

## **I: FEI Rules "on the bit" - unchanged for nearly a century**

See the happy athlete, trying to harmonize.  
He needs two bits and a chain to enter for a prize.  
See the high-schooled horse, burdened with Bronze Age kit.  
There is no need to change - the method's such a hit.

The received wisdom is: revere the rules so blessed.  
Without a double bridle he can't be fully dressed.  
Salute the trusty snaffle, caress the curb and chain.  
It works just like a thumbscrew, never inflicting pain.

Bonding with your partner, bringing ribbons home,  
Nothing could be finer than the crunch of steel on bone.  
The saddle fits him well; his withers are not wrung.  
But it's OK for the mouth - the pain will keep him young.

See the patient victim, grazing in the orchard.  
Who would guess that he is regularly tortured?  
Carry on as always, freedom from fear prefer.  
But should the rules deny this just say they cannot err.

The sport horse, as athlete, is a slave in all but name,  
Shackled with iron in mouth and all four feet the same.  
As a horse can 'hear' a fly, settling on his snout.  
A 'whisper' is enough but let's be sure and 'SHOUT.'

## **II: The Research Speaks for Change**

See the happy athlete, no pain will make him utter.  
But his behavior tells us bits do not melt like butter.  
Pity the equine athlete, by pain and stress confused.  
If rules are made for horses they are sorely disabused.

Why should we rock the boat? Why the critical lines?  
A bit only causes a hundred negative signs.  
Clearly the horse is content and always does what pleases.  
A bit only causes forty odd diseases.

Showing the white of eye, taut in all his muscles,  
He's ready to spook and shy at every bush that rustles.  
See the bad head shaker, tossing his pretty head.  
The cause of this is quite unknown as long as you haven't read .

See him face the judges, lolling out his tongue.  
If it wasn't for the bits he wouldn't be so 'hung.'  
See the Grand Prix hopeful, his mouth should be a blank.  
But if his mouth is open you can legally use a crank.

Dressage is for drama, high tension in the ring.  
He's fully stressed from head to tail - Rollkur is 'the thing.'  
Though he qualifies quite young, his career oft comes to naught.  
Rollkur can lead to a life so nasty, brutish and short.

### **III: The FEI replies**

See the happy athlete, let not one vet make fuss.  
The rules are semi-sacred (it's enough to make you cuss).  
Committees all agree that the horse is man's best mate.  
(Yet the mate hath cause to think that the man he helps doth hate)

Committees in session (to simple truth seem blind),  
Conflict of interest cite: Cook has an axe to grind!  
No need to grasp the nettle, we deny the actual proof  
That a horse might be unhappy with iron in mouth and hoof.

Our attitude is this: Don't bother us with facts.  
These make for heavy going; we don't have time for tracts.  
Science can be sidelined, tradition sanctions use.  
With all our TLC it cannot be abuse.

So circle the wagons, shun the scientific.  
We are elected experts; silence works terrific.

### **IV: The horse responds**

I'm the unhappy athlete, chained and double-shackled.  
And so I will remain, unless the rules are tackled.

Read the regulations; note the FEI word.  
It claims to safeguard welfare but clearly that's absurd.

Observe, listen and learn, the way I tick can teach.  
Make a proper study and practice what I preach.  
Get the science right and after add the art.  
Make sure you put the 'horse' firmly before the 'cart.'

Too long I have been silent and in avoidable pain.  
Is it not your duty to say this is inane?  
I can serve you better; painless is not a sin.  
Why must I not be guided with gentle strap on skin?

Remember that I've been in pain and fear for years.  
Eight words could stop my suffering in this equine vale of tears.  
You are "Sole Judge of Truth" yet "in endless error hurl'd"  
I beg you give some thought to others in this world.

If only you would help me, my agony would abate.  
Please to add those vital words to Article 428.

*- Robert Cook*  
*14th February 2008*