

## HOW TO BE AN ETHICAL EQUESTRIAN: Reaping all the benefits at no cost

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Through millions of years of evolution, mankind has 'used' animals in a variety of ways, just as animals have 'used' mankind (for example, viruses, bacteria, parasites, insects and tigers).

This being so, let's agree on a fact of life that we animals are interdependent and that mankind's 'use' of other animals is, within reason, ethically acceptable

That said, when considering use of the horse for sport (certainly not necessary for our survival) we should strive for the highest ethical standard.

For example and at the very least, it is incumbent on us to minimize the risk of accidents to the horse and ensure that we do not inflict avoidable pain and suffering

Undoubtedly, in the early 1900s, when many horse sport rules were first codified, the above principles were followed and the rules were considered ethically acceptable for their time. The early rule books have been widely adopted as models by other administrations and many individual rules are still in place a hundred years later.

However, three changes have occurred in the last century:

- Our concern for animal welfare has grown
- Humane, more effective and safer alternatives to the bit have been developed
- Equitation science has come of age and we know a great deal more about learning theory and the negative effect of a bit on a horse and its rider

As a result the rules, on biting in particular, are in need of updating by all administrations

To most efficiently reduce risk and eliminate avoidable pain it makes sense to eliminate their most common causes. A recent study showed that not less than 94% of unwanted and potentially dangerous behaviors of the ridden horse were caused by the bit.

Because of this, administrations are urged to follow the 2013 example of the Royal Dutch Federation of Equine Sports in dressage and offer competitors the choice of a bitless option in every discipline for which a bit is currently mandated

This is a win-win situation for the horse, the rider and the administration. Bitless competitors will enhance the welfare and quality of life of their horse, improve performance and enjoy riding in harmony with their horse's basic needs. They will also reduce the likelihood of accidents to themselves and the cost of wastage

Administrations will benefit as a bitless option will improve the public image of their sport, appease the animal rights lobby and increase membership income.

WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?