

## NO BIT IS BEST

In her article, 'The Basics on Bits' (*Thoroughbred Times*, October 5, 2002), Cynthia McFarland omits the basic facts. She describes 16 different bits without mentioning that all bits are physiologically contraindicated, cruel and counterproductive. Horses, including young Thoroughbred racehorses, can be controlled better if the bit method of control is replaced with a recently developed bitless method of control. It is not a good idea to trigger fear responses in an animal as powerful as a horse. The horse's welfare and the rider's safety is enhanced by removing the metal from the mouth. A bit is a pain in the jaw.

Most horsemen agree with McFarland's phrase ... "the less you can put in a horse's mouth and still have proper control, the better off you are." The purpose of this letter is to remind readers that the ultimate of 'less' is none. I do not expect all trainers, on reading this letter, to throw away their bits, though it would be wonderful if even a few did. I recognize that, instead, many will look around for something to throw at me. One thing they could 'throw' at me is that, as chairman of a company that markets a bitless bridle, I have a conflict of interest. I admit this unashamedly, for I know that by introducing this new method of control I am doing more good for the horse and rider now than I have been able to do in the whole of my previous 50 years as a veterinarian, teacher and researcher. I hope that others with experience of the new method of control will contribute to this correspondence.

Paradoxically, the only bar to the introduction of a significant advance in welfare and safety comes, unconsciously, from racing's guardians of welfare and safety. The stewards of racing should be encouraged to study the written evidence and amend the unwritten law of racing that a bit is required. The practical evidence can be drawn to their attention by demonstrations of the new method of control during morning training.

*Robert Cook FRCVS, PhD  
Professor of Surgery Emeritus  
Tufts University, School of Veterinary Medicine,  
Grafton, MA*