

From: Dr. Robert Cook FRCVS
To: The Jockey Club Veterinary Committee
Subject: **RATIONALE FOR ALLOWING THE CROSSOVER BITLESS BRIDLE FOR RACING.**
DATE: 14TH June 2005

The crossover bitless bridle is the first advance in the technology of communication between rider and horse for 6000 years. The bit method of communication was introduced more or less concurrently with the domestication of the horse. Evidence I have gathered in the last 9 years to supplement information that I have published since 1962 indicates that use of the bit was an historic error. It is an error long overdue for correction. In the 21st century we are still using technology developed in 4000 BC. The mechanism of action of the bit is the same today as it was at the dawn of history. Modern bits are essentially no different from those depicted on chariot horses in Egypt at the time of the Pharaohs. The only difference is that the number of bits worn has sometimes doubled. These days, a racehorse is often encumbered with a snaffle and a ring bit. Supplementary devices have also been introduced, such as tongue-ties, dropped nosebands, Flair strips etc., in a doomed attempt to overcome some of the 120 problems caused by the bit in the first instance. I conclude that the bit is always superfluous and often dangerous. It does not control the horse. On the contrary it frequently causes loss of control. Bits frighten horses and cause them pain. Apart from the negative welfare and humanitarian effects of the bit, simply from the jockey's point of view it is not a good idea to frighten an animal as large and powerful as a horse. Bits are a frequent source of accidents to both horse and rider, some of them fatal.

The crossover bitless bridle (CBB) was first introduced to horsemen in 1998. Since that it has been enthusiastically adopted by horsemen of all ages and experience, in just about every discipline. There are no equitation or veterinary medical reasons for not using the CBB and compelling physiological reasons for doing so. The only limitation on its use is an administrative one. Though the CBB is permitted for the cross-country and show jumping phases of eventing, it is not, for example, permitted for dressage under FEI auspices. The situation with regard to racing is anomalous. If there are written rules for racing in the USA and the UK I have not seen them. In the UK, Martin Pipe was the first to use the CBB some years ago. His horse won by 9 lengths, ridden by the champion steeplechase jockey, Tony McCoy. So though the CBB may not be widely recognized in the UK, there may not actually be any official ruling to prevent its use. Curiously, the CBB is banned or anomalous at both ends of the speed spectrum, for the slow speed of dressage and for the high speed of racing. I respectfully submit that there is no logical foundation for such irregularity.

This document provides a summary of the reasons for a clarification of the Jockey Club's position on the CBB. The evidence in support of the reasons for acceptance of the CBB is available in the references cited in the bibliography

below. Many of the references are available online at www.bitlessbridle.com. Members of the committee may also find it useful to review the many users' comments that are available online, both at my website and at one of the websites in the UK, www.bitlessbridle.co.uk.

- A metal bit is a foreign body in a sensitive body cavity
- Bits frighten horses and generate flight, fight and freeze responses
- Bits cause a horse intense, continuous and escalating pain
- Pain inhibits performance
- Fear leads to nervous, highly-strung horses and many an accident
- Bits trigger digestive responses (parasympathetic), rather than the respiratory and cardiovascular responses (sympathetic) needed for maximum performance
- The CBB is painless and compatible with the physiology of exercise
- The CBB provides for more effective communication between rider and horse.
- The CBB is readily accepted by the horse and its painless message is not liable to misinterpretation
- The CBB, being painless, does not frighten a horse. A calm horse can better focus on the job in hand
- The CBB is safer and will reduce the likelihood of racecourse accidents
- The bit causes obstruction of the airway, the very last thing that is wanted in a racehorse
- The mechanism of airway obstruction is poll flexion &/or elevation or displacement of the soft palate (DDSP)
- Poll flexion &/or DDSP are, in turn, a cause of 'bleeding' (asphyxia induced pulmonary edema or AIPE)
- Airway obstruction causes pulmonary congestion and this, in turn, places an added strain on the cardiovascular system
- Repeated pulmonary congestion and AIPE lead to small airway disease, snotty noses, and loss of racing days
- As the bit interferes with breathing and as breathing and striding are synchronized, the bit also interferes with striding.
- Use of the CBB will lengthen the stride and improve performance.
- If the CBB is permitted, tongue-ties and other accessory devices will no longer be required
- Pain and airway obstruction cause premature fatigue, falls and breakdowns
- Bits cause headshaking in the horse and this, in turn, results in many a jockey losing his front teeth
- The CBB will advance the welfare of the horse and the jockey
- Will reduce the need for musculoskeletal and respiratory medication in training
- And will improve the public image of racing

A good way for members of the committee and for stewards of racing to obtain first hand information about how well the CBB provides communication is for them to observe bitless racehorses during training gallops.

I would be glad to make myself available to the committee by phone on July 12 to answer questions or to amplify on the above. A conference call could be set up if the committee so wished. My number in the USA is 410 778 9005. Alternatively, I will be happy to answer questions in writing. My email address is drcook@bitlessbridle.com.

Disclosure: *I am currently chairman of The Bitless Bridle Inc., a company that markets the original CBB. I make this disclosure without blushing as I know that I am doing more for the horse and its owners now than at any previous time in my career. As I have been a veterinarian for 53 years and a salesman for only six, I trust that the committee will not discount my scientific opinions on account of a recent conflict of interest.*