

HORSEMANSHIP, SPORTSMANSHIP AND STATE OF THE SCIENCE

Robert Cook¹

Without a bit you can ...



train a racehorseⁱ



jump for joyⁱⁱ

¹ Professor of Surgery Emeritus, Tufts University, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, USA
Chairman, BitlessBridle Inc., T: (443) 282 0472; E drcook@bitlessbridle.com; www.bitlessbridle.com



show jumpⁱⁱⁱ



anywhere in the world^{iv}



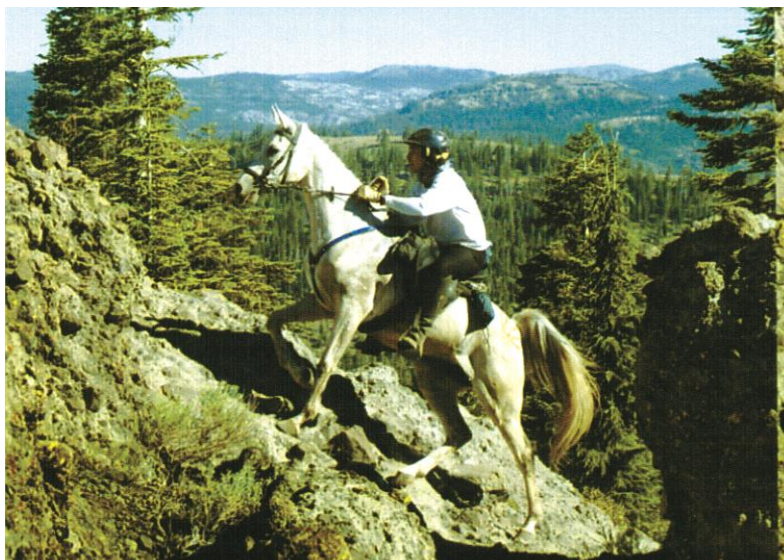
hack in the countryside^v



trail ride, Western or English^{vi}



barrel race^{vii}



climb Cougar Rock in the Tevis Cup endurance ride^{viii}



be a member of the Canadian Endurance Team at the Biltmore endurance ride^{ix}



Team Chase in the UK^x



compete in the two most dangerous phases of eventing^{xi}



train for dressage informally^{xii}



or formally^{xiii}



compete in cowboy mounted shooting^{xiv}



tolt on an Icelandic^{xv}



or ride a Lippizana stallion.^{xvi}



You can also drive in the UK^{xvii}



or Holland^{xviii}



or South Carolina, USA^{xix}



(with this ...^{xx}



... instead of this)^{xxi}



or win with a harness horse in Sweden^{xxii}



(bypassing the bit like this)^{xxiii}

**But until the rules are updated you can't compete without a bit in
4H, Pony Club, dressage, racing or driving events.**

This is not because with a bit

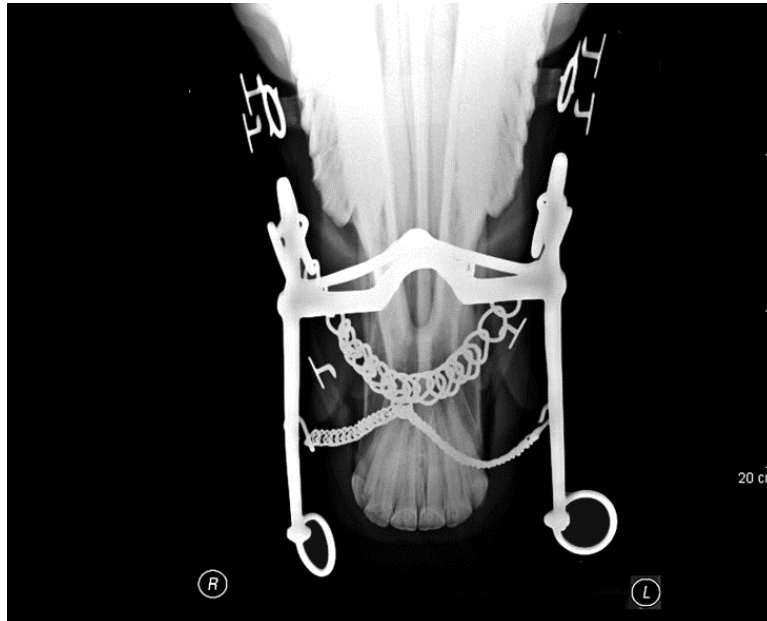
- riders and drivers are safer and in better control
- a horse's welfare is safeguarded
- diseases are prevented
- performance is improved
- wastage is reduced
- the reputation and public image of the discipline is upheld
- or cruelty is prevented

... quite the opposite.

The only reason that a bit is mandated is because that is how it has always been. The administrators of these sports have not yet recognized that, since 2000, a renaissance has taken place in the science of horsemanship. Bitless horsemanship has been field-tested over the last 15 years and shown to deliver improvements in all seven of the

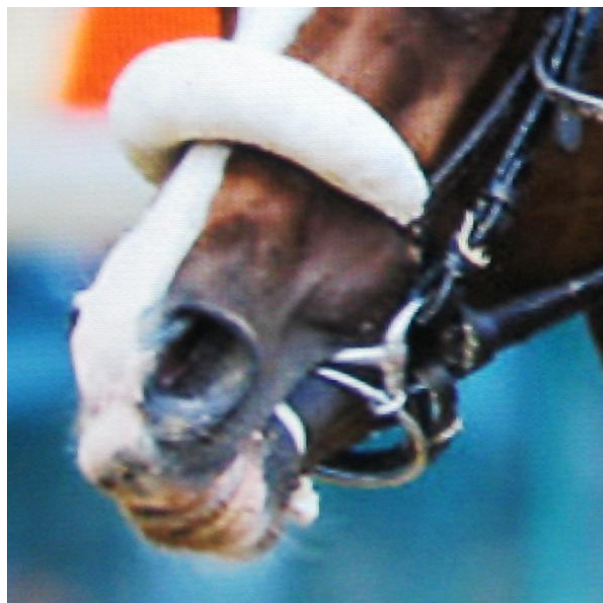
above bulleted fields. Significantly, it is just such improvements that are needed to solve problems that currently bedevil many disciplines, especially dressage and racing.

The FEI claim that their rules place the welfare of the horse as paramount, yet for the upper levels of the sport of dressage ...

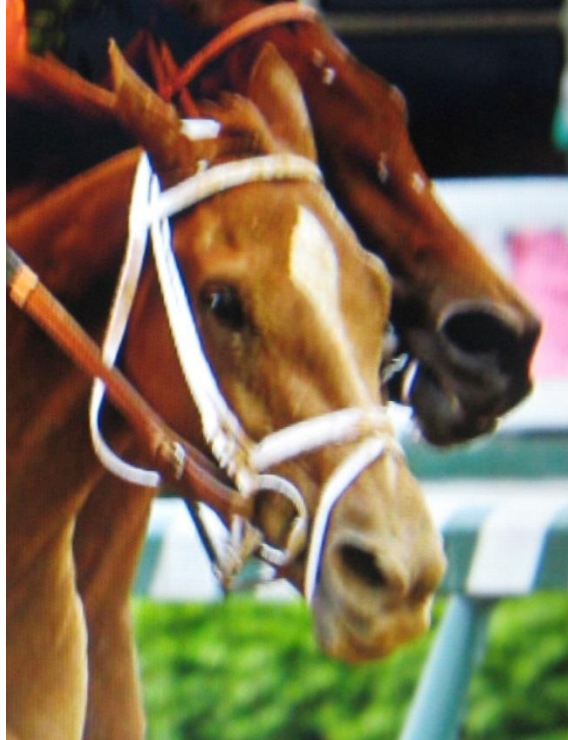


a double bridle is mandated by a rule that has been in place since 1921^{xxiv}

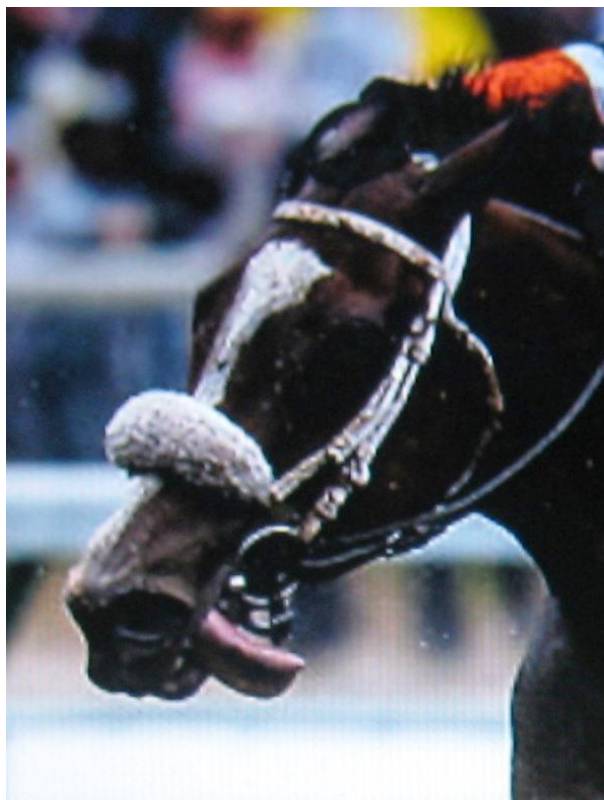
For racing too, use of a bit has been compulsory since racing's rules were first written. As a bit isn't always satisfactory, trainers are permitted to add and frequently do add



a ring bit and tongue tie^{xxv}



or a flash noseband^{xxvi}



which hides this sign of pain but does nothing to reduce the pain^{xxvii}

A comparison can be drawn between man's historic and invasive use of a rapier when fighting and his continuing use of reins with a terminal rod of steel strapped in a horse's mouth when riding. Both instruments cause injury and death. Today's non-martial equivalents that do no harm are the fencing foil and bitless reins. The rapier is for fighting and the foil is for sport. Whereas a fighter uses a rapier on his enemy, a rider uses a bit on her partner. Reins are for signaling not fighting. A bit is more like a rapier and a crossunder bitless bridle is more like a foil. Horsemanship is meant to be a sport. Youngsters in 4H and Pony Clubs should not have to use a 'rapier' that endangers their own safety and the welfare of their horse. Adults too should have the option of using the equestrian equivalent of a foil. Behavioral and physiological evidence shows that horses do not 'accept' the bit and neither should competitors be obliged to. Most riders do not wish to declare war on their horse; they want to enlist him as a partner in their sport.

Be a sport and insist on a rule update

to introduce an advance in science

ⁱ David Edell (UK) riding JUSTINTIME Photo by Mark Amirault©, Dart World Inc.,

ⁱⁱ (From a Jumping Camp in the UK)

ⁱⁱⁱ Concorso Ippico Nazionale CSOC Brasile 21 Guino 2009 C.L. Castellazo

^{iv} (Santiago, Chile)

^v (Photo courtesy of Alice Beardsworth, UK)

^{vi} (Western)

^{vii} (barrel racing)

^{viii} Logos Hall's MOUSE (2005) was the first bitless horse to finish the 100-mile Tevis Cup ride

^{ix} Wendy Benns, a member of the Canadian Endurance Team, riding at Biltmore 2005

^x Dt Lissie Seidell, a German veterinarian working in England, member of the Heythrop Team Chasing team

^{xi} Sarah Getchell riding at an Intermediate Event, Groton, Massachusetts USA

^{xii} (Sandra van der Hof)

^{xiii} (Corrine Wilson, South Africa)

^{xiv} (Cowboy mounted shooting)

^{xv} (Icelandic tolt)

^{xvi} Three Lippizzan stallions, aged 9, 7 and 6, ridden by Heather Meyer were happy to be introduced to the bitless bridle one afternoon in 2010 at Hermann's Royal Lippizzan Stallions, Sarasota, Florida.

^{xvii} Laura Middlemiss driving Tazzle bitless, a horse that in a bit had been described as dangerous.

^{xviii} Courtesy of Madeleine Calkoen, a pioneer for bitless carriage driving and bitless dressage in The Netherlands

^{xix} Peter and Rose White, owners of the Southern Buggy Carriage Company, in Beaufort, South Carolina, USA and pioneers of bitless carriage driving since 2005

^{xx} 19 hand Belgian carriage horse owned by Peter and Rose White, one of five Belgians that have been driven bitless since 2005.

^{xxi} An example of the equipment that is standard practice for most carriage companies

^{xxii} FRITIOF PIRATEN, a Swedish Harness Horse, trained by Susan Richter was the first horse to win a race when driven in a crossunder bitless bridle

^{xxiii} A slack bit bypass strap enables rein tension to be focused on the crossunder bitless bridle rather than the bit. The length of the bypass strap can be adjusted, as required, so that signals can be transmitted entirely to the bit or entirely to the crossunder, or to any intermediate degree between the two. Initially, the design was approved by the Swedish Harness Horse Association (SHHA), as undeniably, the horse had a bit in its mouth and therefore complied with the rules. During this time, Fritiof Piraten won his race. Subsequently, permission was withdrawn pending trials of all harness horse equipment by the SWHA.

^{xxiv} Radiograph courtesy of Tufts University, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, North Grafton, Massachusetts, USA

^{xxv} Tongue ties have been in use for many years and ring bits have been introduced in the last few years

^{xxvi} Flash nosebands are used in the hope of keeping the mouth closed though they do not always succeed in this intent. This is because the incentive for a bitted horse to open its mouth (the bit) has not been removed. A feral horse or a domesticated horse at liberty runs with its mouth closed and lips sealed.

^{xxvii} Tongue lolling is only one of hundreds of signs of bit-induced pain and distress exhibited by horses in racing and all other disciplines