

From: Robert Cook, FRCVS, PhD<sup>1</sup>

To: Members of the Veterinary Committee of the Horse Racing Authority

Date: 1 January 2008

Subject: REPORT ON A SIX-MONTH TRIAL OF THE CROSSOVER BITLESS BRIDLE (CBB) BY TRAINERS IN THE UK

I am aware that the HRA has asked participating trainers to complete a questionnaire about their experience but the following emails and transcripts of telephone conversations will provide some additional evidence for members of the Veterinary Committee to consider.

Nine trainers volunteered to participate in the trial and I have received feedback from them all. The trainers' comments are listed below in alphabetical order with a tenth contribution from someone who schools young Thoroughbreds. For ease of review, the start of a positive comment is highlighted in red and the start of a negative comment in blue. My own introductions and interspersed comments are in green.

I would like the evidence in this memo to be considered in conjunction with the documents I submitted to the committee in June 2005. I declare a conflict of interest up front (see footnote) but wish to add that in submitting this report I am wearing my veterinarian's hat and not my chairman's. I am doing this to improve the welfare of the horse and the safety of the jockey and not in the hope of personal gain. The racehorse population represents only a small percentage of the total horse population of the world. From a financial point of view it makes no sense for me to invest time and energy in the project. On the other hand, I have been interested in the welfare of the Thoroughbred for over 50 years and would like to see it benefit from this indisputable welfare advance.

The Veterinary Committee is especially committed to its role as guardians of the horse and the welfare of both horse and jockey. With this in mind, I am attaching to this report, a brief account of the benefits of the crossover bitless bridle (CBB) as these are applicable to these very issues. The article relates to principles that are relevant to horses and riders in all disciplines, including racing, and focuses specifically on welfare, safety and performance.

The Rules of Racing state, "*The HRA (and the Stewards) has the authority to prohibit any equipment for use on a horse in a race which, in their opinion, is unsuitable, unsafe, or ineffective.*" I do not aspire to persuading the committee to recommend prohibition of the bit on the grounds that the bit is unsuitable, unsafe and ineffective, though a rational review of the evidence would support such a decision. But I would like the committee

---

<sup>1</sup> Professor of Surgery Emeritus, Tufts University, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Massachusetts, USA.  
Chairman, BitlessBridle Inc

to consider recommending to the HRA that a more humane and safer alternative be permitted alongside the bit.

An unsuitable piece of equipment in the opinion of the Stewards would, I imagine, include any equipment that has been shown to cause fear and pain and, like a mischievous medication, to be responsible for over a hundred side-effects, some of them fatal to horse and rider. The bit is such a device. A list of its harmful side-effects is available online at [www.bitlessbridle.com/FOTB-Q.xls](http://www.bitlessbridle.com/FOTB-Q.xls) This is not the place to describe all the side-effects but it will suffice to say that, some of particular relevance to racing include the bit as the prime cause of soft palate elevation and displacement, a significant source of upper airway obstruction and a major cause of asphyxia-induced pulmonary edema. In all disciplines, including racing, the bit is a common cause of bone spur formation on the bars of the mouth and premolar erosion. I have published the back-up evidence for these statements and would be glad to provide the committee with copies of the various articles if they so wished. Most of them are available online at [www.bitlessbridle.com](http://www.bitlessbridle.com) . The CBB, in marked contrast, is virtually incapable of causing pain, does not frighten a horse and has no side effects.

Similarly, an unsafe piece of equipment is presumably one in which the risk of accident and injury to horse and rider is unnecessarily high. Evidence from the above paragraph indicates that, once again, the bit is such a device and that the CBB reduces the risk of accidents.

An effective piece of equipment is, I take it, one that enables a horseman to carry out justifiable and necessary manipulations or maneuvers in the course of equitation. In regard to the bit, 'manipulation' is the appropriate word. We are talking of 'hands' and from this we are reminded that the word 'surgery' is derived from a Greek root meaning 'a working with the hands.' The bit is a surgical instrument placed in a sensitive body cavity which, when attached to a long strap, enables a rider to send hand signals to the head of his horse. To borrow another word from the diagnostic lexicon of medicine, the bit has to be classified as an invasive method of communication, as a body cavity is entered. As it happens, the body cavity transgressed is one of the most sensitive. The metal bit is an invention of the Bronze Age and the principle of the method has not changed, i.e., cause pain to signal a command and stop causing pain when the command is carried out. The method is known by the euphemism, negative reinforcement. Let's put aside, for the moment, the question of whether this is a humane method and simply ask ourselves the question, is it an effective method? Does it enable a rider to communicate successfully? My own answer to this question is an emphatic NO. There is the ever present danger of a horse responding to a painful signal in some manner other than the one intended. Serious and even fatal misunderstandings can occur. Horses are programmed by their evolution to respond to pain with flight, fight and freeze responses. Perhaps the flight response is one that racing unconsciously takes advantage of but the other two are certainly contraindicated. I have heard racing described as 'a controlled bolt.' But apart from the questionable wisdom of using pain as a signaling method, there is the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of using a method that

is so easily misunderstood and which carries with it the burden of so many counter-productive side effects. The bit is incompatible with the physiology of exercise.

I can hear readers protesting at these arguments, saying, “But there has never been an acceptable alternative up to now. Even the traditional bitless bridles are pain-based and they are not ‘suitable’ for racing either.” And I agree and have to confess that in my riding days I must have inflicted pain on every horse I rode. Thanks to the forgiving nature of the horse, I survived and so did the horses. I have only discovered the iniquity of the bit in the last ten years. As someone who has spent over 50 years thinking about the head of the horse, I kick myself for not having tumbled to the truth decades ago. But like everyone else, I was blind-sided by tradition. A bit has been part of a bridle for so long that we have all grown up to accept it without question.

Thanks to the many thousands of ‘natural experiments’ carried out all over the world in the last eight years, in which riders have successfully transitioned their horse overnight from bit to bitless using a painless rein-aid (the CBB), we have learned something of great value to equitation. All that we need for a hand signal to the head is to stimulate the sense of touch. A signal that stimulates pain receptors is ‘over-kill.’ It is not only unnecessary but it is also unsuitable, unsafe and ineffective. This should not surprise us as we have known all our lives that a horse can feel a fly landing on its face. And, apart from when spurs are used over-enthusiastically, our ‘seat’ and ‘leg’ signals have always relied on touch rather than pain.

The development of an acceptable rein-aid that is painless means that the bit has to be re-classified. The working definition of cruelty is “the infliction of avoidable pain or suffering.’ As bit pain is now avoidable, the continued use of a bit under these changed circumstances could be construed as an act of cruelty. After five thousand years of usage, it will take a little time for this message to be absorbed. But as *“no issue has a higher priority for the HRA/Jockey Club than horse welfare”* I am hopeful that this second submission of evidence about bits and bitlessness will be sympathetically received.

---

ANDREW BALDING, Kingsclere Stables

20 December 2007

Dear Bob,

We have only tried the bitless bridle on a two year old filly and colt, both of whom had sore mouths. They were only ridden in straight lines and they appeared to work well until they rubbed both horses under the chin, when we had to stop using them.

We felt they were better to use than a Hackamore, but would only use them on horses ridden by good riders, if we could get over the problem of them rubbing.

We would not consider using a bitless bridle when racing and cannot imagine jockeys being too keen on the idea.

Hope this is of some help.

Yours,

Andrew Balding

*[My reply, the same day:]*

Dear Andrew,

Many thanks for your comments.

The rubbing problem that you encountered can very easily be avoided. Almost certainly, the reason why the chins got rubbed was because the chin strap was not sufficiently snug. When it is too slack, the noseband slides up and down the horse's face too much with changing rein tensions and hair loss can occur. The chin strap should be snug but not tight. You should be able to get just one FLAT finger between the bone of the jaw and the strap.

With this explanation, perhaps you might be willing to give the bridle a further trial? I am sure you would agree that a little hair loss under the chin is not as serious a problem as so many of the problems that can be caused by the bit. And as the hair loss problem is readily corrected, this is not really a reason for not using the bridle.

Rider confidence is something that grows with use. I well understand your decision to only allow good riders to try the bridle, but as this is a bridle that prevents a rider from getting into trouble (it is wonderful for novices and children) it has a great deal to offer riders of all stripes.

Yes, your comments are most helpful. It is only by getting such feedback that I am able to guide users more effectively. I am most grateful.

Kind regards,

Bob

---

KIM BAILEY, Andoversford

*[Kim has been using the bridle for training purposes since 1999, as and when he perceived the need arose with any particular horse. Below is an email he sent me after his early experience with the bridle in December 1999 ]*

We have had the bridle a week only and have already tried it on several horses. I am thrilled with the results we are getting and everyone in the stable is pleased and most

interested in all the literature that came with the bridle. One horse was throwing its head about with a bit in its mouth and is now much happier.

- Kim Bailey,
- Daventry, Northants.

*[In a more recent email, on 6 December 2007, Kim wrote:]*

I am not using your bridle at the moment, as I do not have a horse that needs one. I have left a message for Anthony Stirk to ring me although I would expect it to be easier to see him on the course as he is a very busy man.

---

JOHN BERRY Beverley House stables, NEWMARKET

*[John Installed this comment on his blog in December 2007]*

I rode Extreme Conviction in the bitless bridle, which I am using on him as an experiment on behalf of the manufacturers of this good innovation and which seems a very effective way of controlling a horse. Hugh rode Lady Suffragette who is none the worse for her non-achieving outing at Bangor last week. So that was relay nice: three happy horses and three happy riders, despite the rain that was falling at the time.”

*[From a telephone conversation on 4 December 2007 I made the following notes of John’s comments:]*

My first impression has been good but I have only used it on one horse so far. I wanted to start using the BitlessBridle on a quiet horse. Its effect was brilliant. I could do anything with the horse on this evidence. It was wonderful. I will now try it on another horse, e.g. LADY SUFFRAGETTE a four-year-old and another ‘straightforward’ horse

*[ Users will actually see more dramatic changes for the better if they use the bridle on horses that, in a bitted bridle, have a reputation for being “difficult.”]*

---

ROGER CHARLTON, Beckhampton

Subject: Bitless Training Trial

Date: Monday, December 31, 2007 4:07 AM

Dear Dr Cook

Many thanks for your e mail, Mr. Charlton is away on holiday until the 7th January but I have spoken to him this morning. He has asked me to forward his thoughts. He is very

satisfied with the Bitless Bridle we have been using and would be confident in both using it for working horses and on the racecourse.

I hope these comments will suffice.

With kind regards,

Michele Grantham

Secretary to Roger Charlton

---

HENRY DALY, Ludlow

*[Henry gave me the following comments during a telephone conversation on 29 December 2007:]*

Since I received the bridle six months ago I have used the bridle every day on four or five different types of horses. Collectively, I have used it quite a lot. It works perfectly well and I would expect people to use it. When jumping at speed, no difference was noticed between this bridle and a bitted bridle, probably because jockeys use very little contact during a jump.

Basically, it works fine. It has lots of advantages but also some disadvantages.

*The actual or anticipated disadvantages he described are listed below:*

- *He felt that overall, the bridle provided less control than a bitted bridle [This is contrary to received opinion from riders in other disciplines]*
- *He would be concerned that, in the absence of a starting gate, lack of control at the start of a National Hunt race might be a problem*
- *Less control reported during transitions from walk to trot, trot to canter etc. [This also is contrary to the general opinion of riders in other disciplines]*
- *The need to be careful about which horse it was used on and with which rider. For example, he would not use it on known runaways [In my experience, the bit is one of the most common causes of a horse bolting. The bridle has been found to be the sovereign answer to this problem in many horses]*
- *A consequence of using a non-standard method might be an increased risk of litigation should an accident occur [I agree with this concern but would wish to balance it with the fact that accidents are less likely to occur when the bit, which is a major and potent cause of accidents, is removed. Over the last eight years, the bridle has been used on thousands of horses, in just about every discipline other than Thoroughbred racing, by riders of all skills and experience from very young children to riders with 30 or more years of experience. Accident reports are noticeable for their relative infrequency and none of them have been attributed to the bitless bridle. No litigation has been filed]*

- *If the bridle was permitted for racing, it might be necessary to declare this as an equipment change*
- *Though he has not used it for what he referred to as ‘breaking-in,’ he would not recommend the bridle for this purpose [Horsemen who regularly school youngsters express a strong preference for the bridle, as horses that are not experiencing oral pain remain calmer and learn faster]*

---

SIMON EARLE Equine Health Centre, Sutton Veny, Wiltshire

*[Simon started using the BitlessBridle in 2005 when he was training with Eamonn Wilmott and has continued to use it at his new location. I spoke to him by phone on 14 December 2007 and he gave me the following comments:]*

I rode PLAY IT AGAIN in the BitlessBridle in a schooling (bumper) race, not under rules, and on the flat at Cheltenham IN 2005. He made all the running and won. In the BitlessBridle the horse was fantastic and wonderful. [For full story see appendix below] I was hoping to use it (on the same horse) in a race under rules but it was disallowed by the stewards and, three days before the race, I had to replace the bit. When I did this after the horse had already made an adjustment to the BitlessBridle (BB), the horse felt ‘odd.’ With the increased head bob that the horse had developed in the BB I felt that I was jabbing the horse in the mouth at every stride [With all due respect, this is an operator error not a weakness on the part of the bridle]. With the BB, the horse had learned to use his neck more (a ‘good thing’) and now with the BB ‘felt awkward.’

I used the BB myself on about six other horses for training purposes then stopped. I felt that for racing the BB would not give enough control ... that the BB is not quite right yet for racing. In a bit many horses hang to the left or right but in the BB these same horses hung harder and were difficult to keep straight. Yet I am still basically ‘pro’ the BB.

*[The feedback I get from riders in general on this point is quite the opposite. The BB is found to be particularly helpful in improving steering and horses that lug to one side in a bit are generally vastly improved in the BB]*

We did have one nasty accident *[This was not with the BitlessBridle but with some copy they had been lent by a saddler]*. I had already ridden one horse satisfactorily in the BB and the next day allowed someone else to ride the same horse. This was probably the wrong rider. She was a light girl and the horse ran away. The girl fell and incurred a fractured rib. *[Regrettable though this incident is I have to interject here to point out that bitted horses become runaways on a daily basis on racetracks in the USA. It is my experience that a horse is far less likely to bolt, buck or rear (and exhibit a hundred or more additional items of negative behaviour) in the BB than in a bitted bridle. Many accidents are caused by the bit.]*

I found that the BB was a useful diagnostic tool. For example, a horse that would not hang at all with the bit, might hang with the BB. This alerted me to discover the hidden problem and treat it. I think the BB is a wonderful (diagnostic) tool. *[Simon seems to concede here that the BB was not the cause of a horse hanging, as it appeared in his previous comment]*

I would not now use the BB for training because of the problem of having to re-introduce the bit for racing.

*[Footnote: A videotape of bitless training was made by Simon and Eamonn. I have not seen a copy as it was not compatible with US systems but perhaps the members of the Veterinary Committee would like to see it. I will ask Eamonn if a further copy could be sent to the committee before January 23 2008, though a copy was sent to them in 2005 and may still be available]*

#### Appendix: 'CHUMLEY,' A DAY IN THE LIFE by Eamonn Wilmott (2005)

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. To be honest, the last thing we needed at the time was more horses. But we weren't going to let the poor fellow be shot at four years old. 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 excluded 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 see what he could be. Simon has always believed in him and "Chums" is the most popular horse with the grooms. Yesterday, at Cheltenham in a schooling race, he was up against horses from big yards that would have cost literally hundreds of times what we paid for him. He was raced without shoes and without a bit. 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).

---

RICHARD GUEST, Co. Durham

*[Anthony Stirk gave me the first comment about Richard Guest's observations on the bridle, in an email on 26 June 2007:]*



Very enthusiastic, has used them every day, cantering, working, schooling over hurdles and fences, most horses go much better in them than normal bridle, occasional ones a bit harder to pull up, generally make less 'noises.' As I said in my last email he is a very accomplished horseman, and that might be a factor.

*[Richard was not available when I first gave him a ring but an assistant confirmed that he used the bridle daily, that he was 'a fan,' and would be happy to chat.*

*I made the following transcript from notes made during a telephone conversation with Richard on 23 July 2007:]*

I use it every day, on two-year-old chasers, hurdlers, everything. It's fine. There isn't much difference to riding with a bit but some horses seem to enjoy it and therefore go better. One horse (in a bitted bridle) was a gurgler after a canter and is now so much sweeter and doesn't gurgle. The horse had been 'scoped endlessly and nothing had been found.

I was first encouraged to try the bitless bridle by an herbalist, Liz Whitaker. She had said, "No horse likes a bit in its mouth." And I believe her. I had previously used rope halters, so I was half convinced anyway. 'Bloody hell' I said to myself, "...this'll work.' I have had no problems at all with it. I often go straight out with it. Sometimes I walk around the indoor school to get them settled then off you go.

Over the last six weeks I have used it on 30 horses. I use it as a rule (i.e., routinely) on every horse. I ride out four lots a day, eight horses every morning. I have two beta bridles and I love 'em.

My head lad is a brilliant horseman but refuses to use the bridle. When I ask him, "Why not?" he says, "What's the point if you cannot use it in a race." *[This is incorrect. There are plenty of good reasons why use of the BB, even though just for training, is still a benefit, as many of the advantages carry over on race day. I have listed these in a previous submission]*

One horse, Bally Boy, is a revelation in it. This is the horse that gurgled in a bit. Now the horse 'takes it all the way.' In a bit he was a miserable horse. At any challenge from another horse he would drop the bridle and give up. Now he is a happy little horse, so much sweeter. I cannot believe the difference it has made. He ran last night in a rubber bit and ran as sweet as a nut, finishing third. He got 'taken on' but this time he fought them off and he stayed 'back on.'

I race all my horses in a rubber bit ('Happy Mouth'). But if allowed, there is no horse that I would not race in the bitless bridle.

Richard added that he was a 'horse friendly' rider. "I do what's right for the horse.' He doubted that I would get such a glowing report from others.

MARK JOHNSTON Kingsley House, LEYBURN Yorkshire

*[I made the following transcript from notes taken during a telephone conversation on 4 December 2007:]*

I was about to contact you about the trial and feel rather guilty that I have not been in touch. This has not been a systematic or scientific trial but this was not really possible anyway.

I have used the bridle on half a dozen horses, some with sore mouths and others that, with a bit in their mouth, were 'difficult.' It has been used, for example, on 'pullers' with success. The amount of feedback has been limited but very positive. No problems with the bridle's use have been reported.

This year we have used the bridle during routine cantering work but not with horses galloping alongside each other. I have no reason to think that the bridle would not be fine for faster work. When training progresses next summer we will get more use out of the bridles and in faster work.

The only problem has been that we cannot use the bridle in conjunction with a running martingale. We would be afraid that the martingale ring might get caught-up on the ring to which the rein attaches. A 'stop' on the rein would not help, as the martingale would be unable to slide far enough forward.

*[I responded to this by saying that if the BB is used there is really no need for a martingale as without a bit in their mouths, horses do not throw their heads in the air. Mark pointed out that martingales are still needed for another purpose. As he said, "Martingales are helpful for bad riders who throw their hands in the air." I did not offer this solution at the time but, on reflection, a minor change in the design of the BB would enable a running martingale to be used without hindrance. The reins could be attached to the headstall at a point beyond the 'O' ring on the noseband, i.e. at some point alongside the horse's cheek. This would leave the rein unencumbered and the martingale could slide as far forward as necessary.]*

I have used hackamores in the past and realize that harsher bits are not the answer so, in regard to the BB, you are preaching to the converted.

Anthony Stirk is visiting next Thursday on a different matter. I will try to give him a demonstration of bitless training.

---

MARTIN PIPE CBE, Somerset

*[An email from Martin on 13 December 2007]*

I used the bridle (I believe it was called the Spirit Bridle) in several races where horses were placed and on a winner, Fabulon, who was ridden by Tony McCoy, at Newton Abbott on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1999. The jockey said that the horse did not mind the bridle and he was happy with the way he performed.

The horses accepted the bridle well and the jockeys were happy to ride in it. I have used it a lot at home to get horses to relax and settle and of course it helps with horses that used to get their tongue over the bit or play with the bit, as this cannot now happen.

I found all your comments and evidence very interesting and your articles very good.

Best wishes and keep in touch.

*[An earlier email from Martin on 31 August 1999]*

I am delighted to let you know that the bridle which you supplied us in May was yesterday carried to victory in a race at Newton Abbot under champion jockey Tony McCoy. The horse, Fabulon, was a record equalling 2,644th jumping winner for the stable, and we believe that this is the first time that your bridle has been used to win in this country.

The Racing Post says:

After Tony McCoy had brought Fabulon home a comfortable nine-length winner from Divine Chance, Pipe said with some pride: "You won't see another bridle like that anywhere in the country. It's American and there isn't a bit. It was recommended to me by Geoff Lane<sup>2</sup> at Bristol Veterinary Hospital to help the horse's breathing."

McCoy added: "It gives the horse confidence. When you go after him, there's nothing for him to pull on, so he thinks he's running away."

I hope that this is of interest to you.

Best regards

---

MAXINE STIRK Fountains Farm, Aldfield, RIPON, North Yorkshire

*[Maxine is not a trainer but she schools young, green Thoroughbreds and I have included my correspondence with her for this very reason. My responses to some of her questions may be helpful to members of the committee. It was Maxine's courage and willingness to give the bridle a trial in the first instance that triggered this whole project.]*

---

<sup>2</sup> Senior Lecturer, Department of Clinical Veterinary Science, School of Veterinary Science, University of Bristol, UK

*Our correspondence can be most readily followed if I present it backwards. To start, here is an email I wrote to Maxine on 5 August 2007:]*

Thank you for your comments about the bridle. They were not a bit 'amateurish' and just the feedback that I need. Naturally, I always enjoy the positive feedback but it is even more important to hear the negative comments. Skepticism is a healthy and necessary response to new ideas. But it should be backed by knowledge, preferably of both the theory and practice of a topic. My experience is that a skeptic of the new bridle is often someone who has neither studied the literature nor tried the bridle. An appropriate response to such skepticism is to ask, "Have you used the bridle?" and "Have you read the research?" Reservations born of ignorance can be explained if the skeptic is willing to listen. I have found at trade shows that I can 'turn around' even the most hard-nosed skeptic with a two minute explanation of how the bridle works (see attached sheet).

For my own benefit, rather than yours, I have inserted some responses to your comments below. They may be of some help to you when you try to introduce the bridle to additional newcomers. I will be glad to send you a bridle that you can loan out for this purpose.

I am most grateful to you for having 'broken the ice.' Without your initial courage and confidence, I doubt whether we would have succeeded in getting a trainer trial launched. The fact that you 'only' work with young, green horses is even more impressive.

Now see the inserts in your email ... look out for the asterisks! I hope these help.

*[Maxine's initial email of 2 August 2007 now follows, with my responses inserted in italics.]*

I am glad the bridles are beginning to get a hold with trainers

*A sense of competition seems to be developing already. John Berry tells me that Mark Johnston is now keen to give it a trial. I shall be happy to add him to the team.*

I really do like them but struggle with skeptical staff. We only have young, green horses and some of the staff are more receptive than others.

*I find that horses take to the bridle more or less immediately, whereas humans take a few minutes longer. Nevertheless, if you scan our Users' comments on the website, you will see that even riders only need one ride to be convinced. Many sit down on the evening of day one and write us the most wonderful, unsolicited testimonials.*

*If you ever encounter a horse that fails to respond, please let me know, as this is rare and when it does occur there is generally something that can be done to overcome the problem.*

Interestingly, the one horse with a very soft receptive mouth and naturally good outline in work was the one that was odd. He was fine until we pulled up and then he had a tendency to shoot away in a panicky way. I THINK it was because he felt the bridle still tight around the nose and/or poll.

*The bridle does 'release' ... even after the heaviest pull on the reins. You can check this for yourself when standing by the head by placing your fingers under the bridle straps when rein tension is applied (see also the attached files on this topic). The BB places very little pressure at the poll. The greatest pressure, trivial though it is, occurs across the bridge of the nose, with less under the chin and across the cheek, and least at the poll. When 'pulling-up,' in addition to using signals from 'seat' and 'legs,' the trick is to use a hand signal with firm, intermittent pressure rather than continuous, escalating pressure. As an alternative, you can also 'saw' the reins and, unlike when using a bit, you can do this with without any danger of hurting the horse. In an emergency, a one-rein stop is also an option.*

*A young horse will be shedding teeth. Attention to loose 'caps' and sharp enamel edges on the cheek teeth are two of the dental checks that are still necessary, even with the BB. As the noseband has to be snug (not tight) if a young horse has dental sensitivity from either of the above problems, this might account for the reaction you describe. Such a reaction might also occur if the noseband is snug enough but is placed too high on the horse's head. The noseband of the BB must be placed lower than people are accustomed to place it with a bitted bridle (see the manual). If it is placed at the traditional position, the rider will also have to work too hard to give the stop signal.*

And we had another who was hacking one day when something startled him and he shot forward. The rider (not me) rather grabbed at him and that had the same effect. He bolted up the road and seemed to panic. And yet, cantering normally on the gallop he was fine.

*The BB does not frighten a horse like the bit does, so a bitless horse is calmer and less likely to spook in the first instance. However, the BB will not eliminate all spooking. But the good thing is that when a horse does spook and the rider 'grabs at the reins' this does not hurt the horse as it would do with a bitted bridle. The result is that the horse does not experience a sudden sharp pain that confirms his impression that the paper 'monster' (or whatever it was that caused the initial spook) was indeed something to be really scared of and to be remembered for another occasion. So BB horses generally recover from a spook much more quickly and without the spook escalating into a full-blown bolt. In the case you describe, ask yourself what might have happened if the rider had been using a bit. My feeling is that the panic, such as it was, would have been far worse.*

A filly with a very 'light' mouth, who didn't like a strong contact, went very sweetly in the BB.

Richard Guest is a VERY good jockey and I would be a bit concerned that on some horses with less competent riders there could be a loss of control.

*Bits do not control horses. The belief that they do is one of the most persistent myths of horsemanship. A rider, especially an inexperienced one, is far less likely to 'lose control' in the BB than with a bitted bridle. The BB prevents a novice rider from inflicting pain and so saves him from himself. Bits do not stop horses. On the contrary, bits are the most common cause of complete loss of control. Horses have been bolting, bucking and rearing their way through history and most of them have been wearing bits! Horses defend themselves from the pain of the bit in a number of different ways. They can grab the bit between their teeth, place it under their tongue or buffer it against the front edge of the first lower cheek teeth. All of these 'evasions' result in complete loss of control, and bit-induced bolting, bucking and rearing are other sources of loss of control. With the BB, a rider does not have the means to inadvertently trigger a crisis and yet can never be deprived of an effective means of communication.*

Good luck with them, they are a really good product and I hope you don't mind my amateur comments on them!

---

*[Postscript: Richard Lee Racing, UK purchased a BB for MARKED MAN with a tender mouth (June 2008)]*