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To: customerservice@bitlessbridle.com

Sent: Monday, October 21, 2002 8:29 AM

Subject: ATT: Dr. Cook

Dr. Cook,

Hi. My name is Wenona Boucher. Perhaps you remember talking to me a few years ago when I bought my bitless bridle. I have been riding with it ever since. I love it. I have gone in some local open shows with it and had only a few problems with judges. Most did not care at all that I used it.

But, yesterday I went to my first eventing show. I did not know what to expect from the dressage judge. I thought I might have to put my bit in just as a dummy to fulfill their rules but I was much surprised when she not only made me put in my bit but made me attach my reins straight to it, not using the effects of the bitless bridle at all. She said they had just had a meeting where this came up and it was decided that the reins must be attached directly to the bit. Do you know if this is true or where I might be able to find the rules that apply to this.¹

I had not used a bit for communication on my horse for around three years. My horse did not do too badly, but I know how well we would have done if we were able to use our bitless bridle. I loved doing the eventing and I would love to do it more but it really concerns me that I should have to ride in a bit to practice my dressage. The judge said that when we get to higher levels of dressage we won't be able to get the precise communication that we would get with a bit. I disagree. And, how do they know that if they do not let us try. If we fail, we fail, but let us try!

Please tell me if there is anything I can do, any cases that people have been able to ride in their bitless bridle that would help me. I don't know what to do. I gave her a copy of information that I had from you and told her that I hope the rules change someday. Basically she told me that dressage has been around for so long that it won't change. That is too bad, it will be the horses' loss! Thank you so much for any help you can give me.

Wenona Boucher

Hello Wenona:

¹ 2006: Reviewing the FEI rules on dressage , I found a line in red ink that specifically states that the reins must be attached to a bit. Presumably the red ink indicates a recent alteration of the rules. My guess is that this alteration has been deliberately inserted to prevent use of the Bitless Bridle.

More and more people are asking the same good questions and some day soon I would like to write an article about the predicament that you describe. But in the meantime, I will try to give you some impromptu answers.

The FEI Rules and Regulations with regard to every discipline are available online at www.horsesport.org. Nowhere in the rules for eventing does it actually say that the reins have to be attached to the bit. At the time the rules were compiled, I imagine that this was taken for granted as it was not envisaged that anyone would ever consider an alternative. This in spite of what the Duke of Newcastle said two hundred years ago about how well he could 'dress' a horse without a bit. However, I am sad to say that judges have been interpreting the rules as implying that a rein has to be attached to the bit. So my recommendation that riders should use a dummy bit or some semi-bitless alternative is being rejected by the judges.

Until the FEI can be persuaded to bring their rules up to date and in line with the advance in equitation that the new bitless method of communication provides, riders who wish to take part in competitions run under FEI rules have the following options:

1. Prior to the competition, request permission from the judges to use a figure-of-eight bitless bridle (this is a generic description of the new design, though as it is something of a mouthful I might abbreviate it in this letter to F8BB²). If they refuse, request permission to take part Hors Concours, that is, to be scored but not ranked. This will enable a rider to demonstrate how well a horse can perform without the impediment of the bit. Judges will be exposed to the new idea and, hopefully, will be persuaded to support a rule change in the future.
2. Make no prior approach to the judges and simply go ahead and use the F8BB in the dressage phase. Obviously, you must be prepared to be eliminated when the stewards examine your equipment afterwards but, once again, you will have had the satisfaction of making a point and spreading the word.
3. Place an FEI acceptable bridle over the top of the F8BB³. In some of the lower level competitions, I think I am right in saying that a snaffle bridle is acceptable. In this case, the snaffle rein can be kept slack, much as one keeps tension off the curb rein of a double bridle. Alternatively, one could tie a loop in the snaffle rein and simply lay it on the withers as an inactive piece of equipment. The same approach could be used for those competitions that require a double bridle. Obviously, it would be too awkward to have three pairs of reins in your hand, so you could tie the two reins of the double bridle together and leave them lying dormant on the withers.

² Since this advice was given, I have adopted the generic term 'crossover bitless bridle.'

³ This approach has not been found acceptable to the judges

4. Comply with the current FEI rules. For Eventing, you can use the F8BB for both cross-country and show jumping and will only have to insert a bit for the 'dangerous' dressage phase!
5. Boycott all FEI competitions
6. Persuade show administrators to sponsor bitless dressage demonstrations &/or non-FEI competitions.
7. Write to the USAE, the US national federation for the FEI. Rule change proposals can be registered online at www.equestrian.org (the USAE website). At this site you can see a summary of all the proposed rule changes that are waiting to be considered. Your proposal will be assigned a tracking number so that you can follow its fate! Alternatively, you can voice your support of existing proposals. Sarah Getchell of Groton House, Groton, MA (e-mail address: serpti@aol.com) has already submitted a proposal for the dressage phase of the Eventing rules. The tracking number for this proposal is 070-02 and the relevant article is Art. 1713. I have attached a copy of her proposal below. The additions to the existing rule are in italics (I hope the formatting survives E-mail transmission, though I fear it will not). Deletions are represented with a line struck through the text. Rule changes are considered at the end of the year, i.e. very soon.

Art. 1713. Saddlery [Rule XVII. Eventing Division, Part One- General Rules for all Eventing Competitions]

2. DRESSAGE TEST. Change to read:

2.1 The following are compulsory: an English type saddle and a permitted bridle. *A bitless bridle with cavesson noseband is permitted for all tests. A bridle with a snaffle bit made of metal, leather, rubber or plastic material is permitted for all tests. A noseband is optional, but is restricted to a cavesson noseband, dropped noseband, crossed noseband or flash noseband.* A double bridle with *optional* cavesson noseband, i.e. bit and bridoon with curb chain (made of metal or leather), is permitted for some tests. A lipstrap and rubber or leather cover for the curb chain are optional. The lever arm of the curb bit must not exceed 10 cm (4 inches) in length. The ring of the bridoon must not exceed 8 cm (3 1/8 inches) in diameter. ~~A snaffle made of metal, leather, rubber or plastic material is permitted for all tests. It may have a cavesson noseband, dropped noseband, crossed noseband or flash noseband. The noseband must be made entirely of leather or leather like material, except for a small disc of sheepskin, which may be used in the intersection of the two leather straps of a crossed noseband.~~ *In all cases, the straps of the noseband must be made entirely of leather or leatherlike material. A small disc of sheepskin may be used in the intersection of the two leather straps of a crossed noseband. A noseband may never be so tightly fixed as to harm the horse. All parts of a metal bit coming into the horse's mouth (including curb and bridoon bits of a double bridle) must be of the same metal.* A breast plate may be used. For drawings of permitted bits and nosebands see Appendix 4.

In fairness to the FEI, it is not easy for an international organization to respond rapidly to a changing situation. Big organizations, like big ships, take time to alter course. After 6000 years of support for the traditional use of a bit we should not expect an overnight response when an entirely new method of control and communication is developed. So some patience will have to be exercised in this

interim period. In the long-term, I am confident that the FEI will update their rules. They will, for example, see that this recent revolutionary advance in equitation renders the current compulsory use of a bridoon, curb and chain incompatible with their own mission and values statements and their Code of Conduct. Because of this bitless advance, nine out of the ten items in the FEI Code of Conduct (qv online) are no longer being supported by the rules.

If you consult the FEI Code of Conduct you will see that the prime objective of the FEI is to promote the health and welfare of the horse and to respect the principles of horsemanship. The Mission statement reads as follows;

“The primary mission of the FEI is to advance the orderly growth of equestrian sport world-wide by promoting, regulating and administering humane and sportsmanlike international competition” Evidence that I have published in the last year demonstrates that bits are neither humane nor sporting. Most of these article are available online at www.bitlessbridle.com. Even when used with maximum consideration, a bit is physiologically contraindicated, consistently painful, potentially cruel and a constant source of accidents. Bits are not only harmful to the safety and welfare of both horse and rider but also a cause of reduced performance. I am attaching a copy of an article, currently in press, that provides further evidence. This is an article I have entitled “Bit-Induced Pain: the cause of fear, flight, fight and facial neuralgia.” It is an invited article that will be published in a special edition of *Pferdeheilkunde*, an equine veterinary journal in Germany

Likewise the Values statement refers to the importance of a relationship of confidence and respect between horse and rider. “Of prime importance” it says, “is the welfare of the horse.” The same objective is the first item in the Code of Conduct, “In all equestrian sports the horse must be considered paramount.” Item # 8 in the code states that “All riding and training methods ... must not include any techniques considered by the FEI to be abusive.”

These citations assure us that there is nothing wrong with the overall objectives of the FEI and all that needs changing in the rules is a matter of detail. At the moment, it is a paradox that whereas the FEI rules permit the use of the F8BB for the potentially dangerous sport of show jumping and cross-country eventing, this more humane, safer and improved method of communication is denied the horse and rider when it comes to dressage.

In the draft of an article that Sarah Getchell is preparing for publication she refers to her review of the FEI rules for Eventing as follows:

“When event riders and officials are asked to think about bitless bridles for the dressage phase, their knee-jerk response is that ‘it’s against the rules.’ The fact is that nowhere in the rules for eventing is a bit explicitly required (FEI Art. 523). Or they talk about ‘acceptance of the bit,’ when in fact what is called for is ‘acceptance of the bridle’ (FEI Art. 526.2). The figure of speech ‘on the bit’ appears nowhere in the Eventing rules, and where it is defined in the rules for pure Dressage (FEI Art.

401.60), it describes a bearing and a way of going that can be achieved without a bit.”

Well I think that this covers the points that you raise in your e-mail. Please keep in touch and let me know how you proceed. I am happy to act as a central sorting house with a view to keeping everyone informed about the efforts that are being made to change the rules.

Best wishes,

Robert Cook