She had no control problems and is more convinced than ever. She got a lot of attention from people who noticed she was bitless, and we recommended the bridle to everyone who asked, as well as giving them your email address. One Polish gentleman told us that he knew of a former world-class dressage rider (Danish, but he couldn't remember the name) who ALWAYS trained in a bitless bridle of some sort, and only used a bit in competition, because she had to.

I'm afraid getting it legalized for dressage will be difficult. There were three FEI judges at Bromont (Angela Tucker, Bridget Parker, and Van de Vater) and they all felt there was no sense trying to use it for dressage, absent a change in rule, which they felt would be a good idea but unlikely. Still, if the bridle gets into use for other phases and disciplines, people may get behind it for dressage, too. It would be interesting to have a match between two top dressage riders, one with a bit and one without, to demonstrate that the same results (probably better from the point of view of movement) can be had bitless.

In the meantime, we are encouraging its use whenever we get the chance. - -

Jerri, Wilsall, Montana, 6/14/01:

Just wanted to let you know FLORA is still doing real well in her bitless bridle. I tell everyone in the horse lists how great it is.

Bruce, Unionville, PA, 6/18/01:

I have tried a Beta bitless bridle on a number of horses and I like it. The first horse I used it on was Mr TRICKY. I have been very impressed. I know that I will be using it for training purposes more and more. I love to use it when pupils are exercising my client's horses, as there is no fear of them damaging the horse's mouth. I have not yet used it in competition work, as I am uncertain at present as to whether it would give me a quick enough response.

[Dr. Cook comments:

Riders who feel that they may not be able to get a quick enough response with the bridle could choose to cinch-up the noseband a little more snugly. The standard fitting that we recommend is to allow the space of one flat finger between the back of the jaw and the chinstrap. But for 'fingertip' control and the elimination of any delay in the response, the chinstrap could be cinched up an extra notch so that there was less space than 'one flat finger.' The chinstrap could even just touch the skin, as long as it was not in anyway applying constant pressure on the back of the jaw. This latter situation might trigger headshaking]

Ingrid, Stuttgart, Germany, 6/20/01:

This is just a little but very happy report on our first experiences with the Bitless Bridles - our horses and we, too, love them!!! They fit perfectly and our horses are much more content and react more spontaneously with less effort from our side than with bits! We have

already tried the Bitless Bridles in all disciplines possible for us and our horses: classical dressage riding, leisure riding through fields and forest and also driving without any problems - the performance was even better. The Bitless Bridles are the bridles our horses and we have been waiting for!

Where driving is concerned, `we' (our two horses, my husband Thomas, and I) are beginners, doing leisure driving. We also learn to pull timber since our horses are pulling horses, perhaps you have heard of the quite rare horses of the Black Forest (in Southern Germany), the ``Schwarzwaelde Fuchs" and the famous horse of Switzerland, the Franches Montagnards or ``Freiberger", both are "light" heavy pulling horses.

We train our horses with voice commands and only impulses on the reins. When pulling timber we want them to ``bring in" their own decisions where to go best on difficult terrain. Therefore they must be able to watch all the surrounding area carefully - in this case we think blinkers are not necessary (I find them even obstructive).

Great thanks.

Marion, Pagosa Springs, CO 6/28/01:

Thank you for sending my (3rd) bridle so quickly. I was able to try it out last weekend. The color is good on DUTCH and it is working well on him also. I'll take some pictures of my "boys" in their bridles and email them. I am happy to have found this product!

Cate, Shoemakersville, PA, 7/11/01:

We love your bridles. I have the happiest horses on the planet!

Charish, Easton, MD 7/13/01:

We took CAYCE (the grey QH mare) to her first jumper schooling show last night. My student rode her with the bitless. Lots of questions on it from other riders. One in particular said that Dougie Hannum (Equine Therapist for USET Eventing) had recommending a bitless for one of her horses. Very impressive!

CAYCE took two firsts and two fourths last night. She placed in 4/4 classes! We got pictures of her jumping, and also pictures of all our ribbons, and Kerry - my student, with the truck window filled with blues and whites. We'll send you copies, and, if you like, you may use them on your website, or for publication.

Gretchen Fathauer (Editorial Assisitant - The Horse's Hoof):

The following is an excerpt from `Humane Tack Enables Self-Carriage' that appeared in `The Horse's Hoof', Fall 2001:

"(The first photo below is of) Teresa Jessee's TYLER, a TB/cross gelding, wearing Dr. Cook's bitless bridle. The second photo is of her mounted on TYLER. Despite carrying a heavy rider and having no rein contact to "ask" for a headset, TYLER is offering her a gorgeous headset BECAUSE he can raise his back comfortably in the "treeless" Bob Marshall Sport Saddle, AND he is no longer worried about his mouth being hurt by a bit. As Teresa has severe arthritis, it would be nearly impossible for her to be continually "driving him up into the bit"

with leg aids. This photo shows a horse carrying himself, instead of his rider "pulling him together." Humane, comfortable tack and correct hoof trimming make it so much easier for him to carry himself well!

Teresa is extremely impressed with the difference that the bitless bridle made in Tyler. It changed his whole outlook for the better immediately. He is more willing to round his neck down because he is not bracing for the next rein contact, and he is traveling much more relaxed. She tells me he used to be more braced and high-headed. I rode him, too, and found him to be very light and responsive in the bridle. The saddle is very close contact and secure, plus you really can feel the horse's movement. Also, he is wearing Horsneakers on his front feet.

PS: You would love Tyler--what a sweet boy! He really takes care of his rider. Teresa has been dealing with rheumatoid arthritis since the age of 10. Tyler realizes she needs extra help, and just gives it to her. He walks over to a set of stairs for her to get on, and stands like a statue. He goes over to the same set of stairs to help her get off. When she drops her crop out on trail, he picks it up for her. He is such a gentle soul!

...and here is a comment from the owner herself:

Teresa, Ohio, 9/5/01:

Before I started to use the Bitless Bridle on my TB cross gelding TYLER, he was high-headed and neck-braced, with a short and choppy stride. With the new bridle he immediately became much more relaxed and lengthened his stride. He is now a much happier guy and has not had a bit in his mouth since January 2001. His spooking problem has gone and I am telling everyone how happy I am about the change. Having arthritis I have a bad habit of pulling too hard on the right rein and, as a result, I took the hair off under his chin on one side. However, I put a piece of foam under the crossover strap and this solved the problem.

Sonya, Asheboro, NC, 9/24/01:

I'm just writing to let you know I'm returning my bitless bridle today (within my 30 day trial period). I may be a little different from most users as I was already riding with a rope halter and I've come to realize that my horse & I are "better" with the halter. I'm not sure why this is the case. I was really hopeful that the bitless would provide a better method for lateral work & I believe the concept is there, but in my horse's case (possibly because he's so sensitive) any time I pick up on a rein with the bitless he drops his head to about knee level. I presume this is in response to the poll strap & pressure on the poll. I do not have this problem with the rope halter. As this is a gaited horse with a fair amount of movement, even at a walk, I also don't really care for the swing in the reins that happens on a loose rein. Thank you for the opportunity to try your product. My husband is pleased with his bitless, as is my friend who was never confident enough to ride with a rope halter. I think it is a good product & useful for many riders.

[Dr. Cook responds:

I recall one other person mentioning this head dropping phenomenon when she first introduced her horse to the bridle. But in her case, the 'problem' (if it really is one) corrected itself quite quickly with continued use. So one question relates to the number of times you used the bridle in the short period you had it?

Secondly, are you using reins that are heavier than normal?

A lowering of the head is a sign that a horse is calm and relaxed. As long as it is not excessive (as in your case) this is a virtue and something that many people would love to see. It may be that your halter horse is accustomed to almost no contact at all, so that he now over-responded to the bitless contact on first experiencing it, gentle though this is.

Certainly, I would have expected you to have obtained improved lateral flexion with the bitless bridle. Perhaps you might borrow your husband's bridle and see if continued familiarity would overcome the head down position? I take it that you tried raising your hands to bring your horse's head up?

Anything that you can add to your e-mail would be of interest, as I would like to learn more about this unusual response.]

Sonya 10/9/01:

Hi Dr. Cook - I'll gladly give you any information I can to help with the bridle. I love the concept since it does seem to be an improvement on the rope halter. You may be correct in your feeling that more uses would have solved some of the problem, but since I only had 30 days to decide one way or another (I only ride on the weekends), I decided in the 4 or 5 times that I used it that my horse did better with the rope halter. [see customer service comment below]

My husband & I were discussing it last week while riding for a week in the Great Smoky Mountains (heavenly!) & I told him that it could also be that both the horse & I are more accustomed to the rope halter since it's what we use for all our groundwork. This was actually in reference to my horse stopping better with the rope halter which I thought was odd since I use as much weight shift to stop as rein pressure, but the combination didn't work as well with the bitless. The horse just wanted to push against it? Yes, I probably was using heavier than usual reins as I prefer the rope type (again what I'm accustomed to with the rope halter).

Much of the issue was probably of my own making as well. This horse was extremely spooky when I purchased him so we've worked tons on dropping his head for the calming effect it has. He will drop his head from a touch anywhere on his poll or neck, upon lifting one rein, or even to a "down" voice command. I think I probably have him so in tune with dropping his head that every time I touched a rein on the bitless & he felt the poll pressure that he did what he thought he was supposed to do, dropped his head. Does this make sense to you based on your knowledge of the bitless?

Incidentally my husband went back to using his rope halter last week as well. His horse was also carrying his head very low & pushing on the nose of the bitless even when the reins were loose (feeling confined?). This horse has always carried his head pretty level, but he was actually hitting his chin with his knees. I wouldn't have believed it had I not seen him do it a few times. We were going downhill when this happened. Suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

You mentioned raising the hands to raise the head, but doesn't that still put pressure on the poll as raising your hands affects the reins?

[Customer Service comment:

If, at the end of your thirty day trial period, you do not feel you have had enough time to fully evaluate the Bitless Bridle, feel free to call our toll-free number and request an extension of the 30-day trial.]

Lorin, Franktown, CO. 9/26/01:

This past summer, my daughter and I purchased two Bitless Bridles for our two 5-year-old QH mares. We bought just one at first to try it out, but then, after just one weekend's experience, couldn't get the second one ordered quickly enough (your customer service was exemplary for both orders!).

I found you on the 'Net when I was looking for an easier bridle to use with our red roan, MAGGIE. She'd had some minor ear surgery earlier this summer to remove a sarcoid tumor, and was tender about having the headstall pulled over that ear. Searching the web turned up the "usual stuff", traditional headstalls, etc., *and* The Bitless Bridle. After reading your numerous, and usually glowing, customer testimonials, I thought "what the heck, give it a try."

The bridle's configuration is such that it is easy to get it over MAGGIE'S still-sore ear (she's healing nicely and is allowing more ear-fussing as we work gently with it)... no fighting or trauma, since we don't have to fight the bit while bending ears under the poll-straps, and there's enough slack to get the sore one under the strap first, then the other one. This works fine, and she's re-learning that bridling-up is no big deal. Trust is everything, of course, but having head-gear that's easy to handle really helps.

But that's not the real story... The big success is in just how well this Bridle works with both of these mares. MAGGIE'S been by far the more "rock-solid" ride of my two horses, having been trained well and intelligently on trails. However, she's always been somewhat of a head-shaker (perhaps due to that tumor), and tho' well schooled on neck-reining, she'd sometimes be a bit head-strong. With TBBridle, nearly all of these problems have simply evaporated. She's easily controlled, her head is down and bobbing freely under saddle, and she's much more alert and focused on "the ride" rather than "the bit/mouth." The bridle seems to work just as well, if not better, than Dr. Cook's studies and observations said it would.

Our second mare, QUICKIE, came to us considerably less schooled and experienced under saddle; certainly gentle and willing, just not very experienced yet. Last winter I had her under some solid remedial training by an experienced handler using traditional snaffle and reining techniques, with emphasis on leg-pressure during turns. She'd not yet graduated to neck-reining when I brought her home for use, and my first rides with snaffle were still using a two-handed (and rather tight) direct-reining, with leg cues. Yet QUICKIE was still prone to "pull through" the bit, not yet really "soft in the mouth" as I'd hoped.

If anything, QUICKIE took to TBBridle even faster than MAGGIE. I was some-nervous about that first mount-up, so we did as recommended, starting first in a corral. Her first response was a somewhat quizzical and comical: "Hey, wait! You forgot something!", which quickly gave way to "Hey, cool!... why didn't we do this before?!!" After just a few turns around the corral, we moved right out into open fields --- I found that stops are quicker and cleaner, head's down and ears forward, and she's just plain comfortable with the control we've got, and so am I. Neck-reining (or head-reining, as Dr. Cook calls it) is coming along nicely... no arguments, we just keep focusing on getting the cues right and consistent.

The two TBBridles we purchased are both Betas, one dark brown and one chestnut. Quality, materials and workmanship are superb. Only minor suggestions: I'd advocate for more, and closer-spaced, holes punched into the nose-piece, since that would give better/finer adjustability for snugness. And my daughter would like to have even longer reins, since she'd like to occasionally "flick'em"... I guess I'll graft some leather scrap-ends to hers.

I'll say, in conclusion, and as bluntly as possible: For us, TBBridle has simply become the most single important advance in our horse gear that I've ever experienced in over 40-years of riding. I'm not an "expert" horseman, nor a "whisperer", but I've always tried to respect and

appreciate my mounts, and to try to tune in on what would make riding as enjoyable for them as for me. "The girls" are always ready and happy to go for a ride, and I swear now that they'd put their Bridles on themselves if they could. TBBridle is remarkable, and I'll never put iron in my horses' mouths again... it's simply unnecessary.

Best regards and continued product success!

Adam, Olive Branch, MS, 10/3/01:

We tried our beta bridle on our two Paso Fino mares this weekend. Despite the horses being very different in size, the medium size bridle fit both very well. The range of adjustment is great. Once I had it adjusted for my mare, I could slip in on and off without unbuckling anything. A big plus and a time saver.

Riding impressions -

Before mounting my mare, I tested each rein to make sure she would give her head. Pressure on both reins caused her to tuck her nose in. Satisfied that the mechanics were there, I mounted.

I rode for about 45 minutes at all gaits - walk, corto and largo. My mare ends to be heavy on the hands and somewhat headstrong. When I ride with a bit or with the jaquima alone, I use 2 reins. With the bitless bridle the amount of pressure I needed with a single rein to maintain communication was comfortable - somewhere between the heavy pressure I need with the jaquima alone and the medium-light pressure when I use a bit with a second rein on the nose piece. The nice thing was that she responded to the rein very well - much better than with the jaquima. If she started to get heavy or increase her speed, a firm squeeze and release usually brought her back. Sometimes I needed 2 or 3 squeezes. But even then, I knew I was not causing any pain to the horse, just a diffused pressure across the poll, cheeks and nose.

Two problems I typically have with my mare I did not experience at all on her first outing with the bitless bridle. First, she did not run-away as she tends to do when ridden bitless on the jaquima alone. This is very uncomfortable as she mixes her gaits and pushes hard against the reins. Second, she did not shake or throw her head as she sometimes does with the bit. I changed her to a Myler bit earlier this year, which reduced a lot of the bit problems and lightened her up on the front end, but the bitless bridle gives her no reason to throw her head.

The second trial was with my wife's Paso mare. This mare has not been ridden much this year and is out of shape. She has always been a very light touch with or without a bit. The bitless bridle again was instantly accepted and responded to. As my wife's ride progressed, I noticed that the mare was starting to flex at the poll - something she had not done since she was last in show trim. This was evidently a response to the poll pressure of the bitless bridle. I also noted that the mare was better engaged along her back as evidenced by her slightly elevated tail position. Normally, she keeps her tail flat.

Another small test of the bridle happened when my wife rode the mare towards the barn then turned away to come back to the riding area. Normally, this is when the mare resists and can become quite a handful. This time, after one moment of resistance where my wife applied both reins firmly to check the mare's jumpiness, the mare relented and calmly walked back down the hill. Typically, the mare wins that contest.

Overall, our first rides with the bitless bridle were successful. I was quite pleased with the way the horses accepted it instantly and rode quite happily. I am looking forward to many more rides.

The only problem is that we bought only one bridle.

Sue, Gorham, Maine, 10/8/01 :

I just wanted to let you know that I was pleased with your bitless bridle, even if it was only for a short time. I used it on my 27- year -old paint gelding. He was quite the strong-willed guy, who generally preferred doing things his way. If he wanted to do something, no amount of pressure on the bit would dissuade him. I was leery of using the bitless bridle, as he had only used a bit his entire life-which included reining, team penning, barrel racing and dressage. At this point, all I wanted him for was for the trail. I used the bitless bridle successfully on the trail, from May until August, when unfortunately my horse and I became separated in the woods. We got him back two hours later, but he was minus his saddle, blanket and bridle. No amount of searching has turned up the bridle, although I did get his saddle and blanket back (minus one fender and stirrup.)

The paint and I have parted ways and I now have an older, more sedate gelding. I can't afford to replace the bridle for a while, but wanted to let you know that the bridle works just as well on older, experienced horses. In fact, it is likely that my paint could have injured his mouth crashing through the woods with a traditional bit in his mouth. I am grateful for that.

Roberta, Dallas, Texas, 10/17/01:

I love my new bitless bridle! I received one of your nylon varieties in the hope that I would finally be able to bridle my LARGE quarter horse within a time frame that didn't get me "out of the mood for riding." He's a 7 year-old gelding and it would take me so many tricks in so much time just to get a curb bit in his mouth. This is my first horse of two that I've owned for just 6 months. The other, older, smaller one bridles just fine, but the larger one was getting progressively stubborn. I ordered your bridle in a last ditch effort because I refused to use a hackamore after all the bad things I had read about them. My only hesitation was that people told me that once you'd "spoiled" a horse out of a bit, no one else would want to ride or buy him. Since I'm not planning on selling him, I didn't care. The results have been fabulous! He controls beautifully and tacks up in just a few minutes. He now appears to look forward to riding, instead of "digging in" prior to tacking. Thanks!

Colleen, 11/2/01:

I got my new bitless bridle today and wanted to thank you. No, I won't be sending it back, and in fact will be buying another next month for my other horse. My Peruvian Paso hates bits and it's been a constant fight to get him to open his mouth to take one (who can blame him) and then tosses his head and yawns and carries on once it's in his mouth. I've always hated putting a bit in any horse's mouth, but there've never been any other decent alternatives. And my poor Paso Fino has been crazy in a bit since I've had her. She's very sweet tempered, beautifully mannered, very kind hearted, but I've always known that the bit makes her feel trapped and uncomfortable and bullied, no matter how light the hand and she overreacts to any contact, always has. I can't abide the thought that I've had these damned bits in her mouth for the past 5 years. Poor baby girl. And so I bought the bitless bridle hoping, hoping, hoping, that this would be the answer, and oh yes! It is.

In our first session with the bridle, SMOKEY didn't once toss his head or mouth or pull or yawn, and his collection was better than ever. And SOLANDA, oh what a happy girl she was without the bit. They both took to it immediately and knew exactly what was expected. And even though it was a windy day and I was a little nervous because windy days also make Solanda crazy, and even though we didn't warm up, Solanda was just calmer in a way can't really explain. She was paying more attention to *me* rather than to the bit. That hyper-nervous-jitteriness was gone, she'd stopped flapping her lower lip, and she seemed a whole lot more flexible, and she's always been super flexible. When something spooked her, she didn't overreact in the way I'm used to, just startled slightly and then got right back on task. And *all* of my cues were met with far less trigger response. I think the bit really has contributed to her goosey, nervous behavior all around. I'm so happy to have this and I'm so glad I don't have to torture my poor horses' mouths anymore. Thank you Dr. Cook! What a beautiful thing.

Colleen, 11/6/01:

Dear Dr. Cook,

Bless you! I'm not given to using exclamation points, but your bridle has made me feel particularly exclamatory. I'd be more than happy for you to use my comments on your website. I've been emailing my closest friends with horses about your bridle outlining my experience (together with a link to your site) and so far have been met with much return interest. I feel like a born-again tack person.

And I want to relay what happened next:

The next day, even better with SMOKEY (my Peruvian). I decided to ride both horses bareback. The fear of riding SOLANDA (my Paso Fino) without a bit was completely gone, and I was ready to try her bareback without a bit, something I'd never have considered without this bridle. So we did it. Even better, SOLANDA started to drop her head instead of bracing up into that stiff-necked thing she's always done with a bit (the forced, false collection prompted by her early training with her first trainer), she backed more readily and easily, and then lo and behold rounded her back underneath me and gaited more easily and more happily than I can remember.

SMOKEY and I cantered *bareback* all over the place and he was very wonderful. They both seem delighted to be moving without a bit in their mouths. I'm buying one for SOLANDA next month and I'm never going to put a bit in their mouths again. And this surprised me more than anything, with a bit in their mouths I wouldn't feel nearly as safe.

The next day, SOLANDA did in fact become a bit friskier than usual as you note in your literature might happen with the sense of liberation from the bit, but I didn't mind. I still felt as if she was finally focused in a way she has never been focused before, as if she could finally focus on her movement and on my aids and on me rather than focusing on this thing in her mouth, which has been the bane of her riding experience from the time she was a baby.

A side note: the same day I listened to Sabine Kells on Rick Lamb's Horse Show discussing Dr. Strasser's approach to barefooting, and I feel as if for the first time, with your bridle and with the possibilities of natural horse hoof care, that I'm finally approaching what's best for my horses and for our relationship together. I'm truly grateful to you for your work and your generosity of spirit in your approach to our relationship to our horses. I've told my horse friends that you deserve a special place in heaven for this, and I mean it. Thank you.

Lauren, 11/11/01:

I have a Welsh/Thoroughbred pony and she is a very strong jumper. I bought the Bitless Bridle at the Equine Affaire on Saturday. I rode that same day with one of my friends. My pony, PIPPI, 4 months ago wouldn't even trot because she was ring sour. I started riding in a halter and she got better but I couldn't stop her, so jumping was out of the question!!!!!!!!!! When I hopped on her (using the Bitless Bridle) she was (at first) confused because she (found she) had to stop! We started to jump bareback and she was so happy she tried to buck! Your halter is a miracle because I rode for 2 1/2 hours without a fuss out of her! I'm only 12 so it is hard to get to the barn I board at but I strongly recommend this bridle to horse lovers everywhere especially if you ride bareback like I do!!!!!!!!!!!!!! -

Nancy and Mark, Simsbury, CT, 11/13/01:

I live in Connecticut and was at your seminar on Friday. I had already bought a bridle from your booth as I am a believer in leaving all our domesticated animals as close to how they were made as possible, and was looking for a way to not have to bit my horse. She is a 16H Appaloosa mare named BREEZY, 11 years old, calm and kind. I want to give her the respect she shows me. She dreads the bit so much that when I took her bridle off and hooked it around her neck in preparation for putting on her bridle, she would put her head up on my shoulder and relaxes while I pet and scratch her head. Saturday I tried the bridle. Everyone at the family barn where I board came out to see how it worked, of course hoping for catastrophe. It was fantastic. Instead of putting her head up and opening her mouth when I pulled on the reins (she was used to a "mild" D-ring snaffle) she quietly turned her head in the appropriate direction. She stopped more quickly and neatly with your bridle. I am sure that the effort to develop this bridle, and more importantly the effort to get the word out has been exhausting. I wanted to thank you for that effort and let you know the difference it has made for BREEZY. If you have a mailing list please add me to it. I will be sure to let my friends in the horse world know of this great product. The best to you and your family.

Paula, Newbern, TN 11/13/01:

I want to let you know that I have received and used the bitless bridle on my mule. He does great with the bridle. It is wonderful to use, especially trail riding. It allows him to eat/drink freely and he seems much happier and content. I have also noticed that he is bending, flexing and giving his head more willingly with this bridle than with any other bits, that I have used. I am very satisfied with the beta, it has a very soft touch and lays against his head wonderfully (also easily cleaned, almost maintenance free).

Your customer service was so very friendly and helpful, which I appreciated very much. You have a wonderful product that every equine owner needs to know about and I will definitely be spreading the word.

Thanks again !!!!!

Paula, 11/15/01:

I told my husband again Tuesday night after another ride, how well he (my mule) responds and gives his head more willingly. It is quite amazing and almost too good to be true!!! Thanks so much again for your Bitless Bridle

Karen, 11/19/01 :

I saw your demo and bought a bitless bridle in Mass. Since then have bought two more; one for my young gelding to use now with long lines, and then to ride in, no need for a bit. The other for my Paint who I have had for 2 years. My trainer was so impressed after riding my Paint she wanted one as well.

I have never felt so good riding this horse as I do now in the Bitless bridle. He responds so well, which he didn't in the bit. He would always fight it and I was not enjoying riding. I have to say it has been such a joy, a real eye opener, to have this horse responding to being ridden in the bitless. It is so wonderful, I thought for sure he would take off with me and act up without the bit. Quite the contrary. With the least amount of pressure he will turn right, left, and back up (which may I add he fought tooth and nail before). We can trot around the ring loose rein. Tonight I even rode him back to the stable loose rein, and if he speeded up I just circled him, which he did with ease, not fighting me like before when I would do this with a bit. And he didn't speed up but twice. Once I let him have a loose rein again he just walked back nice. My girl friend who has her horse here at my place is going to get one for her horse as well. I am so glad you were in Mass. Thanks from me and my horses for developing such a wonderful thing. My trainer today said, 'wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone was using this.' With my greatest regards.

Nancy, Simsbury, Connecticut, 11/19/01:

I attended your seminar at the Equine Affaire in Springfield, Massachusetts. I purchased one of your bitless bridles and am eager to report what great success I have had using it. My 16H, 11 year-old Appaloosa hates her full cheek snaffle so much that when I remove her halter to put on her bridle she rests her head on my shoulder for as long as I can hold it, knowing that when I stop petting her it will be time for the bit in her mouth.

Last Saturday I tried the bitless bridle. Everyone at the family barn where I board came out to see how it worked, of course hoping for the excitement of a runaway horse or the drama of a thrown rider. With the few simple directions it was easy to fit the bridle to her head and when I rode her the results were fantastic. Instead of putting her head up and opening her mouth when I applied pressure to a rein (she was used to a "mild" full cheek snaffle) she quietly turned her head in the appropriate direction. She stopped more quickly and neatly with your bridle. Since then I have noticed even on trails that she is more relaxed and able to pay more attention to what I am asking of her. Just taking it off without that rattle of metal on teeth is such a relief to us both. I look forward to a winter where I don't have to try to warm a piece of freezing metal before putting it into the mouth of my beloved mare.

Thank you so much for your efforts to develop this bridle. It has allowed me to give my horse the same level of respect that she has always shown me."

Isabella, Italy, 11/19/01:

I tried your bitless bridle and it worked wonderfully. HAIRI (a seven year old mare) shows now an even improved balance than with my hackamore and to ask her for collection is very easy. She responds very well to all my requests and it's fine in jumping too. I hope in the future other people will adopt your bridle, their horses will certainly thank them for this.

Isabella, Italy, 1/3/02:

I bought your bitless bridle last November and tried it on my seven years old mare, HAIRI. She responded very well, as I already told you.

The problem Hairi had with being ridden in a snaffle bit was, as my trainer explained to me, the conformation and heaviness of her head. She has the neck and the head of a stallion, with a large jawbone, which makes it very difficult for her to flex at the poll. The heaviness of her head causes her to lie on the bit too much and consequently to fall on her forehead. This is no longer possible with the bitless bridle. Having no bit to lay on, she had to learn again to keep her balance independently and now she is much more self balanced than before.

As I told you in my previous e-mail I used to ride her (after the snaffle bit) with an English hackamore. But before she could regain her self-balance we had a bad accident, fortunately without consequences. While jumping a series of cross poles she literally fell out of balance ending with her head on the ground and making me fall as well. This I then realized was because she was so used to searching for her balance on the bit that without it she could not keep it.

The work with the bitless bridle made me realize how important a correct use of posture, legs and hands is in order to have a horse collected. It took me two months to obtain a first degree of collection from HAIRI but I was so proud to have achieved this without any constraint. HAIRI is still a very green horse and I'm an inexperienced rider so every step we make is a success. At the beginning she tried to avoid collection by raising her head but this has progressively disappeared when I learnt to use better my posture. I have still the same problem with canter. She is not used to a collected canter and she still raises her head frequently (she does it much less with my trainer).

In my riding centre there are many people performing dressage at a high level (we have Daniel Pinto one of the best dressage riders in the world). And they keep telling me that with my bitless bridle no collection is possible. Now, I would like to have a technical explanation for this. According to my trainer my horse is collected (not of course to the highest level, she is still at the beginning) and I can feel her hindlegs behind her pushing and I do not see any difference from horses ridden with bits. Could you give me the name of somebody performing dressage who have used your bitless bridle with success? I would like to be able to answer these people appropriately.

Some of them also state that applying pressure on a horse's nose is dangerous and very painful for them. Is there any article on the subject I could suggest them to read?

I'm very disappointed how people react towards anything that is new and how much ignorance is spread also amongst professional riders and trainers. I would so like to demonstrate to them that you can perform dressage and jumping at a good level without a bit or any other restraint aid and I'd like to share my experience with other people. Can you help me with this?

I thank you very much in advance for your attention and send you my best wishes for the New Year.

[Dr. Cook responds:

I am pleased to hear that the Bitless Bridle has restored 'self-carriage' to your mare. However, I would have to question your trainer's explanation as to why she was leaning on the bit in the first instance. No horse is born that, when at liberty, cannot hold its head up. It is the bit that causes a horse to lean, not its conformation. A bitted horse may well be leaning on the bit in order to avoid the pain

caused by the bit pressing on the roof of its mouth. By extending its head and pressing the bit into its tongue it can keep the bit away from its hard palate. I don't believe that a horse actually leans on the bit, as this would have the opposite effect and press the bit into the hard palate; something that a horse would be more likely to avoid as being more painful than the alternative, even though the tongue is very sensitive.

It is quite possible to obtain, with the bitless bridle, all the collection that is necessary for good dressage movements. What the bridle will not do is to produce the exaggerated poll flexion that results in the horse being overbent. I will attach to this letter a recently updated file of comments from dressage riders that will shortly be installed on the website. Perhaps you can contact one or more of these contributors.

Yes, a hackamore can put so much pressure on the bridge of the nose that the bone can even be broken. Some people even suggest that the hackamore should be fitted in such a way that it deliberately obstructs respiration. I strongly disagree with both objectives. But the bitless bridle does neither. The amount of pressure it exerts is gentle to the point of being almost trivial, yet the horse responds well because there is no pain and no respiratory obstruction.

A new idea is one of the most painful things to man. There is a natural tendency amongst all of us to reject new ideas out of hand, rather than to examine them with an open mind and to give them a fair trial. This applies particularly to equitation that has depended for so long on tradition and mythology. Our website is about to undergo a major update and if you keep a watch on this site you will find an increasing amount of information that will be of help to you in answering people's skepticism.]

Dawn, Glasgow, KY, 11/25/01:

I met you at Equitana 2000 and bought a black nylon bridle. I loved it. Since then I have bought two more nylons for myself, plus a leather and a biothane for a friend. My horses are Arabians, gaited horses, and an appaloosa. All do fantastic with your bridle. I wouldn't use anything else.

Pat, 12/3/01:

I just ordered another bitless bridle from you. I love my leather padded headstall and decided to get the Beta headstall so I don't have to worry about ruining my good one now that winter has arrived.

I tried your bridle because my horse had TMJ and is now getting his jaw back into alignment. He was such a good sport about accepting the bit and doing his best to oblige my requests that I was unaware there was a jaw problem until one day it was obvious when I looked at him straight on. He was very touchy around the head and acted as though he was in great pain. Now that the dentist put his jaw back in place and filed his teeth to allow for the new placement of his jaw I decided to try your bitless bridle. I was told by a friend in another state that she rides in nothing but your bridle and highly recommended it. I was confident that this was the way to go that I jumped in and got your top of the line headstall. I couldn't be happier and neither could my horse. He made the transition with absolutely no problem. I didn't know what to expect because this horse (half TB and half Appaloosa) is relatively new to me and only 5 years old. He is marvelous on the trail and in the ring. Together we'll be learning the basics of some dressage and then jumping.

The horse I really want to tell you about is the barn owner's horse. This horse is 6 YO and has had nothing but bit problems. The owner had numerous vets, dentists, chiropractors and acupuncturists in to try and figure out this horse's problem with bits (any kind of bit!) and her nervousness when one is in her mouth. Her bottom lip slaps up and down constantly.

I suggested the owner try my bitless headstall on her horse and voila! the horse moved out with calm and poise. It was incredible to watch. The owner was having such a good time that she said that maybe she has a diamond in the rough there in that horse. She is looking forward to spending more time in the saddle now that she knows how quiet and cooperative the horse can be. I am a school counselor who looks forward to my therapy sessions on and around my horse. The least I can do is make sure he gets half the rewards and pleasures I do. Therefore I don't plan on going back to a bit. Also, I must say that I am truly looking forward to not having to warm a bit for winter riding. >g<

Thank you for a very fine product. The padded leather headstall is beautifully made and of a quality that matches the finer pieces of tack I own. It is definitely show ring quality. Maybe I'll get there one day. :-)

Nancy, 12/7/01:

I recently began jumping BREEZY and the folks at the barn suggested that I use a bridle with a bit. 'Obviously you can't jump a horse with no bit'. But once again the bridle proved itself. She flies over three foot jumps in your bridle. I am grateful because as I study books on jumping I find that one of the worst mistakes is to catch your horse's mouth with the bit as it lands. I am cautious to give her all the rein she needs and relieved that if I make such a mistake she will not have metal in her mouth jerking her head back up.

Susan, Standish, MI 12/10/01:

Just a note to let you know that this bitless bridle is a wonder. I have tried it (not a lot so far) on my three horses and find it to be a wonder. I sort of laugh at how the horses react and then how I reacted. I used it on my 4 yr old mare who has not had any training to speak of, from off of the ground and she reacted almost instantly to turning and yes even backing! Well, that result sold my friend and now she has one. It also seems that several more have/will get one of these bridles. I am really anxious to try on my Arab gelding a former racer training, who is going to be competitive riding this year. This last year using the snaffle and at times he thought he was back racing, not a real good situation, but I do not want to put anything severe on him he has such a good mouth. I have been telling others about this bridle and I believe in what I am saying.

Bitless Bridle User Comments, 2000

Kimbra, (Director of a Therapeutic Riding Program), Poulsbo, CA. 1/4/2000:

As we have had a lot of rain, I have only been able to use the (bitless) bridle one time (yet) with BLACKJACK. This is a Quarter horse with a bulldog jaw that cannot be ridden at all with a bit in his mouth, as he suffers excruciating pain. ... BLACKJACK took readily to the

bridle. He automatically held his head in proper position and was more collected. I felt that I had equal control as I would have with a bit. If anything I was more comfortable, because I had no fear he would rear or buck because of pain caused by the bit. He did some head shaking when I was turning him in small circles but once I loosened up on the reins that behavior diminished.

Trish, 1/12/00:

I bought a nylon bridle and then later a leather one. I like the leather one much better, although I do use the nylon one on my young horse. I don't like switching them back and forth (if so I would use the leather one only) because I have them sized to fit and I don't want to have to adjust each time I switch horses. Although the horses are the same height, one has a large head and the other has a small head. The only problem I have with the nylon one is that the crossover strap isn't stationary (connected to the headstall) as is the leather one. I find when riding with the nylon one, that one side of the reins sometimes ends up being significantly longer than the other side. Like 6 inches on one side and 2 on the other. You then have to lean over and straighten it at the poll.

In my barrel racing training, we do a lot of circles and I've got a young horse that is bursting with energy. I don't have a problem controlling her and don't feel unsafe, it's just that there is nothing to hold the cross-under pieces (what I'm referring to as the throatlatch) in one place, like there is with the leather one. On the leather one the throatlatch cross-under things are joined to the headstall piece and I don't have this problem.

Other than the above I love these bridles. I am the only person that races in these and people are beginning to ask me about them.

My seasoned horse loves it and does very well in it. The true test was the young horse that just came back from 2 months of barrel training. When she came back she was definitely trained well, but she also has scars at the corners of her mouth from the bit cutting. I just instinctively would like to keep bits out of my horse's mouths. I feel I have good control in these bridles. The leather one also looks classier than the nylon.

[Dr. Cook replies:

Two users have previously reported this problem with the nylon headstalls. It may be a question of how much force is being applied to the reins (and with barrel racing I suppose you may be neck reining or direct reining or both). If a great deal of force is being applied to the reins some rotation might be expected. The ideal solution is to ride with less pressure. Alternatively, it may be a question of how loose the wire loop is that constricts the extension of the crossover strap as it passes up over the poll. If it is too loose there will be a tendency for the loop to rotate over the poll and for one rein to get longer than the other.

This can be prevented in a number of different ways. First, as a temporary measure and as an experiment, you could try jamming a wedge of material under the wire loops in order to prevent the rotation. If this works, a more permanent solution would be to take a pair of pliers and pinch the wire loop in the middle, so that it takes a firmer grip. Another solution would be to lace the two straps together at the midline. Punch holes through the nylon with a red-hot nail and lace the straps together over a distance of about two inches. You could produce the same effect by sewing a small square of thin but strong canvas-like material in the same place..]

Kevin, (Eventer) MD 1/15/00:

I have a horse that won't accept the bit. The bitless bridle is wonderful; I love it.

Corinne, Plantation, FL 1/25/00:

The horse that I purchased a Bitless Bridle for earlier this month has been doing so much better. He (a 7 year old Thoroughbred) no longer tosses his head and the bridle seems to have helped him to concentrate. It has worked brilliantly. The horse has won a blue ribbon and was Grand Champion recently. I have a professional rider and she is very pleased with the control that the bridle provides. I am talking it up all round the Florida show circuit. Please send a second bridle.

Steffanie, Little R Stables, Caseyville, Illinois 2/1/00:

Dr. Cook, We just wanted to let you know that we are currently using your bridle on two racehorses in training at Fairmount Park racetrack. We really are pleased with the results, but would like to try the bridle with the martingale."

Steffanie, Little R. Stables, Caseyville Illinois 2/2/2000:

We really are having fun with the bitless bridle. The two horses that we use it on are doing well. One is a parrot-mouthed filly that had continually fought the bit and lugged in badly down the stretch. She is now much calmer and concentrates on galloping, instead of fighting the bit. The second horse is the main reason we tried your bridle. He is a proven racehorse and is 17.2 hands tall. He is a severe bleeder and is a nervous, bad shipper. We feel this is because of the extreme stress of bleeding, and the knowledge he is going to bleed. He is presently on an endurance-training program, galloping and jogging a total of 2.5 to 3.0 miles a day. We are trying to teach him to relax and gallop at a controlled pace, versus galloping quickly each day. It will be with him that we use the martingale.

The filly has never started and the gelding is returning off of a small layoff (to let his lungs heal after a particularly bad bleed). We haven't talked with the stewards yet, and have yet to see another bitless bridle used here (Fairmont Park, Illinois). We've had a lot of inquiries and stares, though!! If you'd like some follow up reports, please let us know. We are trying to help promote your product, and the riders (me, my husband, and one other gallop boy), so far, have had no problems with it.

James, Northfield, Minnesota, 2/17/00:

I am really pleased with these bridles - they give me total control of my two horses.

James, Northfield, Minnesota, 3/8/00:

I have used the bridle on two horses so far. The first one is normally a very fractious horse; a bucking kicking thing. He calmed down amazingly well in the Bitless Bridle, both in the arena and when walking around the track, something which has been very difficult to achieve with a bit in his mouth. It was like night and day; I was elated.

The second horse is a big colt and one that is well behaved with a bit. He went through a little rodeo session at first. He thought he was free. Then, as he realized he wasn't, he first became a little resentful, but then settled down wonderfully well.

I am amazed at the lightness of touch that is needed with the bridle. I have always preferred to ride with little finger control but with these reins I can use an even lighter touch.

Robert, Newark, Delaware 3/15/00 :

My daughter has a horse that we are training for Show Hunter classes that used to be an inveterate head shaker. He also used to lean heavily on the bit.

Since using the Bitless Bridle he has abandoned both habits and can be ridden on a loose rein, almost on the buckle. For show classes that require the use of a bit, we hang a snaffle in his mouth like a pacifier and he plays with it happily without returning to his old ways.

Nancy, Matamoras, PA, 3/19/00:

I received your bridle about a week ago and ABSOLUTELY LOVE IT! I have used it on several of the spirited Morgans on our farm who are known to be a handful at times. Both turned into a totally different horse. Then I used it on my young colt, in long lining....it worked like a charm. I WILL NEVER PUT A BIT IN A HORSE'S MOUTH AGAIN!!! I can't wait for our trainer to see it. She's been away helping out a friend for several weeks. One of my friends told her about my new bridle and she INSISTED she would NEVER ride a horse without a bit!!!! I can't wait to SHOW her what can be accomplished with your bitless bridle. The best way I can express it is, 'Horse and rider now work together as partners'. Why should we DOMINATE and CONTROL when we can work together as one?' I showed the bridle to our farrier, who told the harness racing track a mile down the road about it. Within 5 minutes the owner of Big Z Stables was at our farm wanting to check out this "strange bridle" he had heard about. He was skeptic, yet curious, and said he's definitely going to order one. So if you hear from Big Z Stables in Montague, NJ...it's because of my salesmanship. If you need a distributor in the NJ/PA/NY area, let me know and we can work something out. I would love to see every horse in the WORLD in a bitless bridle. I'd be your best salesperson. I could set up displays at shows, etc. I do have one question. I was going to order a leather bridle to match my saddle, but I feel the leather would not "slide as easily" in and out of the rings as the nylon or biothane does... am I right? Thank you again for this MARVELOUS BRIDLE.

[Dr. Cook responds:

Actually, there is very little sliding with any of the materials. Pressure is transmitted but the amount of actual sliding is negligible. Leather seems to transmit the pressure change just as well as the synthetic materials. There is really nothing to choose between any of the materials with regard to function.]

Elizabeth, (Dressage instructor) Sykesville, MD 3/25/00:

You are onto something wonderful. My 7-year-old Thoroughbred mare was always rather 'mouthy' but then, in June 1998, she developed EPM. Most of the symptoms disappeared after six weeks of treatment but she was left with a facial neuralgia. Subsequently, when a bit was put in her mouth, she would constantly move her jaw back and forth and tip her poll in the

opposite direction. The result was a side-to-side wagging of her head. At the same time, she would squint with both eyes (flutter her eyelids, noisily). The head wagging would be triggered as soon as the slightest pressure was placed on the mouth by anything one did with the reins. She could not walk in a straight line with a bit in her mouth. With the lightest contact she would get panicky, duck from the bridle, and focus entirely on her head. During these moments, she would walk into a wall.

I have had to ride her without a bit, in a cavesson set high on her head, with a dropped noseband, and with reins attached to the "O" rings of the cavesson. Even so she was miserable and if she got tough and needed rein pressure, her head wagging would commence. I was desperate. A horse dentist told me that he didn't see how I could ever do dressage with this horse.

But now she is as happy as a clam in the Bitless Bridle and I am really delighted. It was like slipping a switch. She is still sensitive around her poll and, at rest, and I can still elicit the head wagging response by placing my hands on her poll, her cheek or around her TMJ. But at work in the Bitless Bridle she is as happy as can be. I have videotape film of her before and after the Bitless Bridle, and will get these copied for you.

Sue, Glen Rock, PA, 3/29/00:

This 'thing' is really great. It has made a world of difference to my horse. I use it for dressage and for polocross. For the pony club game, I hold the reins in one hand and twist my thumb either up or down to turn to one side or the other. This is enough to give direct rein signals and it works fine. Neck reining doesn't work.

[Dr. Cook comments: I was pleased to hear how Sue could direct rein with one hand. Neck reining obviously did not work for polocross ... perhaps there was not a sufficiently rapid response. However, in fairness to the bridle, it is worth adding that in general usage for other disciplines most users find that they can neck rein with The Bitless Bridle perfectly well. Training might be an issue.]

Nora, Chestertown MD, 4/10/00:

The bridle is wonderful! I have an old mare, an ex-racehorse, and with a bit in her mouth she gets all nervous and worked-up. She obviously thinks, 'here comes Saratoga all over again'. Because of this I have generally ridden her in a halter but this is so hard on her nose. With the bitless Bridle, however, I have all the control of a bit without the anxiety on her part and without the nose pressure. She stays relaxed and calm and we both enjoy the ride better.

Cheryl, East Greenwich, RI, 4/11/00:

I just ordered a bitless bridle. I tried a friend's and loved it. We never jumped better. I do cross country jumping with an 18 year-old horse who knows his job. But at the beginning of the season, particularly, I am a little nervous and tend to pull back on the bit in front of a jump. The result is, of course, that the horse stalls. But with the Bitless Bridle, if I pull back it doesn't throw the horse off balance. I feel much better and am excited to get my bridle."

Nancy, Wadsworth, Ohio, 4/12/00:

The bridle is working well. I have had two people try it on their horses with great satisfaction. Hopefully, I'll drum up some business for you. You may indeed use my letter for your "Users Comments" section in your website. If there is anything else I can possibly do to help you, please don't hesitate to ask. If I may say so, you have an absolutely fantastic product that the horse world not only wants but NEEDS. Trouble is, I have mentioned this bridle to every horse person I've come in contact with since I received it and NOT ONE of them had even heard about it. ALL of them were very interested and I sent them to your website. Almost all of them were skeptical about being able to control a horse without a bit. BUT most of them had open minds. I think anyone who truly loves horses would be willing to do anything to improve their horses lives and comfort. May I suggest you send one of your bridles to people like John Lyons to try out. If you can get a BIG NAME horse person like this to promote your bridle, A LOT of people in the horse industry would sit up and take notice.....only a suggestion but you have absolutely nothing to lose but the cost of one bridle and possibly everything to gain. I attended the Springfield, MA Equine Affaire last year and WHAT A MARVELOUS place it would be to distribute your bridle. I already have my calendar marked for this year. I wouldn't miss it!

Gary, Aqueduct Park, NY, 4/13/00:

I was the leading trainer at the Aqueduct Racetrack winter meeting. My horses earn close to 2 million dollars per year. I have found the bitless bridle to be a fantastic alternative to using a bit. Horses fight it less and travel much better. We even use it on our hardest to handle horses and they fight the rider much less and are much easier to gallop. Many would think that the most difficult horses would have their way with a rider if you remove the bit, but I find that that kind of horse actually chooses not to fight and appreciates the bit not pulling against his mouth. I have hopes that one day every horse will train in a bitless bridle and only use bits for racing.

My (present) feeling is that I would train all babies with a bit until they totally understand it and accept it. Perhaps until they race a few times. Then they will appreciate the move to the bitless bridle. My main use of the bitless bridle is for the older horse with the broken mouth and the horse that knows the bit well and will appreciate the move to the bitless bridle."

M. Cervas, Fall City, WA, 4/14/00:

I wanted to let you know that the bitless bridle is great! My horse is calm...he's 3-years-old and takes it without any trouble. Once on, he is great on following my leads and I have no problem with his head. I love it. This is the nicest thing that's happened.

Bonnie, Oakland CA, 4/20/00:

Just wanted to tell you that my horse took to the bitless bridle immediately. Before riding him with it, I lunged him with the reins slipped over the back of the cantle of my dressage saddle. For about 20 seconds, he looked confused about the new pressures and wasn't sure he should move forward. But then he did and quickly seemed relaxed on the lunge line. When I rode him, I was pleased that it appears the bridle will accomplish one of my aims: to have my 5

year old ex-race horse relax at the canter so I can work on having an independent seat. With the bitless bridle, he cantered at one speed. Thanks again.

Lavelle, 4/20/00:

I received the nylon bitless bridle at 10:30AM. By 3:00PM I had tried it on all three of my horses.

Horse #1 is a 4 yr old Quarterhorse mare. She was only slightly confused at first but then acted as though she understood the concept.

Horse #2 is a 3yr old TWH gelding. He is headstrong but gentle and willing. I've only been riding him for about 6 months. He thought at first this was an opportunity to get his way and I had to hold on to him a little more at first than horse #1. I had to work more but think that he will enjoy it more as we use it more.

Horse #3 is a 24 month-old TWH stallion. I've only been on him 3 times before getting the bitless bridle but I put it on him adjusted it and lunged him for 10 minutes then got on him. He doesn't know much really so I didn't expect much. At first when I pulled the right rein he went to the left and vice versa. I had taken the "O" ring out for this ride as it was stated that it wasn't necessary to use. He still doesn't get it yet but I had to cut my ride short. Tomorrow he'll get a little longer lesson. I decided to "break" him using the bitless bridle so time will tell.

Now, for the negatives.....What am I to do with all my beautiful color headstalls for TWH's? And my silver western headstalls that match my silver show saddles? I know I can use the color browbands but that's about it! I really don't want to go back to bits now but I don't want to waste those beautiful bridles. What to do?"

Eric, Belleville, Illinois, 4/21/00

This weekend I rode a Missouri Foxtrotter owned by the folks where I board. The horse has a tendency to be a little uncontrollable when first ridden. I rode him with his standard bit for 5 minutes then changed to the bitless bridle. It took me a moment to get used to the feel and another moment for the horse but there was no real learning curve. We both took to it quite easily. I over emphasized the commands at first then easily got used to it and in 10 minutes was able to relax pressure back to normal. The horse had less of a tendency to "run" away and seemed more relaxed. That may all be my imagination. I did notice that he seemed to back much easier and with greater authority. No hesitation at all. Regardless, I'm sure nothing was lost by going bitless. I look forward to using it to train my 10 month old when he comes of age."

Vincent, Campbell Hall, NY, 4/21/00:

I have used this bridle 25 times and I really like it. I break colts and do remedial work. The bridle has a great effect on the way they use their heads. Please shift the chin strap buckle to the left hand side.

Kay, (Trainer), Corpus Christi, TX, 4/26/00:

Thank you for taking my order today on the bitless bridle. I am very excited about this bridle as I have always felt there was a better way than slapping something in a horse's mouth and expecting them to be happy about it; especially during the early years with all the teeth things happening. I've always used a side pull and had decent results with it, but just trying a homemade version of your bitless bridle I was impressed with the results on a horse that wasn't running well and was slinging his head. Boy, did he work much better. It worked wonderfully. He turned better and the brakes were good. He still tended to throw his head up when stopping, so then I used a martingale and he stopped with his head tucked-in, his mouth closed and a nice rounded outline. I think it is a wonderful idea. Now I want to try the real thing! Again, thank you for bringing a new idea to our attention.

Judy, Sudlersville, MD, 5/1/2000:

I cannot tell you what a change I have witnessed with my two Arabians since I have started using the bitless bridle received on April 10th. Decided to use it for a month just to make sure it was going to work and it certainly has!

PRINCESS is no longer lugging on the "bit", although, if she begins to pull to the left as she did before, just a touch on the right rein gets her attention.

JEWEL is in "bitless" heaven. She is older and a little more settled than Princess, but still could be a handful at times. With the bitless bridle she has been absolutely wonderful. She is no longer getting strong on our canters, listens well and is just a dream.

My daughter used the bridle today for the first time and could not believe the change in PRINCESS. She was a bit concerned when we started off but became more confident as we rode along. By the end of the ride she was as thrilled as I have been.

Thanks so much. What a remarkable change in both the horses. We love the bridle and an order has been placed for a second one.

Liz, Hockley, TX, 5/15/00:

As you predicted, the bitless bridle is an asset to my tack room. Thank you!

Karen 5/18/00:

This bridle is a lovely thing. I really like it. My horse now reaches out to put her nose in the bridle. I bought her from people who said they could not control her and they were using a gag bit. But I have no difficulty in controlling her in the Bitless Bridle. By the end of a trail ride, most horses with a bit in their mouths are beginning to look unhappy but not mine.

Wilhelmina, Rembert, SC, 5/19/00:

I am normally very skeptical about new ideas but your bridle really works and I am very happy with it. We used it first on a rather theatrical colt that had behaved well when first schooled but, as time went on and he got stronger, became quite nasty. He pulled and pulled, swished his tail and arched his neck. We couldn't decide what was wrong. We had his mouth examined and his throat scoped but found nothing to explain the problem. Then we changed him over to the Bitless Bridle and he became a totally changed horse. The difference was

incredible ... 'night and day.' He no longer pulled or flashed his tail and his head carriage was improved. We have now sent him to Angel Penna at Belmont, who will continue to use the Bitless Bridle for routine training. When he comes to a breeze, the trainer will put a bit in his mouth, in order to get him used to it for racing, but at these times there is not the need to hold him in.

Lisa, (trail rider and dressage competitor), Baltimore, MD, 5/24/00:

i do parelli natural horsemanship. have recently passed level 1 and am working on level 2 . i don't want to put anything in my horse's mouth. he is so happy without anything. sometimes i use your bridle, sometimes a rope halter, sometimes natural hackamore, sometimes string around neck, sometimes just " a carrot stick" for directing and nothing else.

in level 2 one must demonstrate use cherokee bridle (string through horses mouth), also snaffle bridle. i am going to try to use your bridle for the snaffle bit requirements (dummy bit) or maybe not. is it possible for horse to relax jaw and "give to the bit " if the bit is non-existent. *[Ed: Yes; simply delete the word 'bit' with the word 'bridle'. Ask yourself is the horse relaxed? Is the horse responding easily to the aids?]*

anyway, i will eventually order a leather bridle- i have a nylon one.. i really like the rubber reins, though. can i get a leather bridle with leather reins with rubber grips? i want to compete in dressage- rules still state must have bit. BAH- RULES!

Lisa, 8/21/00:

I called the American Horse Show Assoc. which makes the rules that the USDF follows. They said you need to ride with a snaffle bit so I am hoping to get away with a dummy bit. Showing is not that important to me. I feel my horse is trusting me so much because I never use a bit that I would be betraying him if I put one in his mouth because of rules and tradition, especially since I am not an upper level rider with the most sensitive educated hands. One of the women at the AHSA office expressed an interest in learning more so maybe...

I am enjoying riding with my bridle. My studies of natural horsemanship are going well. I have passed all my tasks, but one, for level one. I love my horse and the relationship we are developing. Thanks again.

Gale (Trail rider), Sarasota, FL, 5/25/00:

Your nylon bridle arrived today and I rode my horse in it for an hour and half. WOW! It really, really, made a difference and was everything you claimed it to be. I ride a rehabilitated Appendix Quarter Horse with a history of a chronic croup problem and a tendency to drag one hind leg. But this afternoon he developed a beautiful floating stride and put himself into a frame. I am absolutely amazed at the bridle and totally thrilled. I am impressed by the way he turns. Even in the warm up period, he got very bendable. I love the way the bridle pushes rather than pulls. And though I normally prefer leather, the bridle is beautifully made and well constructed. Thank you."

Anne, Dundee, MI, 5/26/00:

I tried the bridle out on my Icelandic horse and it works great. I always had a problem with my mare turning corners; but I had no problem turning her yesterday. I will pass the word around about the bridle. I love it.

Anne, St. Anne de Prescott, Ontario, 6/6/00:

The more I train and ride my Icelandic horse, the more I love my bitless bridle. She does not fight me when we do turns. Plus her stride has gotten longer too.

Joanna, Norco, CA 8/21/00:

I've taken my Icelandic out with the bridle once so far. I did notice that he didn't push his nose out at the halt, which he always did before, even when I was using my body and voice command almost exclusively instead of pulling on the reins to halt. I need to figure out how to collect him in all the gaits, but especially in the Tolt. For the tolt the hands alternate pulling on the firmly held reins to collect the horse and get his head up. This seesawing seems to be similar to the method you describe for stopping a strong horse. I have to experiment with the bridle so I don't give him mixed signals.

Dr George Howe, Assoc. Prof of Physiology, Dept of Animal Science, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, 6/2/00:

Your Bitless Bridle is the greatest darn thing. I would have given anything to have had it 15 years ago. I cannot praise it enough. The bridle keeps the horse's heads between the reins and they turn so well."

Janet, Carlisle, PA. 6/3/00:

Thanks so much for sending us the brown beta bridle. We will keep this brown bridle, and also will keep the black beta bridle you had sent until you could send the brown one. Truth is that, now that we have tried the bitless bridle, we will not put anything else on our `boys'.

To follow up on our experience, the black bridle arrived the day our grandchildren arrived. It took 30 seconds for NIKKI, our Arabian that we have for me and our grandchildren to ride, to get used to the new gear. He was at home in it right away and responded as well as or better than when wearing a bit. Our grandchildren rode him for the first time since we got him last November. NIKKI had a reputation of not liking children. Well, he loved ours and was a complete gentleman as each one rode him, using the new bridle.

We hadn't tried it on our 28 year old Walker/Draft mix because he has not been ridden lately due to a tendency to founder. But now he is better and comfortable, so yesterday he gave rides to me and to two little children, ages 4 and 7. He really couldn't believe his experience of being tacked up without having that darned piece of metal in his mouth. He went about his assignment cheerfully and willingly, whereas with a snaffle he got "pesky" quickly and didn't want to keep on working.

As a consequence of our experience, I am taking every opportunity to spread the good word about this new bridle. What a great thing for horses - and for people who care about their horses. If there is anything I can do for this cause, I am willing. Thank you for the reprint of your article on the causes of bleeding, and for the other information on how and when to use the bitless bridle.

Sharon Manning, Oak Ridge, TN, 6/03/00:

Just a note to let you know that I have had time to "test" the Biothane Bitless Bridle that I received AND I AM IMPRESSED! I will never put a bit in any horse of mine ever again.

Sharon 5/20/01:

I was just thinking about you the other day as I was telling yet another person about your web site. I thought I would drop you a line and see how you were doing? Our Bitless Bridles are still working just fine and we enjoy knowing that there is no bit in our horse's mouth. We are getting more and more into the Natural Horse care. I am considering selling my bits and tie downs, etc., but don't even want to put the things out there for someone else to use on their poor horse. Maybe I should start a museum for medieval torture devices for horses. What ya think? :-) Thanks again for all you have done for the horse.

Teresa Bird, 6/11/00:

I ordered one of the synthetic (beta) bridles on September 8 of 2000 as a Christmas gift for a friend of mine. Unfortunately he had a terrible accident with his young horse before I could give it to him and broke his hip in three places. His horse took off while he was mounting and he fell. He isn't even walking now and has decided to sell the horse because it is too dangerous.

I decided to try the bridle myself since I already had it and my horse hates a bit. I have ridden him in a sidepull because of dental problems that would make a bit uncomfortable and he goes quietly with this. I liked the concept of the Bitless Bridle and have tried about six times with him, but he seems to be nervous about it for some reason and doesn't ever settle down. I switched back to the sidepull and he is calm again. I don't understand why this is and I don't see that there is anything physically wrong. I would like to return the bridle to you if possible for a refund. I actually decided to try it myself because it fits in with the Parelli training that I am doing right now. I am disappointed that it didn't work for me because it seems like such a great advancement for the horse's peace of mind. Thanks!

Sarah, Studio City, CA. 7/6/00:

I had been using the Parelli hackamore but was having trouble making the turns. I put on the Bitless Bridle and my mare responded immediately. I was very impressed.

Teresa, Hawthorne, FL, 7/12/00:

I received my Biothane bridle today, expecting positive results, as my horse of 2 months is cooperative and can be ridden safely with a halter. I've been reluctant to bit him, due to my inexperience in dealing with gaited horses. This Paso Fino is 7 years old, is charming, but green in many ways. Although we ride daily, he was nearly impossible to collect or gait using a noseband with curb chain. The effect was tooth-jarring and exhausting for us both. Progress was very slow.

He didn't seem to notice any difference with the bitless bridle, but I DID. He was gaiting smoothly, as if we hadn't had a problem. When he did break into a canter, it was also smooth and collected. All this immediately, I was floored!

One selling point for me was the comment section of the website. It was amazing what some folks had endured and still cared so much about their horses...

Teresa 7/12/00:

We used the bridle for the 2nd time on our morning ride with the same excellent results. It's nice to take a firm feel to show him something and not worry about him thinking it's a punishment. The horse rides about a hand taller than yesterday morning! I also should mention, this bridle is very complimentary to a pretty face, very light and simple. I'll get the word out here. There are a lot of people and horses that need a second chance at success. Thanks so much. Razzmatazz de Dorado and I will keep in touch.

Teresa 7/13/00:

Day Three was another ground breaker. RAZZ was gaiting nicely on our morning ride, when he switched to a trot. I wondered if the gait would return with slightly more collection. Accordingly, I closed on the reins while applying a little leg and raising the reins about three inches vertically. The entire forehand of the horse floated off the ground! We continued to move forward, but with almost no weight on the front. The sound of the front hoof beats diminished to a whisper. We were both in a trance for several minutes until he spotted a garbage can lurking beside the road. Of course, he does what is already in him. But I can guarantee you it was NOT in me. Moving a horse's center of gravity around has never been my gift. We are definitely on to something! (Although this seems all too easy)

Teresa 7/15/00:

And on day 5 Observations stemming from my experience with the bitless bridle in five days of use: My areas of frustration were:- 1) Unable to attain gait from horse, 2) Horse stumbling, 3) Collection vs. contortion. (He also tires after about an hour under saddle, but it is very hot weather right now.) Results: (1) Horse gaiting on cue by day 4 and staying in gait. -* (2) Stumbling only at dead (sloppy) walk or grazing (3) Collection now possible. I have noticed a couple other things and can only speculate how they relate to the whole picture. He is walking faster generally, has more energy (did not want to return home yesterday or today), and just seems happier. You could say the same about me. There has been no problem adjusting to the equipment and no backsliding on any of the gains. Obviously, what we had was a "communication problem". Anyone who is considering use of The Bitless Bridle is welcome to my email address, if I can be of help.

Teresa 6/9/01:

I just ordered a bridle for horse number three. It's been a long time since I corresponded with you and have wondered how you are doing. Is the campaign going as wished? My Paso, RAZZ, successfully completed EPM treatment and realized his ambition to become an au paire since I spoke with you last. He has raised a weanling filly to yearling and taught my 9 year old niece to ride at the same time. He still loves his bridle. Recently, he was anxious to go ride and shoved his head into the mare's bridle as she was being tacked up. He was already wearing his headgear, so looked like Medusa under the coils. RAZZ has used the Bitless Bridle for a year and my mare has been in one seven months. I cannot think of a reason

to use any other headgear. My mare was opinionated and a puller and still puts me to the test regularly. She is bold and confident (pigheaded) by nature. I don't expect to change her, but with your bridle, defeat is not without honor and she does not now become hot or resentful. Sometimes I do ride other horses with their owners' headgear. The mouthing, chewing, tossing, and evading contact with the reins are very distracting, if not disheartening. I am grateful to have found a better way.

William, Indianapolis, IN 7/14/00:

QUINCE will look spectacular in the brown Beta. We are singing the praises of this bridle to every horseperson we meet. In the Fall, I will be using it at a Richard Shrake clinic in Ohio. He is the developer of Resistance Free Riding"

Anne, Canterbury, NH 7/15/00:

I told you I would let you know how things went with the bitless bridle that I ordered a couple of months ago. Finally, I've found some time! First, my main objective was to spare the horses' mouths while my boys are learning to ride. The bridle is an unqualified success in this regard.

Horse 1, BANNER: our 23-year-old half Arab is very light to the aids and had no tolerance for beginners. In the bitless bridle, he relaxes and he and my son Colin can enjoy each other. He is now teaching Colin to canter, something that would have been impossible in a bit. For this I can't thank you enough. Banner had no trouble understanding the aids in the new bridle, but it did take him a few rides to trust it. I don't ride him regularly but for me he is beginning to move forward and round at the same time - something that takes a lot of tact in a bit.

Horse 2, ROXANNE: We bought an 8-year-old unregistered TB this spring. It felt more like a rescue. She was much too cheap for a horse with her good looks, calm disposition and training. She was way underweight, banged up, clearly back sore and who knows what else, but she has that certain something that made me take her home anyway. Time will tell whether I was foolishly impulsive. We rode her lightly at first but then decided she needed time off. She has improved greatly, all though I'm still looking for a good massage therapist. We found a saddle that fits her well, and we've started riding her lightly every other day. So far so good. She too is very light to the aids and loves the bitless bridle. Like Banner, she understood the aids right away, and like Banner, it took her a few rides to trust the bridle. I worked briefly with both of them on the ground and longed them in it first, but neither of them ever expressed any confusion.

Horse 3, OSCAR: A different story. Oscar is a 21-year-old TB, completely sound and still a beautiful, fluid mover. He is not worried about the bit. I ride him in a medium weight loose ring snaffle and he goes nicely and softly 'on the bit'. He's built high behind, and lacks natural athletic balance. He needs lots of rider attention to stay off his forehead. This actually makes him a great teacher - no getting away with sloppy riding! For me he is an energetic, forward, 1st level dressage horse, and ground covering trail horse. For my son, Russell, he is a quiet, relaxed, happy teacher. I rode him once on the trail and twice in the ring with the bitless bridle. My reaction was, that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". In the bitless bridle, he was not round, not easy to turn, couldn't seem to get any collection at all. I'm guessing that it might just take time, but why bother since he's so comfortable in the snaffle. On the trail, the bridle made more sense. I

use a Kimberwick for riding out so that I can use lighter aids for the same control. He is so strong (not hard mouthed, just strong) that all though I can hold him, it isn't fun. I had much the same feeling in the bitless bridle and was very glad that you included the tip about rattling the reins in the instructions. It works. I may try some more trail rides (after the deer flies die off!) to see whether he will relax. I'm sure that the Kimberwick is a bit painful when I need it most and then anxiety is added to that TB urge for speed. So I would like to break that cycle.

All in all, I'm very happy with the bitless bridles and may order a leather one at some time in the future. They work really well for longeing - I use a snap to attach the reins, so I can just remove the reins and attach the longe line to both straps. My only complaint is the adjustability - too much space between holes on the noseband. Hole 2 is too loose, hole 3 impossible to reach. moving the noseband up or down where the horse's nose is bigger or smaller helps, but removes that adjustment as a control/comfort option. I'm attaching 2 pictures taken with a cheap digital camera. My son Colin is the rider and you can see that both BANNER and ROXY are quite happy. They thank you!

Marjolaine, Quebec, Canada 7/21/00:

I have tried the bitless bridle on my difficult mare and after adjustment, I have to say that it is working out extremely well. I have been training this mare for a few months now with a regular snaffle bit and have never got good results. She has a sensitive mouth and was extremely reluctant to the bit. I tried all kind of tricks with the bit but she would never open her mouth for it. It was really getting to be a no-win situation. I tried about six different types of bit (I have a whole collection now) but neither one of them gave me any kind of encouraging result.

After riding her only 3 times with the bitless bridle, she turned out to be a very pleasant horse. No more fussing and no more aggravation. She is responding as if she has been wearing that type of bridle all her life. I have another mare that I will be starting under saddle soon. She is a mild cribber and when you put a bit in her mouth, she doesn't concentrate at all. She is busy trying to place the bit in her mouth so she can chew it!!! If the bitless bridle works for her also (which will probably be the case), I will probably order a second one.

Margaret, Huntington Station, NY 7/28/00:

My horse, once a bit gnashing, head flinging horse, now goes with a flopping lower lip for most of his ride. His roaring is much less when he gallops. Although he still startles easily and often, he is able to regain his composure much more quickly. I believe this is because he is able to recapture his breath more easily.

Lara McGlamery, Mannassas, VA 8/2/00:

I received a <synthetic> bitless bridle today and had such a successful ride that now I'm looking forward to the delivery of the leather bridle I originally ordered. I'm anxious to use the bitless bridle during our fall event season, which kicks off 9/9/00. I sincerely thank you for offering this product and improving the happiness of riders AND horses!

Until today, I thought of WHISPER, my 6 yr. old TB I've owned for nearly two years as a problem horse when it came to biting. He's a dream in every other way, a project I purchased

relatively cheap and took a risk on in hopes he would learn to love eventing as much as I do. He has shown his talent, guts, stamina, and true enthusiasm toward the sport over the last couple of years. I have brought him along slowly enough so that he gains confidence every step of the way and it has paid off with him being a willing, happy partner ... except for one small but major problem.

WHISPER, being trained to race, likes to get flat and strong during galloping and during jumping. Every bit I've tried on him (from the mildest Myler snaffle to ... 'gasp' ... a gag) initiated the same response when I tried to "check" him to slow down or balance before or after a fence -- he would open his mouth very wide and twist his neck. The stronger bits did get him to slow down, but the guilt I felt was horrible. I packed up all my strong bits and concentrated on a Myler ported snaffle (I'm told he has an unusually thick tongue and the port would offer tongue relief). I kept questioning myself and whether or not I'd given WHISPER the proper training to even understand half-halts and balance.

When I heard of the bitless bridle, I made the decision to buy one within a week. Today was our first ride and I wanted to put this thing to the ultimate test. It was our scheduled day for a little galloping and jumping, so we went for it. Warming up with some basic dressage, WHISPER became accustomed to the new aids for braking after just a few transitions. After 30 min. of flat work, we ventured to our 10-acre galloping field and let loose! I was not intimidated by the fact that we had no bit -- as it didn't feel any different at all. I figured if WHISPER got really out of control, we'd just circle. I was pleased to discover that not only did I have brakes, but also I had a much lighter, well-balanced horse galloping beneath me. Only once did WHISPER show any sign of tension with the bitless bridle -- as I was bringing him back after a full-out gallop he did twist his head slightly. I'm sure this response will fade as he gets more comfortable with the feeling of the bridle.

After a couple of gallop sets, we returned to our jumping field and did the most lovely 3'6" jumping course that I've ever felt. Again, I had a well-balanced, happy horse beneath me.

I no longer consider WHISPER to be a "problem," in fact I thank him for teaching me that not all horses are the same and that communication between horse and rider should never depend on a bit! Most of all I thank you for making this revelation possible. I plan to tell everyone I know to "Go Bitless!"

Deborah, Dallas, Texas, 8/10/00:

... I love the bridle. I rode my horse with it last night, and as indicated in your information, she performed like a brand new horse. What an improvement! I have a 24-year-old Arabian Mare, "COPPER", who is the Alpha mare in her herd and thinks she is a 3 year old. Quite bossy! But she behaved like a practiced show horse despite being ridden very little for the past few months.

Now I want to go out and ride her every single night! Thanks so much and feel free to use my comments."

Deborah, Jacksonville, FL:

Letter #1, 8/00/00: Yes, you may add any of my e-mails to your collection of comments and file this particular e-mail as my authorization for such. I am a good correspondent as far as feedback on issues; all I request is that you publish the not-so-positive things in your comments section as well, if I should have any of the sort in the future.

Yes, I did take both horses out this weekend to try out the bridle on the trail. As did you, we too had sunshine here in Florida, but there was no crispness to it. The humidity and flies were especially annoying for horse and rider, and I guess I was grateful that I didn't have to add to the annoyance with a bit too! (How's that for looking at all angles for all the positives in a new product??)

Anyway, I discovered that on my easygoing horse the bridle was great and I will use it on all pleasure rides from here on in. I just had to stop and adjust it after about a half hour for better response. The cavesson was a full 2 inches from his mouth and it worked better at 1.5 inches. I was also hesitant to tighten it as much as the instructions say, but I did so and as expected, the response was very good. Also, I've always had a problem with him not drinking at water *stops; apparently the bit has been a bigger issue than I thought because on this trail ride he gulped water from the river better than ever. I'm hoping I can use this bridle on competitive trail rides for that reason alone ... and also for the following ...

Another major problem I have: my farrier has been trying to stop this horse's interference for well over a year now, and it's down to one spot on the inside right front leg. After 3 hrs of riding on Saturday, I returned to find only the very slightest interference in the usual spot. To help overcome the interference, I've also been concentrating on improving riding more centered, more balanced... and sometimes I notice a difference, sometimes not. My farrier's success has been erratic also...it is a slow process.

ANYway, thinking about it all, with the b/b it seems easier to keep my horses traveling "straighter" on the trail (you know how Arabs are always looking about...) and I would interpret that as being more balanced. ...Thus, is all of this (better seat, corrective shoeing, bitless bridle) adding up to less interference?? Until I do more steady riding on him, I can't confirm this preliminary conclusion between the b/b and interference. But by all rights, his leg should have been knicked pretty deeply after 3 hrs on Saturday and the bitless bridle was the major change of the day????? I'm holding my breath because this means I can do competitive trail on him again; CTR does not permit sport boots or wraps of any sort. I'll keep you posted on this excitement....and believe me, I'm excited! After one long pleasure ride, I know I will switch both horses to the b/b . My friend tried it briefly on her 2 yr old in training and her initial reaction was like my initial reaction: delight with the quick response to turning. She will be ordering one after her next paycheck. My sister has an unpredictable 5 yr old mare who will throw you off in a heartbeat with no warning; she trains and controls her mare in a Monty Roberts buck stop bridle (which goes over the regular bridle) but she's excited about trying the bitless bridle so she can progress now with her reining. My sister is a year new to the horse world and is apprehensive about her choice and use of bits. She's excited about such a thing as the bitless bridle. She also has acquired an 18 mos. old filly that I recommend, when training commences, she start her in your b/b! She'll be placing her order within the month. I will be ordering another very soon so I have one for each horse; when friends ride who are novices, more than ever I appreciate not having to use a bit and still having control. My ultimate goal is using the b/b in actual distance competition. My biggest question, yet unanswered, is "how good is the whoa-power". Until I can get into a larger and more competitive group, I won't know. That is my next step; it's just hard to get such a group together before actual competition. You can trust me to keep you posted however. Even without further experience with the b/b, I'm sold on the item. Every tack room should have one in stock. While it may not solve all of your horse's problems, it's certainly worth trying because of its "non-invasiveness" and more than likely will be a major contribution to the overall success of your training. As I tell my friends:

Aside from looking for improved performance, even if you get the same results as with using a bit, why not just go with the bitless bridle and save your horse's mouth!

I apologize for this lengthy commentary. I guess I'm sort of thinking out loud as I comment to you. Any feedback YOU can offer me with regard to my comments is most appreciated as well. The learning never stops, and my current quest is the adventure of your bitless bridle!! I'm surprised we haven't seen it in the tack shops around the world already. Best regards...

Letter #2, 8/30/00: One horse definitely drinks better with the b/b on. I'm finding that the other horse will only drink when he's darn good and ready and it doesn't matter what he has in his mouth or not.

I rode ROCKY all weekend and had only the very slightest interference, which could have been caused by the awful trail we rode which was full of fallen branches and other tree debris. I'm convinced the b/b has a lot to do with his improvement.

Now, for the not-so-mindful Arab... I rode him for several hours on the trail, walk and easy trot only because I'm trying to reinforce discipline training so that ultimately we can rate ourselves better in competition. He was as manageable with the bitless bridle as with the bitted bridle. As expected, without any martingale after a couple hours he began lunging and head tossing when he got "opposed" to the other horse riding ahead of us. *[Ed: Head tossing can be caused by facial neuralgia but also simply by frustration. The important thing is that he was still under control.]* Yes, frustration is all it is. He has that with any kind of bridle, bitless or bitted, but only when group riding. Alone and with a very small group he's calm, cool, collected. Continual riding is slowly helping us overcome the group issues and jiggling. I enjoy the b/b on him especially, because throughout our jiggling and excitability, it's impossible not to be pulling on the bit if I had a bitted bridle on. The b/b lets me concentrate on other issues.

At no time did I feel he was unmanageable and nothing was unexpected. We had been working with the German martingale. It is more effective than a running martingale in that it is more consistent I believe. It's a pain in the butt becuz it's a lot of "gadgetry" to hook up, but the results are very good. Helps with proper headset and neck flexion. For the most part, I believe less is better when it comes to tack, but some training aids are great as long as we keep in mind that our goal is to eventually "behave" without the prompts of the mechanical aides.

I have ridden successfully for some time now with the German martingale and have ridden without it successfully at times also. I was hoping for too much too soon and should have not changed two major things at once: i.e., going without the martingale and switching to the b/b (which you indicated might give the horse a feeling of freeness on its initial use). I will put a martingale back on JES and we will continue with the bitless bridle and proceed our work with larger and more competitive groups--which is his shortcoming.

I will be ordering another very soon so I have one for each horse; when friends ride who are novices, more than ever I appreciate not having to use a bit and still having control. My ultimate goal is using the b/b in actual distance competition. My biggest question, yet unanswered, is "how good is the whoa-power". Well, neither of my horses does a sliding stop that's for sure, but they do know 'whoa.' I should have been more clear in that I was talking more about how strong and "forward" they get during distance competition. When I'm trying to rate them so they don't blast on ahead in a CTR, I'm looking for some good control at various times. ROCKY is a Russian Arab with a thick, strong neck and when he wants to move out, you'd better be ready to go with him! He will do an extended trot to another's gallop, and I need good control to keep him at a slower pace because I don't want him pounding his legs

that hard for that long. So therefore I need good, even control. (Surprisingly, around the yard and on a casual trail ride, a 4 year old--well supervised of course--can and has ridden him without incident.)

Letter #3, 8/30/00: Well, I had my opportunity this weekend to see your b/b in action and it was grrreat. I intentionally held him back from the others and then let him move out to catch up. In a snaffle I'd have to turn him off balance just to slow him up. In a tom thumb bit he responds much better but I understand that bit does not help round out their back so I shy away from that (and he is somewhat sway back and can easily develop a sore back if ridden improperly). With the bitless bridle, he came to an immediate (almost sliding!) stop when I pulled. I was strong and forceful on the reins but I didn't have to struggle with constant pressure or even pull him off balance to slow him. As I said, it was great stopping power; and we repeated it over and over. Once excited and "strong" however, I needed constant application on the reins to bring him back to a slower pace.

At the end of the ride, unfortunately, I noticed some chafing under the straps under his chin...and maybe some of it was from the ring on the side. I will be penalized at judging time for this. I thought that it would be nice if the straps were covered in neoprene or something. I believe I have the headstall adjusted properly. If I loosen it at all I notice slightly less control, and as you said, loose will tend to result in some marking. Now, I realize equipment cannot make up for lack of training. It's only on the trail in competition that I need extra control (you know, that free-willie feeling...chuckles...). I find that control with the b/b, but I'm worried about the chafing. Any suggestions??

A 12 yr old girl is going to ride him at our annual CTR clinic in a 10-mile "mock" CTR in mid Sept.; we're using the b/b. She's training on him now. We'll keep you posted. I've ordered a 2nd b/b with martingale for JES, the jigger, so you'll get reports on that as we go. Had the best ride of my life on him Sunday in the b/b, 18 miles, but we were conditioning with only one other horse/rider. In 2 weekends we're going to Hard Labor Creek near Atlanta to try some hills, and we'll be with a big group. I'll report back to you on that also! Until I can get into a larger and more competitive group, I won't know. That is my next step; it's just hard to get such a group together before actual competition. You can trust me to keep you posted however.

Even without further experience with the b/b, I'm sold on the item. Every tack room should have one in stock. While it may not solve all of your horses problems, it's certainly worth trying because of its "non-invasiveness" and more than likely will be a major contribution to the overall success of your training. As I tell my friends: Aside from looking for improved performance, even if you get the same results as with using a bit, why not just go with the bitless bridle and save your horse's mouth!

Letter #4, 9/19/00: Well, this weekend was very interesting in all aspects. We set up camp by 9 a.m. Saturday, only to be confronted with a hurricane watch by 11 a.m. The old diehards that we are, we decided to cram the 2-day event into one day in between wind and rain (since the hurricane was not supposed to affect our area until the next morning). The good lord held the rain off during our ride time from 3-6 pm and again no rain on our drive home from 9:30-11:30 pm. All in all it was an adventure, tiring but fun. And because we tossed the days program out the window and "just rode", it turned out that my friend and I had the privilege of receiving one on one instruction from our main speaker, Barbara Madill, for the entire 3 hr ride. JES, my jigger, was 50% better than last year at this time but there's much

needed improvement, so her help was absolutely wonderful and welcomed. I have since found out she is going to be one of the judges at the Biltmore ride in 4 wks. ! Well, she's got MY number for sure and I guess I'd better work hard on her suggestions in the coming weeks so she sees improvement.

Back to the b/b. The first comment I got was "someone had a b/b on one of the rides and her horse ran away with her"....well, horses have run away with bits too; what can you say. After a while I get tired of "defending" the b/b. But there are also a lot of interested people too.

The martingale did not work. It's too big, it kept running into the snaps. Half way thru I just took it off. Both horses need major work on their headsets or I'm going to end up with sore backs eventually. I have serious work to do on them. The b/b setup does not seem to be my answer for this. Barbara suggests I put JES especially back in a bit and that I graduate to the b/b. I'm successful with a snaffle bit with copper rollers and a German martingale on him; he does well with this so I don't mind using it actually (please don't cringe). And also because she's judging me, I will do this. He's a great horse but is VERY hard to get his attention and keep his mind focused, and he tires me out because I have to be "onto" him every minute. I have to admit I need more consistency in my discipline with him.

ROCKY, the Russian Arab used to have a better headset. So bottom line, I'm feeling very unsuccessful and guilty because I feel like I've ruined 2 good horses. I'm fully aware that they didn't just get sloppy by themselves. (I must be tired, because at this point I feel like I should be raising dachshunds instead.)

Little 12 yr old Nice rode ROCKY well despite the fact that he was raring to go and his nose was in the clouds. It's been a year since he's been on a CTR and he truly enjoys the trails, so he was feeling good. Both horses had slight swelling on their noses the next day. (???...too much force on the bridle over too long a period??? have I hurt them???) The neoprene cover we stitched over the cross straps on the one bridle didn't work over the long haul; it slid and bunched up in all the humidity and sweat. Chalk up that idea. The plain cross straps on the other horse made no marks, and there was similar pulling and such. The rubbing might have been a one-time thing. Go figure.

All in all, the horses did no worse than they would have done in the past in snaffle bits. I still believe in the bitless bridle; in it's concept and purpose, and it will always be my goal. My 2 horses and I just need more training in some specific areas. I've been riding for years and today feel like a novice. I am also stubborn, and after I quit whining, I'll get back in the saddle and keep trying to reach my goals.

I'm sending one of my bitless bridles to my sister while I work JES in the bit. I foresee ordering another for myself in beta when JES is ready."

Letter #5, 9/28/00: I need SOMETHing to keep their heads down. My Russian Arab ROCKY isn't so bad and I can maintain a good head set without a martingale most of the time, but the other one has his nose always in the clouds when he gets excited so a martingale has been the answer. The German martingale, as I mentioned, has worked best. No, the bitless bridle does not help them keep a lower head and rounded back. In a small area they are okay, but on the trail it's a whole different story. I think Barbara was being polite in telling me to "graduate" to the bitless bridle. She noticed that my control was lacking when we were on the trail, and this was a polite way of just saying 'get a bit back in his mouth.' She probably wanted to really say a b/b does not appear to be working and is not the answer for training on the trail. I've got another idea up my sleeve from another trainer and I'll share it with you if the results are good after I get to try it. I keep the Russian Arab in the bitless bridle because I know for a

fact that it helps lessen his interfering problem. This is worth its weight in gold to me. I'll be doing a 30 mi CTR on him on Nov 4th and plan to try him again. My young friend who rode him at the clinic didn't understand how to handle his energy so maybe I can do better with him in the b/b.

For the most part, I still use the b/b's on both horses for our "easy" trail rides. It's only in competition and in training with a large group of horses when the excitement builds that the b/b is not working as well as I would hope. Bitless 100% of the time is my goal however."

Letter #6, 10/25/00: Our company changed e-mail systems and I've lost all my files, so I guess we begin our correspondence from scratch. I'm the one in Florida with two Arabs, of which I just took the more aggressive one to the 100 mile competitive trail ride held at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, NC.

The autumn weather was fabulous the entire week we were there, and I was one of two or three other 100-mile rookies in a total group of 30. The others were veterans to distance riding...the cream of the crop from as far north as New Jersey. I was honored (and initially nervous) to be riding with this group. We did not place, but we did win ... that is, we completed the 100 and vetted out sound.

The first day of 40 miles was an extremely difficult course up and down and around the hills and mountains. I was using a copper roller snaffle and a running martingale. My horse got very strong and difficult to handle as I was afraid might happen. I struggled to rate him but it was a 30 mile fight and I didn't necessarily win, he just tired out. The next morning, I was in a little more in control but still found myself fighting to hold him back to a more energy efficient pace.

At 22 miles out the 2nd day I told the judge I was quitting because I was tearing up his mouth and I just couldn't stand seeing. Well, she remembered my bitless bridle from the clinic a month ago and let me switch bridles. My horse did considerably better after that. He was grateful for the reduction in pain (I guarantee you he was hurting badly from the bit). I know that he would have run away with me the first day had I tried using the bitless bridle because I wouldn't have had the strength to keep pulling on him. My horse knows the commands WHOA and EASY on a casual trail ride, but doesn't come close to recognizing the words in competition. This horse is an excellent candidate for serious distance competition if I can unscatter his brain. We'll be doing beginning dressage and further groundwork to help him along.

The 3rd day was only a 20 miler and we used the bitless bridle all the way. After 80 miles of mountains the previous 2 days, he was beginning to understand it's better to trot up the hills and not trip over his heels down them! We actually had an enjoyable, much more rated ride. There's hope!!

I am convinced the bitless bridle is the way to go in "easy" trail riding and would only suggest it for distance competition if one's horse rates well and responds to all commands. It would not be my suggestion to use in competition on a very strong, difficult horse, at least not the first day. (Of course, it's not our desire to go into competition on a crazy horse to begin with, is it??)

While on the trail one of the riders commented on my use of the b/b and said she was concerned about using hers in competition. I agreed with her concern, but we had no further opportunity to discuss it. This woman and her husband are well known respected distance competitors. I expect to see them again in the coming months and hope to engage her in a full discussion of the bitless bridle. Apparently she is familiar with it.

All in all, I was glad I had the bitless bridle with me and that my horse had calmed enough for me to use it. Otherwise, I would have pulled midway the 2nd day. It wasn't worth it to continue hurting his mouth. I am encouraged that we will end up always using the bitless bridle. I am going to research your idea of using studs at the crown of the bridle.

In 2 weeks I have a 30 miler on my quieter Arab (if there is such a thing). I might not start out in the bitless, but will consider switching to it at a later point in the ride. Will keep you informed."

Letter #7: Let me share my latest with you. On a conditioning ride Monday my friend (with a very exuberant Arab) arrived at the ride site only to realize she had left her tack at home in the tack room. (It happens with all our comings and goings.) I offered her my bitless bridle and fortunately she had another saddle with her. This exuberant Arab ran away with her a couple weeks ago and while this was not habitual, she was concerned about the control, especially with the idea of using all different tack this ride. Long story short: her horse did beautifully the entire 3 hours, and it was an adventurous ride with lots of boogey men on the wet, swampy trails and some long, free-feeling canters thru wide open fields. She was impressed. I was impressed. Even when he got a little strong, she managed him well.

Everyone thinks the b/b is a halter with reins, or a version of a sidepull or hackamore, and it's hard to explain that it's like nothing else. Trying it says it best, as you know.

The other side of the story is that I had to put my Arab back in the snaffle for those 3 hrs. He chomped on the bit. He didn't maneuver the tight turns thru dense trees nearly as well. He didn't move as well in general. By the end of the ride his nose was pointing up and to the right into the air and I was constantly tugging on the left rein to keep him straight. We were both annoyed, crabby and tired in the end. And worst of all, he was back to interfering in the old spot as bad as ever b/b/b/d ("before bitless bridle days").

I am now 100% convinced that the b/b is the way to go, and, as you note, my rubbing issues should disappear as my horses become better trained in their responses to my commands.

Peg, (Event Rider), Florence, MT, 8/13/00:

I have been using the bitless bridle that I ordered from you for several months now, and I wanted to give you some feedback. My horse is a big Hungarian/TB warmblood, 12 years old, who I have been schooling for eventing. She has always hated the bit, which I could tell by subtle and not-so-subtle "hints" over the years - short stride, open mouth, hollow way of going, head up... I tried several bits, but they all made her tentative. She would not stretch downwards with her neck on a loose rein, anticipating the return of the contact with the bit, which she knew, was inevitable.

Your bitless bridle has made a big improvement in her way of going!! I am not saying it is a "fix-all", because the problems she experienced are deeply ingrained and will take months if not years to overcome. But we are definitely doing much better -- you should see her stretch down now! We have done LOTS of arena jumping with the bitless, which has worked extremely well. She has no anticipation or nervousness about getting hit in the mouth (which happens occasionally no matter how careful of a rider you are!) so she is more forward and is not concerned in the least about pain.

We just returned from a week at Pony Club Camp (I am a joint DC) and rode cross-country with no problems at all. I seem to have plenty of "brakes" with my bridle, although I will

say that the weather was hot -- quite a different situation from a crisp fall morning, but we shall see later on how that goes (i.e. when she is friskier).

Dressage is probably the biggest adjustment. We have gone back to being a "nose-out" horse temporarily until we create the roundness we once had with the bit. However, after a good warm up she does go round. And the improvement in her length of stride, happily swinging gait, closed mouth, and obvious comfort are WELL worth the degree of roundness we lost.

It was my hope to ride an event this weekend to really test our success, but unfortunately it was cancelled due to the extremely hot weather, fire danger, and smoke from nearby forest fires (you have probably heard about our burning Bitterroot Valley in the national news). We are working towards one in September.

Everyone who sees our bridle is amazed and interested. They have been very curious, and I've noticed folks watching us carefully as we have schooled. My mare, "ROSA", would have made you proud, as she has been exemplary in her "bitless" behavior. I would not say that this bridle is for every horse, though. Or perhaps I should say "not every rider", as horses generally hate bits, and would welcome the change!

It has definitely made me think more about what it really is we are doing with horses. Do we want control and dominance, or more of a partnership? Are we willing to trust the horse and build a mutual trust? Are we willing to give up riding with our hands and use our other aids more effectively? I hope that by my tiny example, people will at least begin to think about these things, also.

One word about the reins - the beta reins were too narrow and slippery for me, so I replaced them with "grippy" reins. The beta would be fine for trail riding, but not enough grip for jumping and eventing (at least, not yet for me!). [Ed: Peg was riding with plain Beta reins. Since this date, Beta reins can now be provided with rubber grips]. I'd like to see the day when my horse and I used no bridle at all. We are learning the Parelli training method, so maybe someday....

Thanks again for your "invention". ROSA thanks you, too.

Peg, in response to a query on a bulletin board, 9/20/00:

Dear Janis- Thanks for your interest in the bitless bridle! I am totally happy with my decision to buy one and go "bitless". Last weekend, I just rode in an event without a bit for the first time! That had been my goal since purchasing it about 4 months ago. We were in the beginner novice division, and everything went very well! We were second after dressage, which really surprised me - dressage has never been our greatest thing. I had to get permission ahead of time to use the bridle, and since this was an unrecognized event, they did. In a USCTA event, it probably would cause elimination. My horse really has "unlocked" since we got rid of the bit. She had some very nice stretching (required in the test). The judge, Jeff Steer, was a little flustered about the absence of a bit, but commented that he did not judge us any differently because of it. I find it curious that we can go "severe" to a certain extent, and it is not questioned. But when we go "gentle", we could be penalized! Anyway, we had a very nice score. The jumping was a breeze. They can get going pretty fast cross-country, but since I know my horse very well, I felt safe during this phase, i.e. I did not get run-away with. Stadium was clean.

I am not sure that this type of bridle would be for every horse - safety might be a concern. However, I have been run-away with plenty of times WITH bits on horses, so I'm not sure it would make any difference. The bitless bridle does get a good response when you apply the "brakes", and you can always circle. They use it a lot on racehorses, and do just great. All I know is that with this horse, I am DONE with bits forever! I feel so good about it, and Rosa

(my mare) is happy as can be. I will be starting a 2 yr. old TB next year, and plan to start him in this bridle.

I am forwarding this to Dr. Cook, also, who is the person who developed this bridle. He is interested in knowing how people like it, too. He can also answer any technical questions you may have. I'd really encourage anyone and everyone to give this bridle a try. I can't express how happy I am not to be putting a bit in my horse's mouth any more! I look at many "problem horses" now with a different eye. I can see some who could definitely benefit. Everywhere I go (pony club, shows, clinics, events), folks are curious. I hope the curiosity will lead to, someday, a different mind-set. -

Peg, four months later, 1/16/01:

"Rosa" and I have been enjoying our bitless bridle very much since our purchase last spring. We've now done two mini-events, and all has gone very well. I was a little worried about going too fast and not being able to slow down during cross-country, but it was not a problem. The weather for one event was quite chilly, and I had a very fit and frisky horse, but was able to slow her enough to be just 40 seconds under optimum time (and it didn't bother either one of us a "bit" - excuse the pun!).

Stadium jumping continues to be great - she is not the least bit worried about me hitting her in the mouth, so is relaxed we both have fun.

Dressage is the challenge, as always! We continue to work at it. Everyone is curious about the bridle, so I have started a lot of wheels turning! Especially when they see a big 16.2 h warmblood who looks like a racehorse being ridden bitless and in control! Now, I still believe the bridle is probably not for every horse, but at a certain point in your partnership with your horse, it's sure a nice option. I can't thank you enough...

Thanks!"

Farrah, (Event Rider) 8/18/00:

I received the bridle today (this morning actually) and I was so excited, I went to ride during lunch. I knew the bridle would be wonderful, but I didn't know it would be like this. It was the best ride of my life (a 5 minute bareback ride in my office clothes no less). Charlie knew exactly what I was wanting, all the time - it was amazing! I can't wait to gallop in it. I am going to my parent's house and I am going to give my mom a lesson at the cross-country course! I am definitely going to test it out then. I am so excited!!!

Lisa, Baltimore, MD 8/21/00:

I do parelli natural horsemanship. have recently passed level 1 and am working on level 2 . I don't want to put anything in my horse's mouth. He is so happy without anything. Sometimes I use your bridle, sometimes a rope halter, sometimes natural hackamore, sometimes string around neck, sometimes just " a carrot stick" for directing and nothing else.

In level 2 one must demonstrate use cherokee bridle (string through horses mouth), also snaffle bridle. i am going to try to use your bridle for the snaffle bit requirements (dummy bit) or maybe not. is it possible for horse to relax jaw and "give to the bit " if the bit is non-existent.

anyway, i will eventually order a leather bridle- i have a nylon one.. i really like the rubber reins, though. can i get a leather bridle with leather reins with rubber grips? I want to compete in dressage- rules still state must have bit. BAH- RULES!

[Dr. Cook's comment:

Yes, it is possible for the horse to relax the jaw and "give to the bit" - just replace the word "bit" with the word "bridle". Ask yourself is the horse relaxed? Is the horse responding easily to the aids?]

Cathy, Pacific, WA 8/28/00:

Just wanted to let you know that I am very happy with my synthetic loaner bridle and won't be trading up to the leather model. I am very pleased with the amount of control I have with the bridle, without the curb-chain pain factor associated with a hackamore. I already figured out 3 years ago that a bit and my horse just don't work together.

Virginia, New Braunfels, TX 8/31/00:

I had seen the article in Equus magazine some time back and loved the idea of no bit -- I could never comprehend how that started in the first place. I had then decided this is how I wanted to start my young Belgium Warmblood. When I received his bridle I decided to try it on my Quarab whom I could never bridle the conventional way. I rode him in just a headstall because he refused to let me put the crown piece over his ears and I had to unbuckle the headstall then, once he had the bit in his mouth, re-buckle the headstall.

With the Bitless Bridle he is allowing me to slip the crown piece over his ears and he loves it. Even though it's a little big on him he has been responsive to it and seems to like it much better without the bit. I don't have as much "coughing" when we first start trotting either.

I'm still waiting to see how it works when he does his usual spook and run. Before he would grab that bit and it was all I could do to turn him around and stop him. I'm keeping my fingers crossed. I trail ride with my Quarab and have high hopes for some wonderful dressage with my BWP.

Ursula, 9/8/00:

I have a 16 year old 'rescue' horse that, when I got him, was already named WILD MAN BOB. He used to hollow out and run through the bit. I tried many different bits, and had his teeth attended to, all without success. But the first time

I used the Bitless Bridle I was astounded; it is an amazing piece of equipment.... a real Godsend and I love it. People would watch and forecast that I would have no control but I showed them that in fact I have more control.

My daughter has also had great success with her jumping horse. She was always afraid when using a bit of banging her horse in the mouth. The Bitless Bridle has given her added confidence and the confidence seems to have spread to her horse, who is now so much more relaxed."

Ellen, Winchester, TN, 9/15/00:

This morning I rode my second horse in your bitless bridle, and for the first time he didn't over flex and chew at the first sign of nervousness (it's a lovely day, but the first coolish one we've had, and pretty breezy, too!). He even spooked twice, but recovered nicely! I am so impressed, and, needless to say, happy!

Kath, (Competitive Trail Rider) Wellington, New Zealand:

Letter #1, 9/18/00: I tried out my bridle today. At first I rode him around in a small paddock for a little while. He found it a bit strange at first, and kept looking for the bit. After a little while, I took him up the trail I normally use. The first difference I noticed was his way of going. Normally going away from his paddock, he is short-strided, zig-zaggy, reluctant, and SLOW. Today, he was striding out, willing, relaxed, "long and low" and NO ZIG-ZAGGING. The next thing I noticed was the mobility of his head and neck. Up and down movement and sideways, looking around. He seemed more interested in his surroundings. He seemed to be puffing less too. On the way back, he was feeling really good. So good that he was jogging down the hills and giving little bucks!

It was only two years ago, when I was getting his teeth seen to, that the dentist said that he could see a quite severe tongue injury high up on his tongue; an old injury long healed. There was a deep groove across obviously caused by a bit. I rode him in a straightbar eggbutt snaffle up till now as I figured that was the kindest one I could use. He has a very soft mouth, so I never touched his mouth when riding except if he was very naughty. And then carefully because of his injury. But he would still fiddle and rattle the bit. On occasion I would ride him in a halter because he was so good and easy to control.

His tongue was very nearly cut right through. He is a Standardbred and when they are young they are treated very badly and all sorts of terrible bits are put in their mouths. This may be the reason he was so sound when I got him at age 7; they would have turned him out because of his injury. It probably would have rendered him unusable. So he probably missed out on being "put through the mill".

I have tried a hackamore on him in the past and it was much less than satisfactory. The Bitless Bridle was better! Now all I am waiting for is my treeless saddle and we'll be completely pain-free! I can't wait!

I am ashamed that I have been unkind to horses by biting them, and abusing their sensitive mouths with the bit. I am NEVER EVER going to put another bit into a horse's mouth again. I am also going to donate all my bits to the metal scrap dealer. I have already begun to spread the word about bits and bitlessness, and also about saddles and treelessness. The name of your site is already emailing its way all across NZ.

So that's what's happened so far. Thanks and I'll keep you posted."

Letter #2, 9/27/00: I have noticed a huge increase in my horse's walking pace since using this bridle. Yesterday I went for a ride with a friend whose horse is no slouch, and I found my horse walking so fast that the other horse had to trot to keep up. The other thing I have noticed is that the crossover straps under his chin are twisting during work. This could be due to my reins, which are clipped on. They COULD be rotating. So, I will see how it goes with strap on reins and get back to you."

[Dr. Cook comments: The crossover straps, being extensions of the reins, will twist if the reins are twisted. It is important, therefore, at the start of a ride, to make sure that the reins are not twisted. Some marker applied to the reins may be useful.]

Letter #3, 10/7/00: I did my first competitive ride of the season today. I used the other reins that buckle on. The crossover straps still twisted, and this time higher up, right underneath the browband. This doesn't seem to interfere with its function though. My horse is still adjusting I think. He still froths profusely and he is a head tosser (he does it when he is excited, even at liberty), and you can guess - the foam goes flying everywhere. So he still "mouths" even without a bit. But I noticed at the end of the ride today that his mouth was dry, finally! So he is adjusting, and fighting me, (more so I think because there is no longer any pain in controlling his head). Although he was very good today, and came back when I asked him. His walk has gotten even faster - can you believe it?

There is much curiosity about the bridle amongst club members, though many of them ride bitless anyway. Wait until I get my treeless saddle! There is also heaps of interest in my horse float (trailer), because my horse faces backward in it. Walks on the front and off the back. Facing backward in a float is unusual here, and I wish it weren't, it's so much better for them."

Darbie, Chestertown, MD, 9/19/00:

My horse became aggressive when ridden in a bit ... bucking, rearing, hesitating at fences, reluctant to go forward. But with the Bitless bridle there is a night and day difference. He is no longer doing any of these things and is now enjoying the work. We had a clean run recently on cross country and show jumping. I still have to use a bit for the dressage phase but I will work on an appeal.

Dr Anja M., DVM, Mayen, Germany 9/20/00:

Now we have used the headstall for one of my horses and we are impressed how good it works. When we used it for the first time, KAI, that's the name of my horse, stood still for a moment, then it seemed, he starts to think. Normally he always shook his head, when he felt the reins, but this time he just stopped. We went out through the fields with him, he was always easy to handle. No problem to stop him with this headstall, even if he is very fast. My other horse also wants to have such a bitless bridle. So it would be very nice, if you would send me another one. Same size (cob) please, but this time leather, color brown, headstall only.

Liz, Fuquay Varina, NC, October 2000:

Hello Dr. Cook, I'm writing to tell you how impressed I am with the bitless bridle. I used it yesterday for about 20 minutes, but the real test was today with my instructor (Mergie)! She will be ordering one from you if she hasn't already after today. She said one of the disadvantages of using class horses with students is the damage uneducated hands can do to the mouth-this solves the problem. She had been getting more and more away from bits using halters, bosals or hackamores.

I am not an extremely athletic person, and am in my early 50s. I didn't start riding again until about five years ago after a 25-year break and have had the privilege of having some excellent instructors. I consider riding to be a lifetime learning experience.

One of the problems I have been trying to correct for a long time now, is holding my horse back or at times using the reins as a balance while working on an independent seat and legs. This bridle just took the fear away of what I might have done to my horse's mouth if he suddenly went sideways or spooked at a 'horse-eating monster.' Both of these things happened today and both times I had immediate control and a horse that went right back to work.

The bridle is everything you said! We did not use a martingale, and feel no need to do so. He stops immediately, is much looser and exhibited one of the best head shaking flat walks I've ever seen him do. ("Flash" is a lite shod THW)

Only one question so far. Yesterday and today, for the first 15-20 minutes, he exhibited a lot of tail wringing. There were two different riders during those sessions. Me the first day for about 15 minutes and my instructor today for around the same time. After that he settled down, but we were both wondering if this is a normal reaction to the new signals he is receiving?

Another person who will be ordering from you is Janet - who probably already did this evening. Her husband has a TWH that has scars in his mouth from a previous owner. Her horse, Allan, is a "puller" who always wants to be in the lead. She was very excited to hear about the lesson today and the entire concept. I have asked my husband to try the bridle out on his horse this weekend. His horse has demonstrated several of the typical problems you have written about. Guess we will be ordering another! Thanks again for such a wonderful humane product.

Jeanne, Eau Claire, WI 10/5/00:

I just wanted to write and tell you that I received the bitless bridle that I ordered and we just love it. We've had a quarter horse for 2 years and haven't been able to ride her until now. This is great! She tosses her head a bit when we first start out, but settles down nicely. In time I think she'll quit completely. I've also been using it on my Standardbred. He's a wonderful horse to ride in any bit, but seems so much happier using the bitless bridle - he responds instantly. So I want to thank you for your product and wanted to let you know how much we're enjoying it.

Jeanne, Eau Claire, WI 10/6/00:

Postscript: As to why our QH mare was unrideable - well, I guess I shouldn't say unrideable. We could ride her with a hackamore, but it was very dangerous because she severely threw her head, almost hitting the rider. She hates a hackamore. We were afraid to ride with a tiedown because of her tendency to panic - thought she might go right over backwards. So we just never rode her. It was always a battle, and a dangerous one.

It's extremely difficult to get a bit in her mouth, and again, once we did, the head throwing was violent. She had been abused by a previous owner -hit in the head and a chain used in her mouth. The very sound of the bit would send her into a panic, and it's been very difficult to even just touch her around her mouth area. She isn't head shy - you can pet her and touch her ears and such. It's just her mouth. And she isn't being nasty - she's scared. Very tense and very reactive.

As I mentioned in my last message, when we first put the bitless bridle on her, we did have a bit of head tossing and carrying on, but to a much less degree. After getting on her to ride, she quit in just a few minutes. You could see her visibly relax. It was actually a pleasure to ride her. So, again I thank you. For us, this is like a miracle. And for CHESKA, she can now be ridden without fear and actually begin to enjoy herself.

Kath, 10/7/00:

I did my first competitive ride of the season today. I used the other reins that buckle on. The crossover straps still twisted, and this time higher up, right underneath the browband. This doesn't seem to interfere with its function though.

My horse is still adjusting I think. He still froths profusely and he is a head tosser (he does it when he is excited, even at liberty), and you can guess - the foam goes flying everywhere. So he still "mouths" even without a bit. But I noticed at the end of the ride today that his mouth was dry, finally! So he is adjusting, and fighting me, (more so I think because there is no longer any pain in controlling his head). Although he was very good today, and came back when I asked him. His walk has gotten even faster - can you believe it?

There is much curiosity about the bridle amongst club members, though many of them ride bitless anyway. Wait until I get my treeless saddle! There is also heaps of interest in my horse float (trailer), because my horse faces backward in it. Walks on the front and off the back. Facing backward in a float is unusual here, and I wish it weren't, it's so much better for them.

Dawn, Pakoma Park, MD 10/10/00:

Have been using my bitless bridle over the summer and fall. Gave it a real test this weekend, taking my stallion to a whole new trail, on a cool, windy day. Worked like a charm. My best friend is now pumping her family for one for Hannukah! My one mare who was trained with a hackamore, and never really cared for bits, is doing much better in this bridle. Of course, she sometimes still ignores my 7-year-old daughter, but such is the nature of horses.

Thanks again for a lovely product, you'll be hearing from me again next year for another.

Jean, (Trail Rider) Brookfield, Vermont, 10/12/00:

I have used your bitless bridle now several times on my 8 year old quarter horse gelding and want to report that I think it is absolutely marvelous! You may recall my telling you that over the summer my horse had developed the condition of "gurgling." I tried most everything I could think of and was at a loss to know what to do next. Well, you were right: the bitless bridle has solved the problem and the "gurgling" has disappeared.

Not only that, GEM is much lighter in my hands and willing to move forward at all paces without 'leaning on the bit!' There are several people in my trail riding circles who are very interested in the concept, and you may find yourself acquiring a few more converts from northern Vermont. In any case, please accept GEM's and my deepest gratitude. We're ever so much happier. Like many others, I doubt I'll ever put a bit in a horse's mouth again."

[Dr. Cook comments:

The history of this horse led me to assume that the 'gurgling' was caused by a displacement of the soft palate, and I recommended the bitless bridle as a likely cure for the problem.]

Rob, Powys, Wales, 10/13/00:

Received your bridle some weeks ago, and my daughter has now had a chance to try it out - she has done road work, a little cross country, and some jumping, as well as daily 1 mile rides bareback to the field and back. Jenni, after initial characteristic nervousness, which immediately transmitted itself to the pony - is now absolutely delighted with the result, and states that she will "never ever" use a bit on the pony again. From observation I would say that the pony's response to aids is much improved, even over the high level that it was originally. You will remember that we ordered the bridle not because of his unmanageability in a bit, but his refusal on occasions to accept it - which caused many "late starts", much stress, and strained tempers all round. Not using the martingale - it is far too large for a 13hh pony - but this does not seem to make any difference - indeed he is throwing and lifting his head far less than he used to anyway. Many thanks for lowering the stress levels in our household!"

Jenni, Powys, Wales, 10/20/00:

Hi, this is Jenni- yes my pony is a Welsh Section C Pony, aged 12 (like me) brown gelding. Rob said to put- "I love him to bits but he used to be a little s#d!!!" Thanks for solving my MAJOR problem. ECHO (the pony) will probably send you threatening emails because you ruined his excuse for not doing any work!!!!

Karen, Fort Bragg, CA, 10/16/00:

I'm sending the photos you requested of my Welsh pony JELLY wearing the leather bitless bridle. She's 13 years old and hasn't been trained, I believe, because of the scar on her tongue. The vet discovered it while floating her teeth. JELLY used to toss her head constantly while being ridden, making it impossible to teach her anything, due to her being so unbalanced. With the Bitless Bridle she has improved 75%. Now when she tosses her head, I feel it is in anticipation of what used to be painful for her. Slowly but surely she's improving. Thank you so much for your wonderful bridle.

Dr Jessica Jahiel, certified instructor in dressage and combined training with the American Riding Instructor Certification Program (ARICP), author of the HORSE-SENSE Newsletter (www.prairienet.org) Summerwood Farm, Illinois, December 2000:

At the Horse Gathering, this year, The Bitless Bridle was the center of attention wherever it went. I had it on (if I remember correctly) twelve horses. You're welcome to add my comments to those already on your website. I'm quite happy to endorse the bridle. I would very much like to see this bridle worn by every school horse ridden by beginners - the horses would be much happier and more comfortable.

I'd like to see the bridles in therapeutic riding programs, as well. Riding is such wonderful therapy, but I've talked to quite a few riders in such programs, and heard their worries about causing the horses pain by inflicting random pulls and tugs on the reins.

And if people are determined to start their three-year-old horses under saddle (I prefer to back horses at 4 or later), this bridle would make life more pleasant for everyone concerned.

Three-year-old horses (not to mention the many two-year-olds that are saddled, bridled, and ridden, although they are far too young) are all actively teething, and it's really the worst possible time to introduce them to the bit.

I love the idea of trail riders leaving the bits in the tack room. I'll also take your Bitless Bridle with me when I teach in the Pacific Northwest in October. Half of the people I'll be working with there are endurance riders, and this is something that they all need to see and learn about. The rest of the riders are likely to be dressage riders ...the nice clean lines of the conservative leather version will convince them to try it, and then they'll forget that they don't have a bit.

My own "bitless bridle" (something I use to show riders how much they can accomplish without using a bit) is simply an old dropped noseband with a ring on each side. It is adjusted loosely, in the position of a conventional cavesson, and with reins attached, it makes a very useful teaching tool. If it's a cold winter, I can generally convince even hesitant riders to try this, because it saves them warming the bit and adjusting lots of small fiddly buckles. However, the aesthetics fail to impress. ;-)

My students hear this so often that I'm sure they repeat it in their sleep: "The bit doesn't stop the horse. The bit lets the horse know that you would like it to stop." Of course, when I get to start them from the very beginning, they're on the longe line with no reins in any case! Once a rider has begun by understanding that the "stop" comes from the rider's back and seat and posture and breathing, NOT from the hand and certainly not from the bit, it's possible to make real progress.

I was interested in your response to some people's doubts as to whether your bridle provided a quick enough 'release'. You wrote ... 'Since the time of Xenophon and before, it has been a fundamental of good horsemanship that the rider should give and take (or rather, take and give), pull and release, punish and reward. This is certainly to be desired when using a rod of metal in the mouth to 'whisper' one's wishes. But when this instrument of potential torture is replaced with no more than a benevolent embrace of the whole of the head (as it is with The Bitless Bridle) the principle of punishment and reward is no longer either relevant or required. As the initial whisper of communication is no more than a gentle squeeze, the need for immediate release is no longer paramount. The horse has not been punished and does not look for flattery and coaxing by way of reward. The partnership and trust between horse and rider has never been breached.' This was nicely put, and I am glad to read these words, because they were almost exactly the ones I used in explaining why "release" wasn't the horse's desire or the rider's goal when this bridle was being used.

In any case, rider's doubts over whether your bridle provided the correct 'pull and release' response is not a genuine cause for concern, as there should be no "pull" in riding, and the hands should "hold and yield", not "pull and release." If "release" means the release of the pressure put on the horse by the rider, then that is the job of the rider's whole body, not just the rider's hands. If "release" means that the rider stops pulling, then something is sadly wrong - a good rider will never pull, and thus will never be in a position to need to stop pulling. Riders need to spend much more time acquiring hands that can hold gently and yield without throwing the horse away. No discipline is exempt I see far too many English riders putting far too much tension on the reins, and far too many Western riders alternating between pulling the horse's mouth and abandoning it by dropping the reins. The result is the same in both cases. Horses begin to fear the bit, and then get behind it and remain there, with tight jaws and polls, and tense necks and backs. I've also found that many riders have their horse's bits adjusted so high that no genuine release is possible anyway, as the rein pressure is secondary to the constant

pressure created by the cheekpieces. One comment that I heard over and over at the Horse Gathering was, "There's no learning curve; the horses just understand this bridle right away." I think that The Bitless Bridle fits perfectly with the Natural Horsemanship methods and goals.

Teresa, owner of a Paso Fino, Hawthorne, FL 10/23/00:

I received my Biothane bridle today, expecting positive results, as my horse of 2 months is cooperative and can be ridden safely with a halter. I've been reluctant to bit him, due to my inexperience in dealing with gaited horses. This Paso Fino is 7 years old, is charming, but green in many ways. Although we ride daily, he was nearly impossible to collect or gait using a noseband with curb chain. The effect was tooth-jarring and exhausting for us both. Progress was very slow.

He didn't seem to notice any difference with the bitless bridle, but I DID. He was gaiting smoothly, as if we hadn't had a problem. When he did break into a canter, it was also smooth and collected. All this immediately, I was floored!

(One selling point for me was the comment section of the website. It was amazing what some folks had endured and still cared so much about their horses.)

I have two questions: Have you considered taking on saddle design? And when is your autobiography going to print? I read the biographical information and want you to hurry up with more." - Teresa Turner, Hawthorne, FL, 7/12/00

Teresa, 10/23/00:

We used the bridle for the 2nd time on our morning ride with the same excellent results. It's nice to take a firm feel to show him something and not worry about him thinking it's a punishment. The horse rides about a hand taller than yesterday morning! I also should mention: this bridle is very complimentary to a pretty face, very light and simple. I'll get the word out here. There are a lot of people and horses that need a second chance at success. Thanks so much. Razzmatazz de Dorado and I will keep in touch." Teresa Turner, Hawthorne, FL 7/12/00

Teresa, Hawthorne, FL 10/25/00:

Day Three was another ground breaker. Razz was gaiting nicely on our morning ride, when he switched to a trot. I wondered if the gait would return with slightly more collection. Accordingly, I closed on the reins while applying a little leg and raising the reins about three inches vertically. The entire forehead of the horse floated off the ground! We continued to move forward, but with almost no weight on the front. The sound of the front hoof beats diminished to a whisper. We were both in a trance for several minutes until he spotted a garbage can lurking beside the road. Of course, he does what is already in him. But I can guarantee you it was NOT in me. Moving a horse's center of gravity around has never been my gift. We are definitely on to something! (Although this seems all too easy.)." - Teresa Turner, Hawthorne, FL, 7/13/00 And on day 3

Observations stemming from my experience with the bitless bridle in five days of use: My areas of frustration were

1) Unable to attain gait from horse, 2) Horse stumbling, 3) Collection vs. contortion. (He also tires after about an hour under saddle, but it is very hot weather right now.)

Results: (1) Horse gaiting on cue by day 4 and staying in gait. (2) Stumbling only at dead (sloppy) walk or grazing (3) Collection now possible.

I have noticed a couple other things and can only speculate how they relate to the whole picture. He is walking faster generally, has more energy (did not want to return home yesterday or today), and just seems happier. You could say the same about me.

There has been no problem adjusting to the equipment and no backsliding on any of the gains. Obviously, what we had was a "communication problem". Anyone who is considering use of The Bitless Bridle is welcome to my email address, if I can be of help. - Teresa Turner, Hawthorne, FL 7/15/00 ... and another three months later

I keep trying to convince folks it's the way to go. Most are fascinated, but seem to think there is a hidden part to it or the horse and I are in some conspiracy. "Stone walls do not a prison make..." (Lovelace)

My little Paso came home after 2 months with a superb professional trainer when diagnosed EPM. (Falling with the rider means flunking the class on a liability true/false question.) The traditional jaquima was mandatory there and we both had to get used to it. (I was told the bitless bridle would confuse him and give him reverse cues.)

Back home, he spotted the bridle and reached out and picked it up. That was enough for me. We're doing it his way while taking our medicine. He's going better now than ever and not "confused" in the least.

I hope sales are through the roof and the stampede is on."

Teresa, 11/29/00:

I listened to your radio interview with Rick Lamb [Ed: www.thehorseshow.com] and enjoyed it tremendously. Here's hoping you and family are doing great this holiday season.

This morning I ordered a second bridle. I have another horse, a 10-year-old Paso Fino mare that was ridden (very infrequently) with a sidepull device. I didn't want the sidepull. I did try her first with a Puerto Rican jaquima and she was stiff and not very responsive.

When I put the Bitless Bridle on her, I turned her a couple times and she had the idea. I have not had a moment's set back since then. This is a hot little mare and I was told she was difficult to stop and was barn sour.

People assume that my gelding, RAZZ, is some kind of saint and therefore the bitless bridle is a success. But he is the same kind of saint as their horses and will get away with whatever he can. If the door to evasiveness doesn't open and there is nothing to hurt him or make him mad, he appears beatific.

I wish more people would just try this equipment. It is such a great way to establish positive communication with our partners.

Your Florida Fans,"

Teresa, 6/9/01:

I just ordered a bridle for horse number three. It's been a long time since I corresponded with you and have wondered how you are doing. Is the campaign going as wished?

My Paso, RAZZ, successfully completed EPM treatment and realized his ambition to become an au paire since I spoke with you last. He has raised a weanling filly to yearling and taught my 9 year old niece to ride at the same time.

He still loves his bridle. Recently, he was anxious to go ride and shoved his head into the mare's bridle as she was being tacked up. He was already wearing his headgear, so looked like Medusa under the coils.

RAZZ has used the Bitless Bridle for a year and my mare has been in one seven months. I cannot think of a reason to use any other headgear. My mare was opinionated and a puller and still puts me to the test regularly. She is bold and confident (pigheaded) by nature. I don't expect to change her, but with your bridle, defeat is not without honor and she does not now become hot or resentful.

Sometimes I do ride other horses with their owners' headgear. The mouthing, chewing, tossing, and evading contact with the reins are very distracting, if not disheartening.

I am grateful to have found a better way."

Laura, Lyons, NY 10/25/00:

I am really excited about the bitless bridle and my husband is sold on it as well. I know I am more relaxed while riding, and it seems the horses are too(!) I will soon be ordering another so both horses will have one, and we can put away our bits. Thanks for the help,

Myra, Lexington, KY 10/26/00:

I entered my Rocky Mountain Horse for three shows, using the Bitless Bridle, and came in 2nd, 5th (I fell off, but the horse stayed with me!) and 1st. The judge never said a word about the bridle and there were no complaints. I was ready to do battle if there were ... I was quite disappointed!

Then to Vermont for a trail ride, with both of my horses in The Bitless Bridle. I had to pull back a little more than I might have done with a bit on my horse but it was OK. Neither of our horses sweated.

I need three more bitless bridles!

Dr. Rebecca Gimenez, Clempson, SC, 10/28/00:

This is Dr. Rebecca Gimenez, the wife of Dr. Tomas Gimenez, whose comments are on your website. I started using his bridles when we met and I am very impressed by them. I use them on our young horses in training and older horses in group rides and on singular ones. I often recommend it to others. who are AMAZED to see me trail riding and jumping with it on my 17 hand Walking Horse (who can be quite full of himself sometimes). Now I own a magazine (www.EquineBovine.com) and would like to do a product feature on the bitless bridle.

Charlene, Woodinville, WA , 11/6/00:

I have received my "loaner" bridle (waiting for my leather version) and finally had a day of decent weather to ride in it! I own an 11 yr old Paso Fino gelding. In this breed, they use a piece of equipment called a jaquima, which is a Columbian version of the hackamore, only it would be more closely related to your bitless bridle. The nose and chin pieces are interchangeable depending on what form of collection you need with your horse, i.e. head more upright or nose more vertical. Some of these pieces contain metal, or ball bearings and can be quite sore. A lot of them are braided nylon or leather. Suffice to say, they are only pinpointing specific areas, and horses can get quite mad at times.

My gelding has had professional training in this type of tack, along with the traditional Columbian bits and ported spoon bits w/ copper rollers and shanks, which move independently of each other. He has never been accepting of a bit. It took me a long time to get him to take the bit. He also roots w/ his nose, and "smiles", showing his teeth. He foams a lot on a bit. He also foams at the mouth without a bit, using the jaquima. I was very anxious to try your bridle. He can also be literally "head strong"... very heavy in the bridle. He has built up muscles on the sides of his neck doing this. My first ride was pretty good with the bitless bridle. I could control him. However our stops are a bit sloppy, as yet. He did NOT foam at all at the mouth! I was always told that that was "good" sign, and the fact that he foams without a bit was "wonderful". But with this bridle, no foam. He did flap his bottom lip a few times, which was different. I did not see him "grin" once. He did however root out when I asked him for a bit more collection so he would go into gait smoother. Can you achieve the same level of collection with your bridle, as with a bit?? In order for a Paso Fino to gait correctly, he needs his head up, and be off the forehand. I know I need a few more rides, but I think I may really like this bridle.

Thanks!

Charlene, 11/19/00:

I was wondering how much trouble I would cause if I canceled my order for the leather version of the bitless bridle, and just kept this beta one? I really like it! It's soft and lightweight and cleans like a dream. I just wasn't sure I would like it, so I ordered the leather. To be honest, this one suits trail riding just fine. EVERY ride is getting better and better. I have loaned the bridle to a friend, she may be ordering one soon.

Charlene, 11/23/00:

That is interesting about the lower lip. I have seen other Paso Finos doing this, some with bits, mostly without. It appeared to be a common "thing" with this breed. However, as I told you, before MY Paso Fino only "grinned" and this doesn't exactly look like relaxation to me! (nor to some judges).

Last weekend I rode using the bitless bridle, in company with 2 other horses with whom my horse can get quite competitive (also Paso Finos). I was able to keep his speed rated, enough so to encourage him to go into a nice slow canter, from a walk no less - no breaking away and "running to the finish line" as he tries to do with a bit in his mouth. I was really amazed. Then I would ask him to come back down into a nice even corto, which had so much cadence it made me smile! Every ride is getting better. I do feel I am "checking" him a lot more, but hope in time these checks will lessen as he gets comfortable with "new" cues. He still wants to start out the ride with a bit of attitude ... throwing his nose into the air when I ask him to slow down. It only seems to be at the beginning of the ride though.

Kat, Milton, VT 11/18/00:

Just wanted to let you know that the bitless bridle I bought for my Percheron-cross youngster does fit. I started lunging him in it. (I haven't backed him yet). He responds much better than he did to the sidepull that I have been using for lunging and long lining. I'm really excited about using it with him.

Gloria, Chatsworth, CA, 11/21/00:

Thank you for your Bitless Bridle. Some of our horses work really well in it and we are finding it very useful."

Cathy, Pittstown, ME 11/22/00:

Happy Thanksgiving: Love the bridle. We have a head bobber that my 8 year old rides ... she put the bridle on and had a great time. I asked her how it worked and she gave me a strange look saying, 'Mom, it works like a bridle should work!' and reported that JILL (the horse) only bobbed her head once! !! Thank you very much! Signed, Happy Customer

Karen, Santa Barbara, CA, 11/28/00:

I ordered your bitless bridle in August or Sept, 2000 to help continue the training 3rd level horse of my very promising 6 year old Dutch Warmblood Dressage horse. This had a bizarre wound at the corner of his lip right where the bit goes. 9 weeks forecast for healing and so I had a while to go before he could take a bit. I started working on alternatives to keep him in shape until he could take a bit. A sidepull hackamore worked for trail riding but left a bit to be desired (literally) for lateral work and collection. He is a very forward horse with a swan neck that has been very soft into the bit. The sidepull makes him curl up more and he gets heavy into the nose. A Bulletin board suggested your bitless bridle, so I ordered one. It came quickly and looks so much like a show bridle that an International rated Judge thought it was a bit and that my horse was going wonderfully. (They unfortunately are not allowed in the show ring,) 3 months later and his lip wound is healed and the swelling is almost gone. It's been 6 months since he's seen a bit, because he is still in Dr Cook's bitless bridle and doing great. We are back to working half pass, shoulder in, and simple changes with no problem. Working on quarter pirouettes and attempting flying changes. Sometimes I feel I don't have that last bit of finesse when trying to bring him into 2nd 3rd level connection with a higher neck and head, but I sense that this is because we haven't developed his training rather than because he lacks of the bit. The bridle works very well in that it tests much more honestly whether you're forward into both hands, and you can't use it to lever the horse like you can with a bit (I know we all claim we don't do this, but I was embarrassed with how many times I found myself attempting to use my hands when I should have used my legs or seat. Much more obvious with the bitless bridle.) I train with an Olympic Bronze medallist and when I brought my horse over for a lesson, she was quite impressed with how well he went and how much it looked like a regular bridle. That's a good vote of confidence. Hope to get him into a bit starting this week so I can start showing again, but I'm in no hurry as the bitless bridle works so well. I think we all could benefit (horse and rider) by doing a stint with this bridle.

Mary, Southern Pines, NC 11/28/00:

Thank you so much for the beautiful bridle which you sent to us--it arrived safely just before the holiday. Lisa Marie (our barn manager) is using it on her 3-year old newly backed Arab gelding. I did a video of her first ride with it and will send it to you after we do a "progress report" when they have had even more time to work with the bridle. We were amazed at how well the first session went. This little guy is quiet by nature but still a three year old and it was a very windy and cold day. (I had hoped Lisa would wait for better weather but she was so

anxious to try it) Anyway, he started in the dressage ring and just went right to work doing his lesson so well along with halts, backing, doing turns, etc. as if he had his bit. Since then she has had him on several longer hacks in the woods both alone and with other horses and he just seems to be so happy with the bridle. We will film the next ring lesson because I expect there will be even more of an improvement in his way of going. She also did not canter in the first session, as it was so cold, etc. But he has been cantering on his hacks on a regular basis and has been very responsive to her aids. We are very excited about it and will get out to show it to some of our other neighbors soon. Hope you had a very nice Thanksgiving. We will keep in touch. If you are ever in the Southern Pines area, our farm is always open as a place to demonstrate the bridle! Thanks again so much."

Lisa Marie, Southern Pines, NC. 11/28/00:

My name is Lisa Marie and I was the recent recipient of a complimentary bridle, which you gave to my employer, Mary Rice of Tallwood Farm in Southern Pines, NC. We were at the respiratory seminar held in Chapel Hill and had made a video of the demonstration of the bitless bridle. I put the bridle on my 3 1/2 year old Arab gelding, he had only been under saddle for about 3 months and we were using a full-cheek rubber snaffle on him. He was doing fine with the bit, but I am very open-minded and the concept of going bitless appeals to me! From the very first day with the bitless bridle he was responding beautifully! I have been using it for approximately 3 weeks, hacking out here at home and on trails. He is a super star with this bridle. The contact and aids I use are very light and I have complete control. We made a tape of the first ride with the bridle and will add onto that so you may see his progress. The first day I rode with it he even did some excellent backing up for me and my boss was so impressed with his performance. I am trying to tell everyone I can about the bridle. As you well know, most long-time horsemen and women are not very open to the idea of not needing a bit to control their horses! I hope to show his progress tomorrow to the young woman that started him for me; she is an international event rider. If I can get her interested at all she may be able to help get some more folks interested. We hope that one day in the future perhaps you could come here and give a demonstration/clinic of your own. We will let you know how we progress! Thanks for your support of the idea and reality that horses do not need bits!!

Jennifer, Newville, PA 11/30/00:

I bought a bitless bridle at Fair Hill International 3-Day event and have used it on several horses so far. Results have ranged from 'Goes just as well as using a bit' to 'Huge improvement immediately, compared to using a bit'. And it looks and feels (i.e., using standard English reins) like a regular bridle.

Elizabeth, East Lansing, MI, 12/3/00:

I have tried everything else. I own a whole collection of bits. But I still needed to have a death grip on the reins. But your Bitless Bridle is fabulous and I love it. I now I want a leather one. It is two years since I finished a show jumping circuit with a smile on my face but today I was the only one smiling. My horse was a little hesitant at first, and then became more confident and more relaxed. He jumped one foot higher. Its really incredible!

Suzie, (Master Saddler) Longmont, CO, 12/6/00:

My horse is very happy in his new bridle and is becoming more forward and responsive every time I ride him. His previous owner says she has never in 15 years seen him move so well. I am very happy.

Vanessa, 12/10/00:

It has been awhile since I have spoken to you but I have loved my Bitless Bridle. I purchased one on 4/9/00. I have the nylon, as the leather was not available at the time needed. But I just ordered the leather one online and hope to get it as soon as possible. This has helped with the horse I spoke with you about; the tongue lolling and resistance are not a factor when we use your bridle. I hope things are going well for you as you have a wonderful product.

Suzanne, Madisonville, LA, 12/10/00 :

Brown Beta arrived today...worked great on the appy :) He liked it and so do I. Not one time did he pull on it or do that *rooting* that I hate so much.

Zoe, Montclair, NJ 12/16/00:

I have only one thing to say to you people: I will NEVER use a bit on my horse AGAIN. EVER. Have to run and do Christmas cleaning. Details to follow! Thank you thank you thank you thank you!!!!!!!

As promised above:-

Zoe, 12/16/00:

The full details of our first experience with the bitless bridle. My Connemara mare Molly was acting like a lunatic in her paddock this morning. All the other horses were in high spirits, galloping up and down their fields, and she was going nuts in her small paddock separated from her buddies, careening up to the gate and slipping in the mud, screaming out for company when everyone else got out of sight. So I knew I wasn't in for the calmest ride of my life! When I went and got her out, she behaved well enough. I took her in and tacked her up and she only tried to thumb her nose at me a few times and stood patiently while I read the instructions for the bitless bridle and adjusted it on her ad infinitum.

She was loopy the last time I rode her in the indoor ring, claustrophobic and hyper, so even though the footing in the outdoor ring was frozen and hard as a rock, I took her out there, intending just to walk anyway as we got the feel of the bridle. I got on her and spent a few minutes doing turns. She was confused at first and wanted to go right when I gave the left rein aid, responding to the pressure on her right cheek. But she cottoned on pretty quickly and soon our turns were nice and smooth.

Then, five minutes into our ride, the three geldings in the upper field, led by my daughter's horse of course, came galloping down at full speed towards the ring, bucking and cavorting. At the same time the two warhorses in the near paddock set to jumping and

spinning. I felt Molly go electric under me. She started snorting and piaffing. I took back on the reins. She backed up into a jump, overturning the standard and the rails went clattering down. I could feel her starting to explode. This is her normal response to excitement and the only part of owning her that I hate--it happens rarely enough but it's a real issue for us.

I took again, released and asked her to go forward a step. She obeyed, but she felt like a volcano ready to explode. I thought I'd better get off, seeing as I had no idea how much control I had with no bit, but I wanted to get away from the fallen jump so I asked her to go forward a bit more. She actually put her head down and moved out. So I decided to stay on for the time being. Then the other horses started their act again. Molly lit up underneath me, started to go into a spin, but this time when I took with the reins, told her to stand, and then go forward, she did so more quickly, with less of an explosive feeling. This cycle repeated itself a few more times, and as it did I felt a very unusual calmness come over her.

I also felt, from the very beginning, an entirely different kind of connection with her. Molly deplores a tightly held bit. She tries to evade strong pressure every which way, tossing her head, opening her mouth, going "rubber" in your hands. As a result I always try to keep an extremely light contact, which can translate into nothing very easily. I'm always uneasy when she starts "acting up," because a "death grip" on the reins is the worst response I can have and giving her her head leaves me with no control whatsoever. But with the bitless bridle, I felt as if

I had a strong, but comforting connection to her, and she responded in kind. Your description of a "benevolent headlock" is EXACTLY how it feels. Within ten minutes she was working away with a more relaxed attention than I have ever felt from her. She stopped effortlessly, backed easily, stretched down willingly, and the fight was completely gone. Her anxiety changed to calm alertness. It was amazing. I tried a trot, and she worked beautifully.

I decided to go into the indoor after all, as by now I really wanted to try cantering her. We've always had trouble keeping our balance together at the canter, especially in circles. She tends to break into the trot, and I end up bouncing all over the place. She'll also toss her head on the canter departs, especially to the left. Well, not in the bitless bridle. She moved into the canter smoothly, and within about ten minutes of working, I had her going in circles evenly and without breaking, I was able to gently use my leg on her to keep her going, and worked practically with a loose rein! She remained calm and connected to me to an unprecedented degree.

I didn't want to get off her!!! Working Molly on her "up" days has always been fraught with a certain degree of anxiety for me, and I often end up somewhat frustrated and a little frightened. I never want to do anything to traumatize her, both out of concern for her but also because a firm hand on my part can so easily deteriorate into a fight. But today we moved into a solid partnership where I felt I could do just about anything with her. So I decided to take her for a short hack down the road. We rarely go out alone, as I am nervous about her reaction to cars, goats, miniature ponies etc. I worry my own nervousness will translate to her, and it does. But today I felt like the mother of a mildly nervous but very compliant child. The competent mother! Off we went a quarter of a mile or so down the road. She did everything I asked. I could feel her trust for me like a palpable object. It was remarkable.

I drove home singing in the car. I will never put a bit in her mouth again. I feel as though we've been transported into another dimension.

I cannot thank you enough, Dr. Cook & Paul. It's hard to believe that after three years of ownership, my relationship with Molly could change so radically in a single afternoon. I'm curious now about the success that the lady I read about on your website has had trying to change the USDF regulations re. showing in dressage without a bit. We are eventers, so I am

sure I will encounter the same regulations in the dressage component of our shows. I haven't begun to show yet--am intending to do so next summer--but I will NOT put a bit back in this horse's mouth--not even a dummy. You should have seen the happy expression on her face and the relaxed line of her lips when I was working her today (actually, it was hilarious to see the confused wrinkling of her lips when we started off today doing some groundwork as she clued in to the new pressure on her nose and poll). I feel that any return to a bit at this point would be a huge step backwards.

Well, enough rambling. Please accept my deepest gratitude for the best Christmas present (next to Molly herself of course) I have ever had!"