

# **THE FEI AND THE BITLESS BRIDLE: Correspondence about a rule change proposal**

**Robert Cook  
March 2007**

From September 2005 to March 2007 I corresponded with Michael Stone at the FEI, in the hope of persuading the FEI to consider a rule change proposal whereby the cross-under design of bitless bridle would become permitted equipment under FEI rules for dressage and dressage related disciplines.<sup>1</sup> At the onset of the correspondence, Michael Stone was the Sports Director of the FEI but, by stages during the correspondence, he was first appointed Acting Secretary General and, finally, Secretary General.

The correspondence took some time to become fully engaged but, after nearly a year, it became apparent that the Dressage Committee of the FEI was unwilling to recommend a rule change. I persevered with the evidence in favour of a change but to no avail. After a couple of more active exchanges, the Secretary General brought the correspondence to a close.

I had hoped that the FEI would show some leadership over this matter but they have rejected the opportunity. The only other route is through the national federations. A national federation will need to be persuaded to recommend a rule change to the FEI, for the FEI to vote on. As I am seen by the FEI to have a conflict of interest in this matter, I must pass the baton to dressage riders for them to pursue the goal. Riders who are also members of their national federation are urged to submit proposals. If they can muster the support of a committee member, this would help. I urge as many as possible to make their voices heard.

I would be glad to keep a tally of the number of proposals being submitted and the dates of submissions to each federation committee. I would also be glad to receive copies of rejection letters that members receive. Members whose proposals are rejected are urged to insist on being given rational reasons for the rejection. Such rejection evidence may serve as a guide for subsequent proposals.

The campaign for a rule change will take time and energy. Rapid results are unlikely. In the meantime, dressage riders who wish to use the cross-under bitless bridle could help the cause by taking part Hors Concours. This will increasingly demonstrate to the judges and other competitors that excellent dressage performances are possible with the cross-under bitless bridle. But even more importantly, if riders would send me a copy of their scores, of how they ranked in each competition and of any remarks by the judges, I will collate

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<sup>1</sup> In the correspondence, I have used the description 'crossover bitless bridle' but more recently I have decided that a better generic description of the new design would be the 'cross-under bitless bridle.'

these to produce both quantitative and qualitative evidence of bitless performances.

I have debated the ethics of publishing a correspondence without first seeking the consent of my correspondent. If this was correspondence about a private matter I would have felt that to take such a step was inappropriate. But this is not a private correspondence and it is about a public matter. Furthermore, it is about a welfare matter. The welfare of both horse and rider could be improved by a rule change that permitted dressage riders the option of using a more humane method of communication. This being the case, I have decided to publish the correspondence in the belief that the background information it provides may be of some help to those who will be submitting rule change proposals.

Riders and readers who would like to see the various attachments that are mentioned in the correspondence can download these from my website at [www.bitlessbridle.com](http://www.bitlessbridle.com). Click on 'Articles' and select the title of interest.

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*A letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2005 to Michael Stone, at which time he was the Sports Director of the FEI. A few days previously, as a result of a discussion about the possibility of a rule change, I had sent Stone a complimentary leather bridle and he had agreed give it a trial by loaning it out to a number of dressage riders in Lausanne and getting their feedback .*

Dear Michael,

I had intended to let the bridle speak for itself, as it is its own best ambassador. But I share your interest in seeing the reaction of your more traditional members and cannot resist adding a comment. First, some background that you already know:

Dressage riders have been drilled for generations on the importance of a horse being, as the phrase goes, 'on the bit.' The result is that this very phrase could now become a barrier to acceptance of a bridle that apparently has nothing to be 'on!' A better phrase would be 'on the bridle.' An even better phrase would be 'on the aids.' Even better still, would be acceptance of the reality that true collection depends on some aids more than others. 'Seat and legs' are the key to collection rather than 'hands.'

Those riders who have invested patient years training a horse to become fit and strong, with the emphasis on 'seat and legs,' so that he can carry and balance both himself and his rider, will be much more likely to approve of the crossover bitless bridle. Those who have been taking a short cut by using their hands to produce poll flexion (and, therefore, false collection) may be disappointed that they can no longer get their horse 'in a frame.' With perseverance, of course, they will achieve true collection but this does not come overnight.

Because of the above, the crossover bitless bridle becomes a test of the rider. A rider that can move from a bitted bridle to the crossover bitless bridle

without losing collection has better 'hands' than a rider whose horse falls apart. I hope that this does not sound as though I am being unnecessarily defensive. I just wish to alert you to some of the reactions I predict you will encounter.

I also accept the possibility that a few riders with impeccable 'hands' may decide that, at least in the first instance, they do not have the delicacy of communication with the crossover design that they have with a bit. But the communication can be expected to improve with time as the horse becomes more accustomed to the new sensations. In any case, 'impeccable hands' with "the delicacy of a neurosurgeon" are a rarity and this reaction will be just as rare.

The difference in performance between the bit and the crossover bitless method of communication is rather analogous to the difference between shaving with an old-fashioned cut-throat razor (straight razor) and a safety razor. A cut-throat razor in the hands of a master will give you a closer shave than a safety razor. But a cut-throat razor in less competent hands is likely to lead to accidents. On the other hand (excuse the pun), even a learner can use a safety razor and give himself a perfectly acceptable shave without incurring the risks he would be taking if he wielded a cut-throat. The crossover bitless bridle is the shaving equivalent of the safety razor. Being painless, it saves the rider from hurting the horse. A pain free horse learns faster and performs better. Horse and rider develop a partnership and harmony ensues. The cost of what might be lost in 'closeness' is more than compensated for by the benefits.

I am, therefore, suggesting that an appraisal of the crossover bitless bridle may be viewed as a cost/benefit equation. Is the cost of any loss of finesse (itself questionable) for an elite few not more than balanced by the huge benefit for the great majority of riders and the undeniable benefit for all horses. My research tells me that a bit causes over 120 problems for horse and rider (see my book, included in the bridle package). Some of these 'problems' (such as bucking, rearing and bolting) produce accidents that jeopardize the very life of both horse and rider. Other problems may be less life-threatening but are still serious and are the result, as are bucking, rearing and bolting, of a rider unintentionally causing a horse pain. I conclude that the bit method of communication, like the cut-throat razor, represents a hazard to welfare and safety.

I am not suggesting that the bit should be banned but I urge the FEI to consider approving, alongside the currently named bits, a painless and more effective method of communication that reduces the risk of accidents, enhances the welfare of the horse, and increases the pleasure and satisfaction of riders.

I hope these thoughts will provide you with a useful background to the trials that you have volunteered to conduct. I am so delighted that you have this open mind and have agreed to look at the bridle. Please understand that my prime objective here is to promote the welfare of the horse and not to promote sales for my company. I have been a research veterinarian for 53 years and a veterinarian/salesman for only six. I hope that my track record (CV available online) will counterbalance this conflict of interest. By way of mitigation, may I also add that the crossover design has been so successful that it is being copied all over the world. I own a US patent on the Bitless Bridle but do not claim or

wish to claim a world-wide monopoly. When the idea is copied abroad, I am happy that the horse will benefit. In order to avoid anyone at the FEI thinking that this is an effort on my part to push a particular product, I have been at pains to refer to the design by a generic name, the crossover bitless bridle, rather than a proprietary one.

What I am 'selling' is an idea, not a product. I see it as an opportunity for the FEI to make an historic contribution to the welfare of the horse. This trial is the first small step towards the possibility (albeit not immediately) of a rule change to approve the crossover design of bitless bridle for competitive dressage. It also represents an opportunity to materially benefit the horse. If the FEI were to give a lead to the national organizations on this crucial matter, it would save the horse many years of unnecessary pain and prevent many an accident.

Kind regards,

Bob

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**From:** Bob Cook [mailto:drcook@bitlessbridle.com]  
**Sent:** 26 January 2006 01:13  
**To:** Michael Stone

Hello Michael:

I am attaching an abstract that I have submitted for a welfare conference to be held in September at the Royal Society, London. As the abstract mentions the FEI, I thought you should see a copy.

Have you received any feedback yet from the riders to whom you lent the trial bridle?

Regards,

Bob

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1/30/06

Dear Bob,

Thanks for the email, I will check with our testers and there was nothing attached"

Thanks

Michael

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*After a number of other reminders, the following brief reply from Michael Stone was received [eleven months after the original letter], on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2006*

Dear Bob,

My apologies, I have been very busy the past weeks and have been traveling so have not had a chance to respond. The general response has been that the bridle is a good tool for schooling horses who do not readily accept the bit or who are just difficult! However the testers do not think that it can provide sufficient control for top-level dressage. They believe that the double bridle is the classical and still best method for competition at International Level and consequently would not recommend a change in the rules to permit your bridle to be used.

I realize that this is not what you wanted to hear but that is what has been reported back.

Once again my apologies for not getting back to you sooner  
-Michael Stone  
Acting Secretary General

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*I acknowledged the receipt of this reply more or less immediately but indicated that I was disappointed and would respond at greater length in due course. Three months later, on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2006, I sent the following:*

**To:** Michael Stone, Sports Director and Acting Secretary General, FEI  
**From:** Dr. Robert Cook<sup>2</sup>, Professor of Surgery Emeritus, Tufts University.  
Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, North Grafton, MA 01536 USA  
Chairman, The Bitless Bridle Inc. 206 Birch Run Road, Chestertown, MD 21620  
**Date:** October 24, 2006  
**Subject: RULE CHANGE PROPOSAL TO PERMIT USE OF THE CROSSOVER BITLESS BRIDLE FOR FEI SPONSORED COMPETITIONS**

Michael, I'm sure you haven't been waiting all this time for the second shoe to drop but you will probably remember my wish to respond more fully to your last email on July 31, 2006 and this is what I am now doing.

You were absolutely right, of course, when you said that the feedback from the BB trials was not what I wanted to hear. It was most disappointing that none of the riders who tested the bridle felt inclined to recommend a rule change to permit the crossover bitless bridle to be used in FEI competitions. I wonder how many gave it a trial and for how long? I am tempted to add the who, what, why, when and where questions too, as it is so unusual for an entire group of

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<sup>2</sup> Email: [drcook@bitlessbridle.com](mailto:drcook@bitlessbridle.com) Telephone: (410) 778 9005

riders to all express such lack of enthusiasm for the bridle. Have you, I wonder, had a chance to use it yourself?

Please know that I am disappointed for the horse's sake. In writing to you, I am wearing my research veterinarian's flat hat, not my chairman's top hat. In 50 years of research focused on the head, neck and chest of the horse, I have gained some experience that is relevant to the matter in question. I am also writing to you on behalf of riders, worldwide, who - having discovered the benefits of the bridle - wish to use this improved and more humane method of communication in FEI competitions.

Over the last eight years the crossover bitless bridle (CBB) has been field-tested, to my certain knowledge, on over 25,000 horses. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and, because the merit of the new concept in horsemanship has been quickly recognized, many companies around the world are now marketing the same design. As a result, the total numbers of horses in crossover bitless bridles will far exceed my estimate. These tests, whereby a horse is switched from a (painful) bitted bridle to a (painless) crossover bitless bridle, represent what scientists call 'natural experiments.' Referring to my own 'experiment' the test population has included horses of all types, temperaments and ages, both 'green' and fully schooled, from many different parts of the world. The horses have been engaged in a wide variety of disciplines (including dressage), and ridden by a range of riders from disabled, novice, and children, to riders and certified instructors with thirty or more years of experience. The bridles have been purchased with a 30-day warranty, yet refunds have been requested by less than five percent. Experience tells me that the majority of these are returned because the users have failed to fit the bridle correctly. This is something that has to be expected with new technology, even with an item as simple as the CBB. So it is possible to say that the collective results of these many 'experiments' have been overwhelmingly convincing. The general response has been one of unbridled (one might say 'unbitted') enthusiasm. You only need to spend 10 minutes reviewing the users' comments on [www.bitlessbridle.com](http://www.bitlessbridle.com) and other websites such as [www.bitlessbridle.co.uk](http://www.bitlessbridle.co.uk) to get a feel for the huge relief from pain and fear that is documented. As less than five in a hundred riders found the CBB unsatisfactory, I am puzzled as to why there was not even one person from (I am assuming) three or four who tried the bridle, who wished to recommend it as an acceptable option to two bits and a chain. The 'natural experiments' predicted that perhaps 5% of your testers might have found the CBB unsatisfactory, whereas it appears that 100% found it so. With an anomalous result such as this, any researcher would automatically review the protocols and conditions of the experiment and run it again.

I am also disappointed on behalf of the FEI. I feel that the FEI is about to miss an opportunity to advance the welfare of the horse and further its own stated objectives. As the international body responsible for governing horse sports, I would have thought that the FEI would have welcomed the indisputable welfare advance that the CBB represents.

You report that your testers agreed, "*the bridle is a good tool for schooling horses who do not readily accept the bit.*" Your testers obviously recognized that

this non-acceptance of the rein aids disappeared when the (painful) bit was removed. Continuing, your testers agreed that it was a good tool for horses “*who are just difficult.*” Again, the testers presumably recognized that the bit was the cause of the ‘difficulty’ and that resistant behavior disappeared when the bit was removed. So far, so good, as these are really the only two comments in the testers’ report that are of relevance to the question. But now your testers switch in their comments to a matter that has nothing to do with welfare and, therefore, nothing to do with the formulation of rules. The testers refer to their doubts as to whether they, personally, could achieve an internationally acceptable standard of dressage performance without a bit. As the FEI Code of Conduct makes clear, such considerations are not a factor in determining the rules. Apart from this, there are many variables that would have to be considered before this particular dissatisfaction could be attributed to the equipment. The training of the horse, the skill of the rider, and the standard of judging are only some of the variables.

Your testers reported that they did not think that the CBB could provide “*sufficient control for top-level dressage.*” This represents a prediction that has not and cannot be put to the test, as the current rules prevent it. Riders who have used the CBB for many years would not agree with this prediction. They simply ask that the rules be changed so that at least they are given the opportunity; firstly to use a more humane method of communication and secondly, to demonstrate their ability to communicate even more effectively than by means of a bit. Welfare considerations are presumably the primary factor in deciding the rules. Even if quality of performance was a secondary consideration, quality does not depend on the use of a bit. In fact, as the bit is an impediment to the horse and a handicap for the rider, better quality performances can be assured if the bit is removed. If horses are not in pain, they become calm, compliant and content. These are conditions that foster improved performance. The Duke of Newcastle averred, three centuries ago, that a bit was not necessary and that he could ‘dress’ a horse with a scarf around its neck.

Your testers need not be concerned that bitless riders would in some way be handicapped by not having a bit in their horses’ mouths. If bitless dressage performances suffered (which is most unlikely unless riders were previously relying on the bit to achieve false collection and judges were failing to penalize such situations), this is not a matter that your testers needed to worry about. Neither, as long as the bitless horse is under control in the arena and is not running amok (far less likely than if it was bitted) should it be a factor in determining the rules. All that bitless riders are asking is to be given the option to compete without having to use what they rightly consider to be a painful and cruel method of communication and an impediment to performance.

I realize that no rider can submit a rule change proposal directly to the FEI, so you are my one portal of access on this matter. You might direct me to the national federations and tell me that it is to them that submissions should be made. I recognize that this is the proper channel but when this is done a problem arises that results in a perpetual ‘spinning of wheels.’ If I, or anyone else, go through these proper channels, as people have already done many times, they receive a polite but brief rejection, explaining that the national

federation takes its lead from the FEI and, therefore, they are unable to change their rules. Sometimes, the same message is transmitted that your own testers fell back on... *"the double bridle is the classical and still [the] best method."* This memorandum is already long enough, so I will not extend it by repeating my thoughts on this argument. But I am appending an unpublished article (1) that addresses what I describe as the argument from tradition. In summary, it is an argument that is inadmissible when applied to a matter of welfare.

I would also like to draw your attention to what may soon become a matter of law in the UK. The new Animal Welfare Bill currently going through Parliament contains legislation that has a direct bearing on the use of the bit in the horse. The Bill is designed to cover the law as it affects companion animals rather than commercial (farm) animals. The horse is considered a companion animal and, as such, its welfare will be governed by this legislation. Under this new law, an animal's owner is to be held accountable for a 'duty of care.' The welfare guidelines in the Bill are based on the Five Freedoms. The horse's bit infringes four of these five freedoms. If this new legislation becomes law, use of the bit will contravene the law.

In January 2006, I thought I had sent you an abstract that I had submitted for an international animal welfare conference at the Royal Society in September 2006. Looking back, I realize that I may have omitted to include the attachment (now remedied, see appendix 2). The abstract was accepted for the conference and will be included in the conference proceedings. The proceedings are to be published as a supplement to "Animal Welfare" the official journal of the University Federation of Animal Welfare, one of the co-sponsors of the conference. You will see that the abstract contains a plea for the FEI to introduce a rule change to permit the CBB. The poster that I designed for the same conference carried the title, "Bitting and Shoeing Reclassified as Cruel." (see PowerPoint presentation 3). Cruelty is legally defined as the infliction of avoidable pain or suffering. As a result of research I have now completed and the availability in the last eight years of a humane alternative to the bit (the CBB), it can now be argued that the pain of the bit is avoidable and, therefore, cruel. The current FEI dressage rules that mandate the use of two bits and a chain could expose the FEI to embarrassing criticism or even legal action in the future. The criticism could be deflected if riders were offered the option of competing without a bit, in a bridle that is pain-free, compatible with the physiological needs of the horse, and provides for comprehensive rider communication.

If the CBB became a permitted piece of equipment under FEI rules for dressage and other disciplines from which at present it is barred, this would provide for many welfare improvements over and above freedom from pain and suffering. As I have mentioned in previous correspondence, the bit is responsible for 120 or more problems for horse and rider (see appended Behavioral Profiling Questionnaire 4). The majority of problems are triggered by pain or the fear of pain but there are plenty of other problems that would disappear if horses were not encumbered with bits. For example, and in relation to dressage in particular:

- Training would be rendered easier as a horse in pain cannot learn



- Performance would be improved
- No longer would horses gape their mouths during dressage tests or protrude their tongues.
- Riders would no longer need to combat this by using crank nosebands.
- Without the leverage provided by two bits and a chain, riders would be unable to generate hyperflexion and use this pathophysiological training method.
- During a test, horses would be less likely to be overbent and false collection would be eliminated
- As the horse would no longer be in pain from the bit, fearful and excitable, there would be no temptation to sedate a horse prior to entering the arena.
- Transitions would be smoother
- Excessive sweating and slobbering would be eliminated
- Constant fidgeting of the horse when supposed to be standing still would be less likely
- Episodes of bucking and rearing would be most unlikely
- Far fewer dressage horses would develop the headshaking syndrome
- Straightness, impulsion and rhythm would be improved
- In the above and other ways, the CBB saves riders from themselves, as the new concept promotes better horsemanship
- By eliminating bit-induced problems, riders have the opportunity to better express their skills
- Horse and rider harmony would be more apparent

In your email of 18 October 2005 you wrote, *“I obviously do not agree with your contention that we are in breach of 9 out of 10 points of the [FEI] code of conduct ....”* My assumption is that when you wrote this you had not yet had a chance to read my book, “Metal in the Mouth,” a copy of which I sent you. Otherwise, I don’t see how you could have rationalized your use of the word ‘obviously.’ To me it is far from obvious that you could fail to accept the factual evidence. Perhaps you could explain the grounds for your personal ‘acceptance of the bit.’ Even more to the point, perhaps you could explain why you feel that it is necessary to mandate the exclusive use of the bit and ban a humane option? A possible explanation for your word ‘obviously’ might be that someone in your position could feel that it was incumbent to uphold the historical and classical tradition of horsemanship. But I am sure you would agree that this duty would not take precedence over insuring that the FEI upheld the highest possible standards for the welfare of the horse.

This is a matter of such importance that I must ask either you or one of your staff to give me a more satisfactory answer to my proposal than the one I have yet received. It is necessary to hear what your real reasons and reservations are for rejecting this advance. If you can muster some valid scientific arguments, I will ‘cease and desist.’ The lives of both riders and horses are at stake in this debate, so if you tell me that neither you nor your staff has the time to debate the issue I will have to say now that such an answer would be unacceptable. The horse riding public need and deserve to hear your reasons for rejecting a proposal that would reduce pain and suffering for the horse and

reduce bit-induced accidents affecting both horse and rider. As I can give you over 120 reasons why the bit method of communication is inhumane and dangerous and why the CBB should be a permitted piece of equipment, I need to ask you what reasons can you give me for the opposing view? I will not ask you to provide reasons why the bit is not inhumane and dangerous. That would be an unfair question, though you can try to answer it if you wish. But can you show me that the CBB is inhumane, that it doesn't provide efficient communication, that it is unsafe, or in some other way incompatible with the FEI objectives?

In case you and your colleagues are resisting the idea of permitting the CBB because you feel that this might be the thin edge of a wedge that would now justify the admission of a flood of other bitless bridles, let me reassure you. Unlike the CBB, all the traditional bitless bridles (the hackamores, bosals and sidepulls) are pain-based bridles and none of them can claim to provide for comprehensive communication. No valid argument could be made to permit such bridles. Neither am I asking that bits should be banned, simply that a humane alternative should be permitted. My personal opinion is that the bit will gradually pass out of use without the need for legislation. Once competitors realize that the CBB improves not only the welfare of horses but also their performance, use of the bit will rapidly decline and it will become a bygone seen only in museums and antique shops.

Recently, while browsing through the FEI rules for dressage, I came across a line of red ink stating that reins must be attached to a bit. What was the rationale, I wonder, behind this amendment? Am I right in interpreting this as a specific block to any proposal for a rule change to permit the CBB? Today, I tried (unsuccessfully) to locate this line again but I did find the amendments introduced on 10/5/06. Sadly, I was unable to read the entire rules as on two occasions the rules 'froze' on about page 14. But I did see that the phrase 'on the bit' was frequently cited. As I have remarked in previous articles that I have sent you, I believe that use of this phrase leads to a misunderstanding about the true aim of dressage. Instead, we should refer to a horse being 'on the bridle' or 'on the rein aids.'

The rest of the horse world looks to the FEI to give them a lead in matters of equine welfare. Sadly, if the FEI fails to set an example, it deters all the national federations from bringing their own rules up to date. A logjam at the top affects every organization, right down to Pony Clubs and the safety and welfare of young riders and their horses. If the FEI fails to support an advance in equine welfare and human safety, this affects riders who are not even contemplating national or international competitions. As the situation now stands, it could be said that the FEI is ruling against a welfare advance. I am sure that the FEI would not wish to be thought responsible for preventing riders from adopting a more humane and safer method.

The bit has been a standard method of control (I prefer the word 'communication') for 5000 years. Man's own evolution has ill-equipped him to deal with new ideas and so there is always a phylogenetic inertia to be expected before resistance to change is overcome. The CBB has only been available for eight years and the research on which the advance is founded has only been

available for three years. I realize that the FEI is a big ship and it takes time for it to change direction. Nevertheless, in this age of information, I hope it will not take several more decades for the evidence to be absorbed and action taken.

To use a rather tired expression, this is not rocket science. Members of the FEI committees that might be asked to consider this proposal are not being faced with the need for a high-technology analysis of yet one more piece of metallurgy to be inserted into a horse's delicate mouth. The woman on horseback (the horse industry equivalent of the man in the street) is just asking permission to dispense with metal inserts altogether and to use something that is simpler, kinder and gentler. She is asking to use two strap loops, one over the nose and one over the poll. The straps are so designed as to be virtually incapable of hurting the horse. The pressures that the straps are able to apply are trivial and they are distributed over the whole of the head. Signaling is accomplished with a hug or a nudge. Even if a rider were to throw the whole of her body weight into the reins, the horse would feel no more than a momentary and painless tug on the head. In terms of signaling, this is a whisper not a shout. In terms of horsemanship it is the quintessence of less is more.

Many thousands of 'women on horseback' have recognized the logic, practicality and benefits of applying the CBB welfare advance to the art of horsemanship. I am receiving more and more inquiries from riders who wish to use the CBB for FEI sponsored competitions. If you would like to see a list of petitioners, I could compile one for you. This ground swell of support for a rule change proposal, backed-up by the scientific evidence I have provided, constitutes a brief for change that would be difficult to refute. The purpose of this memorandum is to ask you, formally, to use your authority to place such a question on the table for discussion.

Well, if you have read this far I thank you. At least I can now feel that I have done my best and that an influential person in the FEI has been provided with the facts on which a decision can be based. I do not apologize for the length of this document, however, as it is one of fundamental importance to the welfare of both horse and rider. If you need more facts or if you would like to conduct a more extended and better-considered trial, please let me know. I would be glad to provide either fact or bridles to facilitate this matter.

Michael, since we commenced this correspondence in August 2005, I see that you have become the Acting Secretary General of the FEI as well as its Sports Director. I congratulate you most sincerely on this appointment. At the same time, I am sure that your new responsibilities absorb more time than each day provides, and for this I offer you my condolences. Nevertheless, your new authority gives you the opportunity to make a signal contribution (in more ways than one) to the welfare of the horse. If you succeed in implementing a rule change to permit the CBB you will have done the horse a favor that it has been waiting for since the Bronze Age. You will also have done the FEI a favor of historic proportions.

## Appendix

1. Cook, W.R.: “**Tradition and the status quo, or science and advance?**” Unpublished material, 2006
2. Cook, W.R, Strasser, H, and De Beukelaer, E.R.J.M. “**Compliance with physiology as the foundation for animal welfare guidelines: Exemplified by the rehabilitation of the horse's foot & mouth.**” In press. *Animal Welfare*
3. Cook, W.R, Strasser, H, and De Beukelaer, E.R.J.M. “**Bitting and shoeing reclassified as cruel.**” PowerPoint Poster presentation for the British Veterinary Association and University Federation of Animal Welfare Conference, “The Quality of Life; The heart of the matter.” Royal Society, London, UK September 13-14, 2006.
4. Cook, W.R: “**Behavioral Profiling Questionnaire.**” Unpublished material (available online at [www.bitlessbridle.com](http://www.bitlessbridle.com))

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**From:** Bob Cook [mailto:drcook@bitlessbridle.com]

**Sent:** 02 March 2007 03:43

**To:** m.stone@horsesport.org

**Subject:** Cross-under bitless bridle & rule change

Dear Michael,

Four months ago I sent you a long email about a rule change proposal but have had no acknowledgment or reply. I wonder if perhaps you forwarded it to the chairman of an FEI committee and it has got lost in transit?

To remind you of its contents, I am attaching a copy of the email, in a file that contains the major items of our correspondence.

Even if you are unable to give me your considered reply immediately, I would appreciate it if you would drop me a note to assure me today's email was at least received.

Many thanks,

Bob

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**From:** Michael Stone

**To:** 'Bob Cook'

**Sent:** Monday, March 05, 2007 6:00 AM

**Subject:** RE: Cross-under bitless bridle & rule change

Dear Bob,

Thanks for your email, I am not sure what happened but I did discuss with our committee and I am afraid that they do not wish to propose such a rule, the only alternative is for a National Federation to propose it if you can persuade the USEF to do so then it would at least be on the agenda

Kind regards

Michael

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**From:** Bob Cook [mailto:drcook@bitlessbridle.com]  
**Sent:** 07 March 2007 23:54  
**To:** Michael Stone  
**Subject:** Re: Cross-under bitless bridle & rule change

Dear Michael,

When you say that you discussed the CBB issue with your committee, which committee was this and when? Had the committee members been given (and had they read) the document plus attachments I sent you four months ago? Perhaps you are referring to your original discussion after a few riders had given the bridle a trial in September 2005?

In my document dated 24 October 2006 I emphasized that national federations, when asked to consider this rule change, can be relied upon to reject the proposal on the grounds that they abide by the FEI regulations. Yet now you refer me back to the national federation route. I think we both know that such a route is doomed to fail. Is this what the FEI wants...to frustrate any update in equine welfare, even when the science is irrefutable and the benefits to horse (and rider) are undeniable?

The only way to break this logjam is for the FEI to face up to their responsibilities for equine welfare and give a lead to all the national federations. An appeal to the USEF or any other national federation will be yet another futile exercise in wheel spinning. An organization such as the FEI that undertakes responsibility for equine welfare also undertakes accountability. I am disappointed that neither you nor your committee have thought it necessary to provide any reason for rejecting the proposal for an advance in welfare or to answer any of the points I made in my proposal. May I draw your attention, once more to the following paragraph from my October 2006 proposal:

As the international body responsible for governing horse sports, I would have thought that the FEI would have welcomed the indisputable welfare advance that the CBB represents. I realize that no rider can submit a rule change proposal directly to the FEI, so you are my one portal of access on this matter. You might direct me to the national federations and tell me that it is to them that submissions should be made. I recognize that this is the proper channel but when this is done a problem arises that results in a perpetual 'spinning of wheels.' If I, or anyone else, go through these proper channels, as people have already done many times, they receive a polite but brief rejection, explaining that the national federation takes its lead from the FEI and, therefore, they are unable to change their rules.

The 'proper channel' is no more than the particular channel that perhaps the founding fathers of the FEI first agreed. There is nothing sacred about these channels. If you wished to make an exception when the need arises, as it now does, you could. By so doing, you could avoid what should be a deep embarrassment to the FEI, when an advance in science has the effect of rendering its current rules cruel and rendering it no longer in compliance with its

own ten commandments. If the FEI refuses to permit a more humane method of communication, based on a faulty argument from tradition, they will be guilty of mandating cruelty and provide competitors with no option but cruelty. By insisting on the national federation route the FEI will be both prolonging and endorsing cruelty. I cannot think that such a standard is something you wish to defend in open debate.

Talking of which, the current concern over the FEI's endorsement of 'Rollkur' reminds me to point out that the practice of Rollkur is an additional reason for providing an alternative to the bit. Over-bending is an extreme example of abuse of the bit. The FEI Dressage and Veterinary Committee, in their report on the Rollkur workshop last year, indicated their wish to consider further evidence on this practice. I have responded with a 51 page document that I sent to Dr. Sluyter on 21 February 2006. I asked him to acknowledge its receipt but, in spite of a reminder, I still have had no confirmation of its delivery. For your information, I am attaching a copy of the monograph, as it is relevant to my proposal for a rule change. It has been published as a pdf document in the March issue of 'Horses For Life,' together with some editorial comment ([www.horsesforlife.com](http://www.horsesforlife.com)). It will, I understand, be published again in subsequent issues, together with introductory articles on selected aspects of the monograph. If your committee members are under the impression that they are defending the classical tradition by denying bitless dressage, may I point out that this faulty argument from tradition is anyway invalid. Classical dressage involved plenty of bitless work. There is nothing untraditional about such a proposal. The Duke of Newcastle, a pillar of classical dressage, advocated training with a cavesson and no bit. He was highly critical of the lorum's art and would, I feel confident, have loved the CBB.

It is immeasurably sad that, when a painless, safer and more effective method of rider/horse communication becomes available, an option that marks a watershed in equestrian history, the FEI – the appointed guardians of the horse - should not be the organization that takes the lead in introducing it as a permitted piece of equipment. Please give the matter some further thought. I urge this for the sake of the safety and welfare of the horse, the safety and welfare of the rider, and the reputation of the FEI.

Your insistence on each national federation making the rule change first before they, in turn, recommend the change to the FEI, reminds me of the famously ironic remark by Benjamin Disraeli..."I must follow the people. Am I not their leader?" Here is an opportunity for the FEI to show leadership. Instead of following the national federations, you could lead from the front. In my last email, I listed some of the advantages to the FEI of such an initiative, so I will not repeat them here. But I am encouraged by the article by Arndt Bronkhorst on your website ("Stepping up to Pole Position"). With the 'improved internal structure' of the FEI that was put in place on 1 January 2007, this is surely the ideal time for the FEI – to use Bronkhorst's own words again – to exhibit this new empowerment, vision, energy, passion and faith.

Michael, I see that further congratulations are now in order and that you are now confirmed in the saddle as the Secretary General of the FEI. I hope you

will enjoy the ride and steer the FEI with a firm but gentle hand. Forgive me for extending the metaphor and suggesting that the CBB would provide just the touch you need.

Kind regards,  
Bob

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**From:** Michael Stone  
**To:** 'Bob Cook'  
**Sent:** Friday, March 09, 2007 12:56 PM  
**Subject:** RE: Cross-under bitless bridle & rule change

Dear Bob,

The Dressage Committee were given your proposal as they are the only discipline within the FEI that has a restriction on the bridles in competition. Your or similar bridles bit less or otherwise are permitted so there is no necessity to seek a rule change.

As the technical committee does not wish to change the rules the only other option is through the NFs. The NFs do not need to change their rules just propose a change which would then be voted on by our General Assembly. If as you have indicated the NFs do not want to change the rules then there is no other avenue.

The FEI is effectively owned by our NFs and as such we can propose rule changes as well as practice changes but we cannot force them through against their will and to be blunt there is no robust scientific evidence to suggest that any other method of control is better for the horse. Your bridle is permitted in approximately 1300 of our 1600 events world wide, and I am sure if it becomes successful in Jumping, Endurance etc then the Dressage discipline may have another look.

Thanks and kind regards  
Michael

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**From:** Bob Cook [mailto:drcook@bitlessbridle.com]  
**Sent:** 12 March 2007 02:25  
**To:** Michael Stone  
**Cc:** The Bitless Bridle; EquestriansQuest@horsesforlife.com  
**Subject:** Re: Cross-under bitless bridle & rule change

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your slightly fuller response to my email correspondence. Your previous replies have been frustratingly brief and inadequate. However, your current response still falls far short of what is needed. To be blunt (your phrase), it is ambiguous, obscure and, in important respects, incorrect. I have inserted my comments in the attached annotated copy of your email. Please

consider these comments carefully and let me have a more rational response to the points I raise.

In the meantime, I would like to make the following additional comments. We have been corresponding now for two years. During this time, the evidence has become even more robust, yet no progress has been made.

1. On the basis of the evidence that is already available, the FEI could (and should) permit the CBB for Dressage, the dressage phase of Eventing, and Para-Equestrian.

2. If the Dressage Committee would like to obtain further support for this rule change, may I suggest a simple experiment? Let the FEI actively encourage (invite) Hors Concours performances at all levels. Now let the Dressage Committee take the total test scores for each competition and see how CBB performances compare with bitted performances. I am confident that such an experiment would provide mathematical evidence of the CBB being 'successful.'

3. It is inappropriate that, under Para-Equestrian rules, a disabled rider should be obliged to use a cruel and dangerous piece of equipment. Handicapped riders should not be riding handicapped horses.

4. As the FEI are trying to make equine sport accessible for both able bodied and disabled athletes (riders), I suggest they should also give consideration to the horse that is disabled by the bit. The current disciplines that are regulated by the FEI and for which a bit is mandatory could legitimately be reclassified under the umbrella heading of Para-Equus.

5. I appreciate that the rules for Show Hunters and for all the Pony Clubs around the world are not directly regulated by the FEI. Nevertheless, the FEI as the regulatory body for the major equine sports, is also regarded as the role model for all the others. Pony Clubs are influenced to scale their rules in such a way that the younger generation are suitably prepared to graduate into the senior horse world. Ponies, being intelligent small horses, are notoriously resistant to the bit. It is no longer necessary that young and inexperienced riders should have little option but to use a method of control that causes so many accidents and problems for the rider. The bit is a demanding instrument. It requires great discretion, strength of mind and balance of body to use it humanely. Many an adult rider, let alone a child, never achieves this skill, even after a lifetime of experience. The FEI is carrying a serious and even legal liability for continuing to endorse the bit as the standard and exclusive method of control for these children, when a better method is available.

6. Because the CBB has become available in the last eight years and because the related research and documentation of the change has exposed so much that was previously unknown about the bit, it is now abundantly apparent that the bit inflicts avoidable pain. As this is the definition of cruelty, the FEI leave themselves wide open to criticism and even legal action if they refuse to recognize this significant welfare advance and resist a rule change.

Michael, I regret having to write to you in this way. Mark it down as one of the 'privileges' of being Secretary General. As the leader of a large and powerful organization, you inevitably become the recipient of both kudos and criticism.



Kind regards,  
Bob

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*[I attached the file below in which I inserted my responses to each section of Michael Stone's email of 9th March 2007.]*

Dear Bob,

The Dressage Committee were given your proposal as they are the only discipline within the FEI that has a restriction on the bridles in competition.

\*Dressage is not the only discipline for which the CBB is not permitted.

Your or similar bridles bit less or otherwise are permitted so there is no necessity to seek a rule change.

\*I was puzzled by this sentence until I recognized that you were saying that the cross-under bitless bridle (CBB) and all other bitless bridles are permitted in all disciplines other than dressage. But this is factually incorrect. CBBs are not, for example, permitted for Eventing (competitors would be disqualified in the dressage phase), for Driving, or for Para-Equestrian. I have not been able to discover the FEI ruling on Reining or Vaulting and neither have I checked the FEI Pony test requirements. But I do note that the US Pony Club, for example, states that USEF Rules apply (therefore, FEI Rules) and from this it follows that the US Pony Club disallows the CBB.

As the technical committee...

\*Are you referring here to a Technical Sub-committee of the Dressage Committee?

...does not wish to change the rules

\*Obviously, the Dressage Committee could change the rules if they so wished. Yet you have given me no scientific or welfare reason for such resistance. The 'lack of control' argument is insupportable and, in view of the effectiveness of the communication and control provided by the CBB, irrelevant. As the stated objective of the FEI is that **"welfare must take precedence over all other demands"** and as the bit inflicts unavoidable pain and is, by definition, cruel, there should be no unwillingness to permit the CBB. If the resistance to advance is based on the incorrect belief that bitless dressage is not in accord with the classical tradition, please read my attached article, 'Tradition and the Status Quo, or Science and Advance' which was published in January 2007 in the

Veterinary Times, UK . Such a tradition-based stance anyway contravenes the precedence that should be given to welfare.

the only other option is through the NFs.

\*The FEI, in passing the buck to the NFs, are abrogating their leadership responsibility. Having declared their hand through the Dressage Committee, they are now expecting the NFs to recommend a proposal that has already been rejected by the FEI.

The NFs do not need to change their rules just propose a change which would then be voted on by our General Assembly.

\*Do you mean that any one NF would not itself have to change their own NF rule and that all they would need to do would be to recommend a change to the FEI?

If as you have indicated the NFs do not want to change the rules then there is no other avenue.

\*The FEI cites the NFs as a reason for not changing the rule and the NF's cite the FEI. Such a situation is bizarre. But the very fact that the Dressage Committee of the FEI 'does not wish' to change the rule tells me that they have the authority to do so if they wished. As they have the authority, they also have the responsibility, which brings me back to the need for accountability. It is apparent that the Dressage Committee is the body responsible for this logjam. As Secretary General, I urge you to use your authority to break this logjam.

Do you mean that every NF would have to agree to recommend an FEI rule change or that only one NF recommendation would be sufficient? Please clarify. Your next sentence appears to contradict what you imply about the apparent helplessness of the FEI.

The FEI is effectively owned by our NFs and as such we can propose rule changes as well as practice changes but we cannot force them through against their will

\*If the FEI were to propose a rule change to the NF's this would surely carry enormous weight and authority. When you write about the FEI being able to 'practice rule changes' are you referring to the FEI's ability to govern international competitions that are entirely under the aegis of the FEI and in which presumably no one NF has any authority?

...and to be blunt there is no robust scientific evidence to suggest that any other method of control is better for the horse.

\*Sorry Michael, but this is plain incorrect. There is already plenty of robust scientific evidence to refute your statement and more is on the way. The bit method of control and communication is not better than all alternatives.

Specifically, the bit method is not superior to the CBB, neither for the horse nor the rider. You have no grounds for dismissing the evidence I have marshaled in many articles and in my book "Metal in the Mouth; The Abusive Effects of Bitted Bridles." There is overwhelming and compelling evidence that the bit is potentially painful and is responsible for over a hundred negative side-effects. If you have read the evidence, I cannot understand how you could be so blunt. The kindest interpretation I can put on your statement is to assume you have not read the evidence. Have you, for example, read my book and have you read my monograph on 'Why Rollkur is Wrong'? Please give me direct answers to these and many other questions I have put to you in this and previous emails. Do you really mean to claim that the bit method is better for the horse, in spite of the evidence to the contrary? Or might you be of the opinion that the bit is better for the rider? In other words, could this be code for the unstated admission that the bit is 'better' because, without it, many riders would be unable to produce a semblance of collection, i.e., the false collection that, nevertheless, satisfies the current cadre of judges?

If, by use of the word 'robust' you are referring to the absence of double-blind randomized controlled trials, I must explain why this is a false expectation. Such trials are not and never will be available for the bit/bitless comparison any more than they are available for 99% of the current therapies in human medicine, let alone veterinary medicine. Consider for a moment the conditions that would be essential for such a bit/CBB trial. The protocol would be unable to overcome a source of error in such an experiment. In order to avoid bias, riders would have to be unaware of whether they were riding a horse with a bit or a CBB. The rider would have to be 'blind' (i.e., literally blindfolded), wear ear muffs and padded gloves.

On the other hand, robust scientific evidence is available by considering the fundamental principles of equine anatomy and physiology. The bit method of 'control' (I prefer the word 'communication') is incompatible with the physiology of exercise. Clearly, it is not 'better' for a horse to be in pain. It is not 'better' that a horse should be required to perform athletically with one or more foreign bodies in its mouth and a chain under its chin. A bitted horse is a handicapped horse. When a fly can communicate with a horse by landing on its face, why would a rider need to use a steel rod in its sensitive mouth? Bits do not control horses. Their painful signal is often the cause of a loss of control. In thankful contrast, the painless signal of the CBB has been shown to be effective, safer, and compatible with the horse's physiology.

An inability to mount randomized controlled trials is a familiar dilemma in the biological sciences. It is overcome in the only way possible by looking for the occurrence of what are referred to as 'natural experiments' i.e., situations which mimic as closely as possible the ideal experimental protocol. With regard to your hypothesis that bits are better than CBBs, these natural experiments have been carried out in abundance (c. 30,000 'experiments' in the USA and untold

numbers abroad) over the last eight years. Each time a horse is transitioned from a bit to a CBB it constitutes a natural experiment. The horse acts as its own control. These 'experiments' have been conducted on:

- every possible type, temperament and breed of horse, on every age of horse, on horses of all stages of training from 'green' to fully-schooled, and in just about every discipline.
- The variability of the human element of these natural experiments has been overcome by tests being conducted by riders of every age, skill, sex, and physical fitness. But it has always been the same rider that has reported on the bit and then the CBB performance. Furthermore, these riders have been thoroughly familiar with the behavior patterns of their horse in a bitted bridle (of every conceivable design), generally for many years, before the transition to the CBB. None of the riders have had any conflict of interest in reporting their results or any reason why they might be biased in favor of the test equipment (the CBB). In fact, bearing in mind the inherent skepticism of horsepersons regarding all new equipment (especially something as radically different and superficially scary as the CBB) quite the opposite bias might be anticipated.
- The weather element has been 'averaged-out' by natural experiments being conducted under varying conditions and over long periods of time to account for daily fluctuations. In general, the experiments have taken place, repeatedly, in the same arena, barn, paddock, trail ride and exercise gallop under every imaginable permutation of ambient temperature, wind conditions, and seasonal variation, from rain, snow and ice to summer heat, humidity and high pollen counts. The experiments have been conducted in a host of different countries around the world and in all seasons.
- In each natural experiment, the equipment used (bit or CBB) has been the only constant variable.
- The temporal factor has been a critical advantage, as horses have transitioned from the bit to the CBB...literally overnight. This has permitted a striking contrast to be documented between before-and-after behavioral profiles. Furthermore, in an interesting number of cases, the natural experiment has been reversed and a horse that has already transitioned once from bit to CBB has now been returned to a bitted bridle and its behavior reversal further documented.
- The natural experiments have been extensively documented. As the great majority of the experiments were conducted by owner/riders who had purchased the CBB under a 30-day money-back warranty, a rule of thumb assessment of experimental 'result' can be judged from the fact that returns have been less than 5%. To say that riders were 'satisfied' and the CBB 'successful' would be to hugely underestimate the enthusiasm, delight and gratitude with which this advance has been welcomed.
- Unsolicited reports that fill hundreds of pages are available online at [www.bitlessbridle.com](http://www.bitlessbridle.com) and at [www.bitlessbridle.uk.co](http://www.bitlessbridle.uk.co). Coming as they do from experienced 'lab animal attendants' (owner/riders), such reports cannot be dismissed as 'anecdotal.'
- A large series of natural experiments (c.75) have been documented with behavioral profile questionnaires completed before and after the transition.

Copies of the questionnaires could be read by the Dressage Committee if they wished.

- To overcome a sampling bias in the questionnaire evidence arising from the fact that the questionnaires did not come from a randomized sample of the population, a further series of natural experiments has recently been completed in Ireland. In this 'experiment' all 27 horses in one riding school were switched from bit to CBB. The experimental results have been documented with behavioral profile questionnaires and backed-up with video recordings of the before-and-after behavior. The results will be reported at a conference in May, 2007.

**Summary of Results:** Collectively, the questionnaires and testimonials disprove the null hypothesis that a bitted rein-aid causes fewer negative side-effects than a CBB rein-aid. In other words, horses can be communicated with ('controlled') better with a cross-under bitless bridle than with a bit.

Your bridle is permitted in approximately 1300 of our 1600 events world wide and I am sure if it becomes successful in Jumping, Endurance etc then the Dressage discipline may have another look.

\*The CBB is already 'successful' in jumping and endurance, not to mention a host of other disciplines including trail riding, barrel racing, reining, fox hunting, riding instruction and riding for the handicapped. How much more evidence of success is required? The only reason it is not successful in earning ribbons is because riders that use it are disqualified under current rules. The CBB is, even now, 'successful' in dressage when riders take part Hors Concours. The Dressage Committee need look no further.

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*I received the following final reply from Michael Stone on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2007*

Dear Bob,

Thank you for your email. I am afraid that you do not understand the FEI's role or the role of its NFs. The technical committees of the FEI decide on rules such as permitted bits. The Dressage committee is the technical committee responsible for bits in Dressage and their decisions are followed by all other Technical committees which have a Dressage component, so whilst you are correct in saying that the Eventing dressage test does not permit your or other bitless bridles the other phases are completely open. I probably did not express myself well.

The FEI is a democratic organisation owned by its member federations. Our statutes do not allow us the freedom to force rules on our members. They also do not permit us to interfere in other organizations such as pony club or hunter jumpers. This is not an abdication of responsibility rather a statement of fact.

I have indeed read your articles and I have circulated them to our Veterinary department and committee. The articles are in large part your personal opinion and observations and the opinions of users. When looking at Rollkur we had scientific information from the University of Utrecht which in collaboration with other universities have done research with clear scientific principles. Clearly it is possible.

Your continued implication that the FEI does not care about welfare and tolerates cruel methods is not only unfair but totally without foundation. The leading horse welfare organisation the International League for the Protection of Horses will verify this.

There is no longer any point in continuing this correspondence. I have indicated how you can proceed by having your bridle accepted in the majority of our disciplines and proving its worth in that way. Alternatively you can show some scientific evidence that the bit is damaging and that your system is not. Personal views or testimonies from non professionals will not convince anyone especially as you have a commercial interest in the product.

I have tried my best to give you and your bridle a fair chance, but as far as the FEI is concerned the matter is now closed.

Yours sincerely  
Michael

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*Though not expecting a reply, I sent Michael the following memorandum by way of response to his comments, to put my side of the story.*

**To:** Michael Stone, Secretary General, FEI

**From:** Robert Cook, Professor of Surgery Emeritus, Tufts University  
Chairman, The Bitless Bridle, Inc.,

**Subject: PROPOSAL FOR A RULE CHANGE TO PERMIT THE CROSS-UNDER BITLESS BRIDLE UNDER FEI RULES FOR DRESSAGE.**

**Date:** 19 March 2007

**MEMO:** I have inserted my responses to your email of 13 March 2007 in the body of your text. See the [blue](#) sections below.

Bob

*[Appendix, 24 March 2007: Michael Stone responded today to some of my [blue](#) comments, by inserting his in [red](#). I have added these in brackets but, to avoid making the exchanges too confusing, I have resisted the urge to add any further comments of my own. However, Michael has at last provided one additional piece of information that is important to note. He confirms that **the FEI Committees do indeed have the ability to propose rule changes to the national federations for their approval.** If only they were willing to make such a proposal with regard to the cross-under bitless bridle, the FEI could save the*

*horse much pain and everybody else a great deal of time. Such was my hope and purpose in contacting the FEI in the first instance.]*

Dear Bob,

Thank you for your email. I am afraid that you do not understand the FEI's role or the role of its NFs. The technical committees of the FEI decide on rules such as permitted bits. The Dressage committee is the technical committee responsible for bits in Dressage and their decisions are followed by all other Technical committees which have a Dressage component, so whilst you are correct in saying that the Eventing dressage test does not permit your or other bitless bridles the other phases are completely open. I probably did not express myself well.

Thank you for the partial clarification. I remain puzzled by the fact that you say above "The technical committees of the FEI decide on rules such as permitted bits" and yet in previous correspondence you maintain that the FEI has no power in this matter. Perhaps it is that the FEI sets international rules on bits but cannot impose these on the national federations (see below)?

[24 March 2007: The Committees propose rules and they are approved by the NFs]

The FEI is a democratic organisation owned by its member federations. Our statutes do not allow us the freedom to force rules on our members.

I understand that you cannot force rules on your NF members but you have failed to answer my question as to who determines the rules for international events. Unless you tell me to the contrary, I am left to assume that such rules are decided by the FEI. If the FEI decide international rules they will certainly influence, by so doing, all decisions made by the national federations. NFs will feel obliged to comply with these rules in order to avoid being out of step with the FEI on matters international. As the FEI set the international standard, it is surely not as powerless as you maintain. I would be surprised if you could not influence the NFs if you wished

[ 24 March 2007: See above]

Whether a certain bit is permitted or not permitted presumably depends on whether it is considered to be acceptable on welfare grounds, as – according to FEI objectives - *welfare takes precedence over all other factors*. The guiding principle must therefore be that those bits which provide for effective communication and which, at the same time, are considered to be least harmful to the horse will be the ones to be permitted. As the least harmful has to be no

bit at all I fail to understand why the demonstrably effective cross-under bitless bridle should not be permitted. 'Dressage' is simply another word for 'training.' A horse is trained much better by a method that causes no pain.

[24 March 2007: As I have said repeatedly you have not provided any substantive evidence that bits (are) harmful]

They also do not permit us to interfere in other organizations such as pony club or hunter jumpers. This is not an abdication of responsibility rather a statement of fact.

I was aware that the FEI do not control Pony Club or Hunter Jumper competitions and I made this clear in my email. The point I was making was the same point I referred to above, that you have more influence than you are admitting and, therefore, a responsibility that accompanies that power. Once again, FEI Rules are regarded by the rest of the horse world as a guide to standard usage and they influence the rules of other organizations. The Pony Club may not be forced to adopt FEI rules but they have to be aware of their need to prepare the young entry for their life as adults in the world of competition. If I asked the Pony Club to change their rules, they would quote the FEI rules as their reason for being unable to change.

[24 March 2007: No comment]

I have indeed read your articles and I have circulated them to our Veterinary department and committee.

I would be interested to know which articles you have read and which you passed on to which committee. It is apparent that you totally disagree with the evidence I present in my articles, yet you give me no scientific reasons for your lack of agreement.

The articles are in large part your personal opinion and observations...

They are my opinion based on years of study and supported by personal observations and reports by disinterested owners on the effects of removing the bit. I do not apologize for the fact that I am the first veterinarian to recognize that the bit is contraindicated, counterproductive and an impediment to horse and rider. By the nature of research, original observations have to be made by someone. Initially, that someone is often ridiculed and labeled a crank. But if the experimental evidence can be reproduced by others, which it can, the pioneer is vindicated.

In the case of the bit/bitless 'natural experiments' the evidence is being duplicated every day all over the world. I have made no secret of my conflict of interest over the last eight years. But it does not necessarily follow that



evidence, based on 49 years of research (and six years of experience as a practitioner prior to that) can therefore be discounted. The fact that the bridle's design has been found so effective that it is being copied and marketed in many countries other than the USA should give you pause before you imply that I am not only a crank but also a charlatan.

...and the opinions of users.

You seem to be dismissing this evidence as worthless. Yet in laboratory animal research it has long been recognized that observations made by animal attendants on their experimental subject's behavior, before and after a procedure, are of value. Horse owners and riders are acute observers of their animal's behavior and their testimony should not be dismissed.

When looking at Rollkur we had scientific information from the University of Utrecht which in collaboration with other universities have done research with clear scientific principles. Clearly it is possible.

By citing the radiographic examination of two horses by Dr. Emile Welling<sup>3</sup> as an example of 'clear scientific principles,' you betray a misunderstanding of scientific method and the nature of evidence. I can only assume that you have little familiarity with science and should therefore be excused for having previously labeled my own extensive evidence as not being scientifically robust.

[24 March 2007; The work was not just base(d) on Dr Welling]

In my paper, 'Why is Rollkur Wrong?' I pointed out that the small amount of evidence presented at the Rollkur Workshop was focused exclusively on the mid-neck. Yet this was not the only anatomical location where evidence of damage might be looked for and not the most likely. The scanty evidence you cite does not exonerate over-bending. The inability to discover radiological evidence of mid-neck damage in a sample of only two horses cannot be taken as an assurance that no mid-neck damage was being inflicted. Apart from this, it does not follow that because some investigation was done on the mid-neck region that a different investigation focused on the mouth is not also relevant. Obviously, methods of investigation have to be adjusted to the nature of the question being asked and are influenced by the anatomical location under investigation.

[24 March 2007: You obviously did not read the papers fully, part of the work showed how Rollkur actually helped the horse to relay its back, in any case Rollkur can be practiced with your bridle which makes me wonder about your experience of Dressage at this level]

Your continued implication that the FEI does not care about welfare and tolerates cruel methods is not only unfair but totally without foundation.

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<sup>3</sup> Member of the FEI Veterinary Committee

I have clearly described how the availability of an improved method of communication, the cross-under bitless bridle, renders it necessary to reclassify the bit method of control as cruel. The accepted definition of cruelty demands such a reclassification. Let me repeat... "*Cruelty is the infliction of avoidable pain.*" As the pain of a bit is now avoidable it is, by definition, cruel. There is no getting away from this and, frankly, your opinion on the matter is incorrect. If the FEI show an unwillingness to acknowledge a major welfare advance, they are showing that they do not care about welfare. Furthermore, they are no longer in compliance with their own stated objectives on welfare. My conclusion on the matter is not an implication; it is a statement of fact, both fair and well founded.

The leading horse welfare organisation the International League for the Protection of Horses<sup>4</sup> will verify this.

The ILPH have not, to my knowledge, considered the evidence I have published on bits. Neither any veterinarian on their staff nor, for that matter, any other veterinarian has produced evidence to refute my publications on this topic in the last eight years.

There is no longer any point in continuing this correspondence.

Thousands of horse owners would strongly disagree with you on this point. You, personally, may find it a bother to answer the questions I pose and consider the arguments for change, but there are ample reasons for so doing. The Dressage Committee of the FEI obviously refuses to add a bitless option to their rule on bits but, "*if the welfare of the horse takes precedence over all other matters*" in deciding on rules, I don't see how they can justify such a decision. Not only is the UK law on cruelty in favor of such an option but so also are the FEI's own guidelines.

I have indicated how you can proceed by having your bridle accepted in the majority of our disciplines and proving its worth in that way.

The cross-under bitless bridle has already proved its worth. The further passage of time will continue to support the proof. More significantly, in eight years of trials and in just about every discipline including dressage, no evidence disproves the merit of the bridle.

Alternatively you can show some scientific evidence that the bit is damaging and that your system is not.

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<sup>4</sup> The FEI Welfare Sub-Committee has seven members, including its Secretary. Out of this seven, three (43%) are representatives of the International League for the Protection of Horses, including its Secretary. As of this date (22 March 2007) the Welfare Sub-Committee has not yet received the promised report on Rollkur from the FEI Dressage Committee, following the 2006 Workshop. Neither will they have studied the 51 page monograph "Why is Rollkur Wrong?" that I sent to the Chairman of the FEI Veterinary Committee in February 2007.

I have already published ample scientific evidence on the damage caused by the bit. Similarly, I have explained at length why the cross-under bitless bridle is not in any way damaging. On the contrary, it solves 100 bit-induced problems and prevents or cured 40 different diseases caused by the bit.

Personal views or testimonies from non-professionals will not convince anyone

I have already addressed this point above. The personal testimonies of riders are convincing other riders in large numbers, so it is incorrect to say that they are not convincing 'anyone.' Sadly, it is true that the scientific evidence and testimonies are not convincing anyone at the FEI.

especially as you have a commercial interest in the product.

If a veterinarian's life-time research results in the development of a product that enhances the welfare of the horse, this is surely something to be welcomed rather than greeted with suspicion. Perhaps it would help if you thought of the bridle as a 'therapy' being sold by a veterinarian for the treatment of equine disease. At less than a \$100 for a lifetime treatment, it is one of the least expensive of veterinary bills and this does not take into account the 'added value' of increased safety and a host of horsemanship solutions. Many an owner has 'saved' her horse by removing the bit. Many an owner has said that the CBB was the best investment that they had ever made in their horse.

I have tried my best to give you and your bridle a fair chance...

An increasingly determined group of riders would disagree with you on this point. For myself, I have to say that your response has been inadequate and unacceptable. For the first nine months you more or less ignored my gift of a leather bridle and I had to repeatedly ask you for some feedback. When it finally came, your report of the trial was only sketchy and you were economic with your comments. More recently, you have become a little more engaged in the debate but now, after just a couple of exchanges, you disengage entirely. My perception is that I have graduated in this correspondence from being studiously ignored to being summarily dismissed. I do not agree that my proposal has been given a proper hearing. If this is the best you can do to give the horse a fair chance I am deeply disappointed in the FEI.

...but as far as the FEI is concerned the matter is now closed.

All I can say to that is...pity the poor horse.

[24 March 2007: Again your opinion I will not respond further]