



## To BIT or not to BIT that is the question... why we went bitless

Pam Allen-LeBlanc, Agr., MBA, Hidden Brook Farm

*I learned to ride with a bit. When I instructed Pony Club, I taught people to put three wrinkles in the horses' mouth to adjust the bit properly. It never occurred to me to question this logic or to go against centuries – even millennia of horsemanship principles that seemed to work. I tried to keep my hands light and thought that was sufficient to provide comfort to my horse. Then Kevin Crane made me see that the wrinkles were not necessary – that a horse can hold the bit in their mouths. My husband and I tried just with fingers in our mouths to simulate 3 wrinkles – and no wrinkles. It was definitely easier to feel a light touch when the bit was loose – so we took out the wrinkles. And my horses liked it better. But we talked about it, and realized that although it was more comfortable with no pressure, it certainly was not comfortable to have even fingers – much less metal in our mouths – and we started to wonder...*

*I had long since started keeping my horses naturally. They go in and out as they please and their health and happiness improved dramatically when I let go of the accepted convention of keeping my horses in a barn. I stopped shoeing my horses long ago. Barefoot just seemed healthier and more natural to me, even though I had not yet studied the structure of the hoof or perfected my trimming techniques as I later would. And then, some 13 years ago, I started studying natural horsemanship in earnest – becoming absolutely amazed at what could be accomplished with a better understanding of the horse.*

*I followed Monty Roberts for some time, and a few years back, he introduced me to Joe Camp's book, *The Soul of a Horse*. This is a wonderful book for anyone interested in keeping horses naturally. Joe confirmed my beliefs about natural horse keeping – and gave me the gift of a new mindset – one which began to question the accepted practices that I had grown up with. And yet, I still never thought of getting rid of my bit until Joe sent us an email asking whether we even needed the bit at all. I realized that in fact, we do not.*

*Joe's full article can be found here: <http://www.thesoulofahorse.com/bitless.htm> and it is truly thought provoking. Except in our dealings with Kevin, when I started placing a bit lower in a horses' mouth, I had never truly thought about a bit being an uncomfortable piece of metal lying on the sensitive bone of a horses' mouth. I removed the wolf teeth from my horses – so it was more comfortable now that the bit was not banging on these small, sensitive teeth right? You need a bit for control right? Not so says Joe. Not so says Dr. Cook of the bitless bridle. And now, not so say I.*

*I thought of the first pony I ever rode – in a heavy curbed bit. She was completely out of control. She's the only horse I have met since who could run away at a full gallop with her nose bent and touching my leg. I realized the control I gained with that pony eventually had nothing at all to do with her bit – and everything to do with her training and our work together. Eventually, we could comfortably ride her in a halter. The bit was not a factor in her control at all.*

*At this point, I'm starting to feel really uncomfortable. I always thought I was doing the most humane thing, riding with a wide, mild snaffle bit and warming my bit in the winter.*

But Joe, citing Dr. Cook ([www.bitlessbridle.com](http://www.bitlessbridle.com)) from his book "Metal in the Mouth" told me that:

1. "Horses have loads of nerve endings running through the part of their mouth where the bit lies. And a bit laying there is uncomfortable at best and painful at worst." *I am an animal scientist – and know this to be true, I just never thought of it before.*



2. "Bits "control" the horse through the use of pain." *I guess I had not thought of that before either. Was that what I wanted with my horses? No. Definitely not. It flies into the face of natural horsemanship principles – and of my own life principles.*
3. "Now add to this the fact that when anything goes into a horses' mouth, the brain causes the flap to open between the lungs and stomach so the "food" it thinks is coming will go to the stomach, not into the lungs. So a horse with a bit is not getting his full load of oxygen." *Yikes. What have I done?*

*Then I started thinking of all of the negative reactions to bits I had seen in the course of my life with horses:*

- *the gaping mouths*
- *heads being lifted, tossed and thrown*
- *tails swishing*
- *heads shaking*
- *horses backing to evade the pressure*
- *necks bowed into an un-natural position*

*I thought "the horses have been trying to tell me this all along, and I never heard them." And while I always tried to ensure my hands were gentle – I am certain that they caused my horse pain at times. And I am certain that many of the problems I experienced with the horse I had in high school could have been alleviated. So simply. I wouldn't want a piece of metal in my mouth for hours on end. And I am a mammal and an animal – just like the horse. So why should I treat my horse any differently that I would want to be treated? It started to fall into place for me. I would no longer use bits on my horses – unless a horse clearly did not mind them or preferred them.*

*Believe it or not, I have a very opinionated older mare who was always ridden with a bit – and she actually prefers it – so I respect that. But the majority of my horses now have been trained to react to soft pressure and prefer to work without a bit. So long as they do so in a safe and respectful manner – my bit stays in the tack room.*

*More recently, I have been exposed to Alexander Nevzorov's research. These are studies undertaken together with physiologists, vets and forensic scientists in Russia. The experiments on the effect of bits on the horse's mouth have been documented and signed by the experts. I was astounded to learn from this research that a typical pull puts 80-150 kg of pressure per square centimeter in a horse's sensitive mouth and when the bit is jerked as many of us have done or seen done to a horse, that force exceeds 300kg per square centimeter. Knowing what I know now about the amount of nerve endings inside the horses' mouth where the bit lies – I am horrified.*

*If other people wish to use bits on their horses, that's their business, their horses have probably been trained with bits and that's probably how they should ride their horses. I must admit that the heavy hands and heavy bits I sometimes see leave me with a heavy heart. But maybe they never thought about bits like this. Or maybe they tried bitless and it did not work for them. Maybe they feel they need a bit for "control". Or maybe their horses have never fought the bit. I hope they will consider bitless – and encourage them to watch Stormy May's "The Path of the Horse" but ultimately, this decision is up to them. I can ask them to consider the research and possibility of riding bitless, but I don't feel that I have a right to impose my beliefs on them.*

*My horses on the other hand are my business, and I no longer intended to cause them the discomfort and pain that comes with a bit. I am sorry it took me 28 or 29 years to hear this message from the horse. But once heard, I took the message to heart, worked with my horses to request softness and compliance with a rope halter – and then found a soft, side-pull rope halter with which we were able to give clear signals to my horses from the saddle. We trained our horses the communication system associated with this soft pressure and once we had clear signals and understanding in place, we started riding with perfect "control". We noticed that the horses were very happy, that they never resisted the light pressure, never swished their tails in annoyance or threw their heads up to evade the pressure, their breathing was good and in fact, everyone was happy. Certainly we felt better about things.*

*People say "but surely you don't ride on the trails like that?" to which I ask – "why ever not?" We have never had an incident of run-aways – or even a horse who did not go where it was requested. And our relationships with our horses flourished. Someday we may have a run-away. Or a horse who does not go where requested – but those happen with people riding in bits too. So be it – we will deal with it when it happens.*

*I know, with the work of great horsemen and women like Pat Parelli and Stacy Westfall who do not use anything on their horses faces for "control" that "control" is more about the melding of minds and mutual respect than it is about causing pain to a horse when it does not listen to a command. Although I hope to get to that point with my horses someday, I'm not there yet. But I know others who are. And others who have great success with their horses and these principles with*

rope halters, bitless bridles, bosals and the like. So for several years, I have asked different horse clubs and 4-H programs to consider allowing bitless performances. I know that every major breed association and every major sporting association is being asked to consider this at the moment although there is incredible resistance to it. Not only that, it elicits a very emotional response from people. Why is this?

My requests have largely been ignored, but recently, when my 8 year old daughter Caroline and our horse, BG Buddy were not permitted to enter their 4-H class without a bit – despite the fact that the rule-book does not state that they could not, despite the fact that they exhibited a relaxed and respectful performance and despite the fact that I offered to put a lead line on the horse if the committee was worried about safety; I committed to putting forth a better argument – and a further explanation of why we believe in bitless. Up until this point, I was going with logic and proven performance as seen in my own horses – but I knew that I was going to have to dig into the issue further if I was to truly convince people – and for the horses' sakes – I believe it is time this argument got further consideration and attention.

The logic for "needing bits" being thrown back at me does not make any sense – and yet, people are not yet willing to let go of that logic. I even asked John Lyons, a tremendous and respected horseman why a bit was necessary – and I was told "it just was", "that you get better responses that way" and "you need a bit". Now my respect for Mr. Lyons is still firmly in place. He is a tremendous horseman. But I hope someday, he, like the breed and sport associations will consider allowing bitless performances. If for no other reason than the oxygen issue.

My students, who have also been experiencing the pleasure of bitless performances for years rallied behind me and sent me a treasure trove of research and data to draw from. And I found that this issue is even more important than I had realized when I saw how much concrete and scientific data supports this work. I will attempt to summarize it as much as possible below. But the funny thing is that **while I was researching this, trying to prove the bitless riding allows the same controlled, safe and accurate performance that riding with a bit allows – I found that this assumption was incorrect. In the majority of the scientifically researched trials – bitless riding provided a MUCH MORE CONTROLLED, SAFE and ACCURATE performance – with the SAME HORSES than riding with a bit did.**

## Summary of Resources supporting bitless riding:

**Dr. Robert Cook** – [www.bitlessbridle.com](http://www.bitlessbridle.com) has done much of the pioneering work behind bitless riding. In his article: 10<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE IRON---FREE HORSE, Dr Cook states that in the last 10 years since bitless and shoeless became a "**natural demetalling experiment**" we have proven both to be better for the horse's quality of life and that many accidents and diseases can be linked to both. He says there is something about the inside of a horse's mouth that dislikes the touch of a metal rod and wonders why horse owners like ourselves, who love our horses cannot understand this logic while the man-in-the street immediately considers it from the horse's viewpoint. He feels we have been "**brainwashed**" into believing both are needed for control and safety and urges us to consider that they are not. But he preaches hope, that there is an army of bitless equestrians all over the world now who have liberated the horse – now if they can just successfully defend these practices to the FEI, national equestrian federations, Pony Clubs, 4-H clubs and breed associations to bring about a more widespread change – asking that riders and drivers have the option to compete their horses bitless, barefoot and pain-free. Please consult his website for a treasure trove of scientific and anecdotal data proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that bitless is a viable alternative.

### **An Experiment by the Certified Horseman's Association [2009]**

In October of 2008 the Certified Horseman's Association agreed to conduct an experiment with Dr. Cook in which four riding school horses completed two four-minute exercise tests, first in a snaffle bridle, then in the BitlessBridle. **None of the horses had ever been ridden in a crossunder bridle before, however all four horses showed significant improvement when the Bitless Bridle was used.** The experiment was videotaped, and can be seen at <http://www.bitlessbridle.com/dbID/420.html> and the scientific paper - Short Communication – Preliminary study of jointed snaffle vs. crossunder bitless bridles: Quantified comparison of behaviour in four horses by W. R. COOK\* and D. S. MILLS† can be found in the EQUINE VETERINARY JOURNAL; *Equine vet. J.* (2009) 41 (1) 00-00; doi: 10.2746/042516409X4721501. This experiment – and the hundreds of others like them being carried out are profound. Please check them out.

In his efforts to bring about rule changes that would allow bitless riding in competition, Dr. Cook has experienced that "**Official bodies** such as the FEI (Federation Equestre Internationale, the international governing body for horse sport) **are aware of the welfare arguments for a rule change** to permit use of the cross-under bitless bridle. None have, as yet, agreed to such a change. Their **reasons do not include any scientific arguments** but are simply based on a wish to retain the *status quo*."

Dr. Cook also states that "**Cruelty is defined as the infliction of avoidable pain** (Morton 1993, Cook et al 2006). Now that an acceptable and preferable alternative to the bit is available, the pain of a bit is avoidable. It follows that the bit method should now be reclassified as cruel (Figs 5-7). Quite apart from its inhumanity, it has also been shown that **the bit is not even an efficient or safe method of communication** (Cook et al. 2003)"

**AQHA** - Unwittingly perhaps, the AQHA – one of the largest and most respected breed associations support bitless riding in many of their commercial publications, but do not yet allow it in their breed shows. However, in their Horse Training Update circulated Sept. 21, 2010, they published an article called "**Fighting the Bit**". It talks about the **many problems horses have accepting the bit** – and reviews the many solutions. It's funny that riding bitless does not come up as one of the many solutions – despite the advice offered from a wise trainer that "Training horses is not difficult. They are quite willing to perform any task they are capable of, so long as it does not cause them immediate pain". They talk about how bits sometime place "extreme force on the jaw bone" and offer solutions such as cavessons and dropped nosebands which won't allow the horse to escape the pressure of the bit – they hold the horses' mouth shut. They even mention that "Care should be taken not to draw the dropped noseband too tight as it can restrict the flow of air to the nostrils." And yet in the same article, they insist that "A horses' mouth is an extremely sensitive structure. Treat it with respect, and the rewards of riding a truly responsive horse will be yours."

*Am I missing something here? The best solution seems obvious to me.*

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Preliminary investigations of horses' (*Equus caballus*) responses to different bridles during foundation training

[Jessica S. Quicka](#), [Amanda K. Warren-Smith](#)

#### **Abstract**

Throughout equitation history, bitted bridles have been the primary method of controlling the ridden horse. In response to **health and behavioral concerns** arising from the use of bitted bridles, bitless bridles offer new methods of steering and control. However, the **effectiveness of bitless bridles** on horses had not been previously examined scientifically. Therefore, the current study measured behavioral and cardiac responses of horses undergoing foundation training (bridling, long reining, and riding) wearing either a bitted or a bitless bridle.

The horses wearing the bitted bridle exhibited more chewing, opening of the mouth, pawing the ground, and tail swishing than those in the bitless bridle. The horses wearing the bitless bridle exhibited more head lowering during long reining compared to those in the bitted bridle. The frequency of chewing, opening the mouth, and head raising decreased as training progressed. The number of steps taken after the application of the halt stimulus was greatest for the horses in the bitted bridle during long reining compared with those in the bitless bridle. During long reining, the heart rate and heart rate variability of the horses were higher for those in a bitted bridle compared with those in a bitless bridle.

The results of this study suggest that **horses wearing bitless bridles performed at least as well as, if not better** than, those in bitted bridles. If the use of bitted bridles does cause discomfort to horses, as suggested by some, then the use of bitless bridles could be beneficial and certainly warrants further investigation.

Preliminary investigations of horses' (*Equus caballus*) responses to bitted and bitless bridles during foundation training

Jessica S Quick<sup>1</sup>, Amanda K Warren-Smith<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Rural Management, University of Sydney, PO Box 883, Orange, NSW, 2800, Australia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Science, Charles Stuart University, PO Box 883, Orange, NSW, 2800, Australia

Traditionally, bridles have been the primary mechanism for controlling the ridden horse. Normally, these bridles will contain a metal bit, designed to apply pressure to various locations within the horse's mouth, which is a highly sensitive site. Despite the near universal use and acceptance of bitted bridles by riders, debate continues as to whether the presence of the bit is required for the effective training of horses. In response, bridles that do not require a bit have been made available, although the effectiveness of bitless bridles on horses has not been previously examined scientifically. Therefore, the current study measured behavioural and cardiac responses of horses (n=8) undergoing foundation training wearing either a bitted or bitless bridle. Measures were recorded during three stages of training; bridling, long-reining and riding. There was no difference in heart rate between the groups during any of the training stages. However, the horses wearing the bitless bridle had lower heart rate variability when long-reining (P=0.035), indicating that they were experiencing less stress than those wearing the bitted bridle. During all stages of training the horses wearing a bitted bridle exhibited more chewing (P<0.001), head nodding (P<0.001), opening of the mouth (P<0.001), pawing the ground

(P=0.009) and rubbing their noses on the ground (P<0.001) than those horses wearing a bitless bridle. The horses that had the bitless bridle were more likely to maintain a steady head carriage, a desirable response in most performance horses. Accordingly, the data indicate that there may be some benefits to both horse and rider in terms of communication, safety, performance and welfare in using bitless bridles and that further work with larger numbers of horses using bitless bridles in a range of disciplines should be conducted to establish further advantages.

#### Andy Beck, founder of W.H.E.E.P. and well known international equine journalist

The development of the bitless bridle was driven by two distinct aims. Firstly to **reduce pain or discomfort in the mouth and decrease symptoms such as head-shaking, and secondly to deal with the negative change of posture commonly associated with bit use.** The older solution, and one often recommended in the past when mouth problems caused by bit use were such that a horse became virtually unrideable, was the hackamore.

And while the hackamore certainly gets rid of the bit it still operates on the basis of pain/discomfort by allowing the rider to exert pressure on the 'chin-groove' and nose by way of leverage. Once again the rider's hands dictate how much interference there will be. Given a knowledgeable rider that is aware of the mechanical advantage offered by the leverage and a good degree of sensitivity in terms of how such force might reasonably be applied, plus a level of physical fitness so that the hands are able to act at all times independently of the rider's torso, the hackamore is not a bad device. But where any of these conditions are missing, or where harsh designs are used, such as those made with sharp curb chains or chunks of bicycle chain (leather covered or not) over the nose, what you actually end up with is something that can do even more damage. So while the hackamore gets rid of pain in the mouth it tends merely to transfer it elsewhere – with equally bad or worse effects on posture and movement.

So in terms of the second aim, it is essential that the bridle does not cause discomfort in any part of the head and face, chin groove, nose or poll. And unfortunately once complexities are introduced in design, such as where straps cross over or under one another, there tend to be problems with binding or seizing – so that the bridle tightens, applying pressure to the lower jaw, poll or face, but does not release dependably as soon as the hands give.

So perhaps it is fair to suggest that these cross under or over types have more to do with the rider's perception regarding security than with achieving a pain-free medium of communication. Any of those of us that were raised on bitted bridles have absorbed the notion that we must be able to impose our will on the horse by being able to increase mechanical pressure in order to get them to stop. So there is a background feeling of insecurity when we use a bridle that does not allow us to do so. But you just have to watch a bunch of kids riding over jumps in bitless sidepull type bridles and it very soon becomes obvious that the horses are more relaxed and far less likely to refuse to do as asked.

To Bit or Not to Bit? Bitless Driving article in Rural Heritage Magazine (Author Bethany Caskey drives bitless in Albia, Iowa) (*and here I thought I was being original with my title...*)

Highlights: So why go bitless? Light handedness with a horse is the mark of a superb horseperson. Yet **man has traditionally used force and fighting methods to get what he wants from the horse ...** Modern horsemanship embraces better methods than most of the traditional methods, and drivers who cling to the old ways soon will be left behind.

So the next time you start a colt, or think about sharpening up an older animal, consider the bitless bridle. If you do decide to change, you will find handsomely made bridles available. And if you continue driving with a bit, at least drive as though you don't need it. (for full article) [http://www.naturalhorse.com/filesN/Driving\\_Rural\\_Heritage.pdf](http://www.naturalhorse.com/filesN/Driving_Rural_Heritage.pdf)

Why Bitless is Better by **Aeron Mack**

<http://naturalhorsemanship.wordpress.com/>

Many people ask me why I ride in a halter. (Many people just stare at me with a look of confusion, but that's ok!). There are a few reasons why I do it, and I'd like to share them with you because I think it's an important topic and more people should know about it.

**Natural horsemanship and bitless riding go hand in hand.** Natural Horsemanship is based on the horse's own natural instincts and behaviors, and focuses on a **pain-free, fear-free method of teaching horses.** Because the **bit can, and often does, cause pain, it is a contradictory method of training to NH.** Now of course not all bits are created equal, just as not all people hurt their horses with them (at least, not intentionally), but from what I have learned, even just the presence of the bit in the mouth can be detrimental to the horse, both physically and mentally.

**Horses' mouths are designed for eating, swallowing, and breathing, and when a bit is present, it interferes with these basic processes.** In some horses the effect is more profound, but all horses are affected by this to some degree. Problems with bits can often be seen with behaviors like running away, head tossing, rearing, and many other negative behaviors. I highly recommend [Dr. Robert Cook](#) and Dr. Hiltrud Strasser's book "Metal in the Mouth" for a more detailed explanation.

So, if we remove **the bit, and the horse is more comfortable, he is also calmer and more willing to learn.** Remember that **horses don't learn when they're in pain.** I have noticed such a difference in my horses' attitudes that I now ride bitless all the time. Now that doesn't mean I am "anti-bit," or that I never use a bit.... I still do, more often on horses I know I'm going to sell. I realize not everyone rides bitless, so I teach my 'for sale' horses to go both ways.

So for those who think that you can't achieve a certain level of learning without a bit, let me ask you this: **If horse A can perform at a certain level without a bit, and horse B performs at the same level with a bit, which horse is better trained?** It seems ironic to me that in western riding, a horse is started in a snaffle bit, and then "graduates up" to a shank bit. If your horse is getting better trained (pardon the grammar), why move from the milder bit to the stronger?? Shouldn't it be the other way around? As a horse becomes better and better trained, the bit should get milder and milder – the logical extension of which is: at a certain point, no bit is needed at all.

I used to work in a tack store, and many many times, people would come in and ask me for a 'better' or 'bigger' bit. "My horse just isn't going the way he used to, and I need something with a little more [bite/leverage/control/whatever]." Obviously if the horse is getting worse, or responding less, it is a **rider/trainer error, not a bit error.** The majority of people who ride with bits think that a stronger bit equals more control, but that's not true. The proof is in the pudding. All you need to do is look at some of the bits people use when "control" is an issue, like in foxhunting and eventing. Some of these horses look like they are **running away with the rider, or completely out of control, even with that big bit in their mouths.** Then, look at some of the NH riders and trainers... working with precision and control with only a string around the horse's neck, or nothing at all!

For many years now I have foxhunted in a rope halter and rope reins. People think I'm nuts. I won't rule that out, but in this case, it was reasonable, since I had trained my horse to be ridden in this way. Some people said that my horse was unusual, that most horses couldn't do what my horse did. Hogwash! She is just an off-the-track thoroughbred like half the hunt horses out there. **Any horse can learn to do what mine does. It's a matter of taking the time to teach them.** Obviously I wouldn't just put a halter on some horse and go hunting without 'proper prior preparation' as Pat Parelli would say. **Taking the time to train the horse properly will reap great rewards in the end...**

Aeron Mack - [Petition the USEF to allow Bitless Bridles](#)

Currently bitless bridles are not permitted in most types of recognized competition in the U.S. However, as bitless riding has become more and more popular, there is an ever-increasing belief that the USEF should amend the rules to allow bitless bridles. After all, if I can do anything in a bitless bridle that another person can do with a bitted bridle, shouldn't I be allowed to compete against him? **It has gotten to the point where people like myself who ride bitless full-time do not compete in recognized competitions anymore.** I strongly encourage you to appeal to the USEF to amend the rules to allow bitless bridles in competition. Here is some information and instruction for petitioning the USEF to allow the use of bitless bridles in competition. I encourage everyone to make your voice heard! This *appeal is actually headed by Dr. Cook* - [www.bitlessbridle.com/dbID/209.html](http://www.bitlessbridle.com/dbID/209.html)

Taking the OW Out of WOW:

Changing the Rules of Competition

By **Suzanne Engler Case** – excerpt from full article:

The challenge of change is to bridge the gap between the old and the new by recognizing the intentions of the people who have worked to make our industry what it is today and by helping these people to move forward in considering new visions. Many of these people and industry organizations are immersed in tradition, and may have a hard time seeing a fresh perspective. They may not be able to understand why someone may want to compete in dressage without bits, spurs, horseshoes, or even a saddle. They may not be able to understand that much of what is currently accepted in competition does not keep horses and competitors safe and happy, such as leverage and restrictive tack, which gives a false sense of control to the rider and causes pain in the horse. They may not be able to understand that current judging, which rewards a certain 'look' or outcome (however it may be achieved) rather than genuine horsemanship, is not keeping horses happy, and breaches their mission statement regarding 'welfare'.

**If the existing organizations are too old-school and not willing or ready to consider other perspectives in relating to animals, will people one day end up considering the formation of new organizations?** They most likely will, and rightfully so.

Hopefully the well-established organizations will learn to be open to at least trying some of the progressive ideas that are brewing in the natural horse world. **It is up to us, the competitors and organization members, to become proactive and work hard to help these existing organizations evolve, or to form new organizations.** The true **welfare of the horses is reason enough.** Just think of all our equine friends who are actively **competing right now under rules that promote abuse and harm rather than welfare.** It is important to **ask why,** for example, in certain dressage competitions it is prohibited to compete without spur, whip, and bit, when this equipment could be considered obsolete (once used for survival in battle to direct the horse swiftly though painfully) and potentially harmful in the wrong hands.

Maybe we should be asking ourselves and others what the horse might enjoy. Haven't we been using and abusing the horse for centuries for our own needs and enjoyment? **It is time that this relationship between human and horse becomes reciprocal.** For an animal that has been so passive and easy to manipulate, and has served us so well, this idea should not be so far-fetched... a relationship that is enjoyable and respectful to both species.

Canadians and husband & wife team of avid horse lovers, Gerry Guy and Zoe Brooks, designed and patented the Nurtural Bitless Bridle on their 500 acre farm in Northern Ontario in 2005. It all started when Zoe's mare did not like the bit. Now these 'better bitless bridles' are bringing smiles to horses and their owners in every corner of the equestrian world. Nurtural Bitless Bridle is also making lots of headway in equine sports. <http://www.nurturalhorse.com/>

Cynthia Cooper has an interesting website <http://www.naturalhorseworld.com/BitlessRidingTips.htm> which supports bitless riding.

## Organizations that allow bitless riding – as at Oct. 14, 2010

- Most western events and stock horse breed shows allow a bosal hackamore for junior horses (under 4-5 years of age)
- Bitless bridles are allowed but considered "unconventional tack" in hunter classes
- Bitless riding is allowed in endurance riding, competitive trail riding, rodeos and Gymkhana events and are sometimes allowed in show jumping and eventing during the stadium and cross country events
- Horse and Rider's Lynn Palm has been giving bridles performances for 4 decades. 2010 marks her 40<sup>th</sup> year as a bridle free performer
- Equine Canada's Canadian Eventing allow hackamores throughout the levels in Cross country and stadium jumping and Hackamores are permitted in Jumpers (warmup as well as competition)
- American Saddlebred Breed shows allow hackamores for horses 4 years and under that have not previously been shown in a curb before
- Arabian Jumpers, native costume, western pleasure (5 and under), equitation (4 yrs and under) and reining allow hackamores.
- North American Trail Riding Competition
- New Hampshire 4-H if you have a vet's note
- The Canadian Cowgirls perform their drill team and trick riding routines all over the world in bitless bridles
- Christine Stevenson (19) competed in Spruce Meadows "Battle of the Breeds" with her 9 year old Paint gelding, Heart and Soul (Sully) bitless
- Sept 2010: Canadian Endurance Team rides at the World Equestrian Games in Nurtural Bitless Bridles
- Trainers for 2009 Extreme Mustang Makeover Go Bitless

## Comments from Hidden Brook Farm students and friends:

"I know almost nothing about riding and horses but I do know that bit-less seems so right, philosophically, ethically and aesthetically. Are our animals dangerous wild energy to be mastered and controlled or are they friends and partners which whom we work and play, with respect and in a spirit of partnership? I know what I think." Peter DeMarsh

"We were just on a judged pleasure ride this weekend and Scott and I rode with just the halter, they were cautious with us but fine, sorry your daughter had to experience it , but that is why I don't want to show (some people just don't understand)..." Donna Wiggans

"I agree with Bitless riding... it makes more sense for the horses... who wants that in their mouth?" Telah Morrison

"I prefer (bitless riding) and with children I think it is more humane on the horses mouth... actually even with some adults..." Kim Peer

"Caroline and Buddy rock! We took Toby and Rufus... Rufus as green as Kermit the frog... BITLESS on his first trail ride today." Marge Branscombe