



The BITLESS BRIDLE

U.S. Patent No. 6,591,289

by Dr. Robert Cook



USER'S MANUAL

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IMPORTANT:

**Read the fitting instructions on pages four and five before using.
Improper fitting can result in less effective control.**

AVOIDANCE OF ACCIDENTS

Nevertheless, equitation is an inherently risky activity and The Bitless Bridle, Inc., can accept no responsibility for any accidents that might occur.

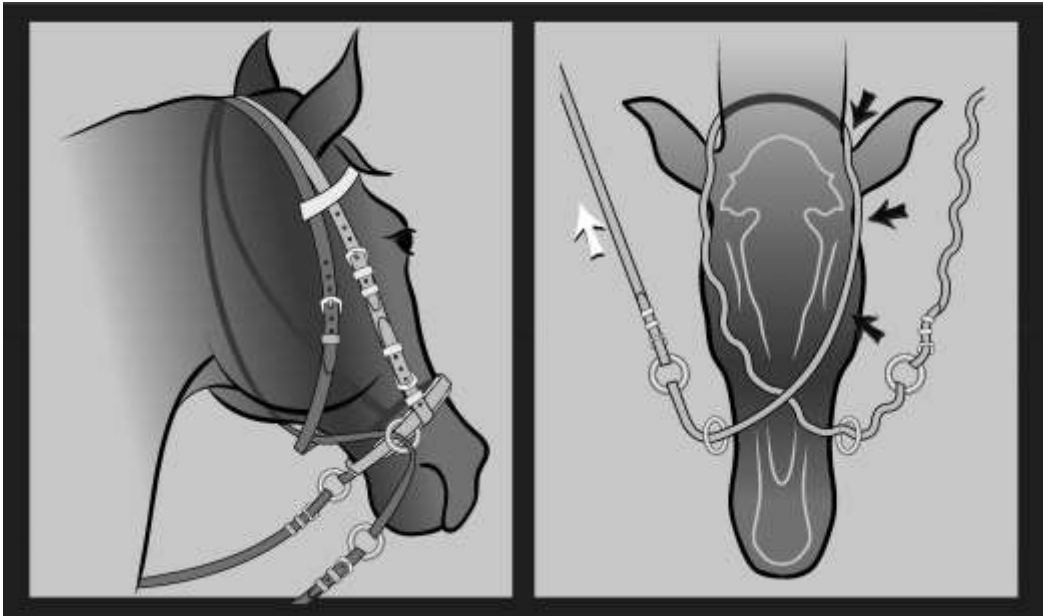
CAUTION

Observe the following during first time use:

When first introduced to the Bitless Bridle™, it sometimes revives a horse's spirits with a feeling of "free at last". Such a display of exuberance will eventually pass, but be prepared for the possibility even though it occurs in less than 1% of horses. Begin in a covered school or a small paddock rather than an open area. Consider preliminary longeing or a short workout in the horse's normal tack. These and other strategies familiar to horse people can be used to reduce the small risk of boisterous behavior.

APPLICATION

The action of this bridle differs fundamentally from all other bitless bridles (the hackamores, bosals, and sidepulls). By means of a simple but subtle system of two loops, one over the poll and one over the nose, the bridle embraces the whole of the head. It can be thought of as providing the rider with a benevolent headlock on the horse (See illustration below) . Unlike the bit method of control, the Bitless Bridle is compatible with the physiological needs of the horse at exercise. First and foremost, it does not injure or frighten the horse, but neither does it interfere with the horse's ability to breathe and stride freely.



view from **side**

view from **below**

Steering:

A squeeze on one rein (*white arrow*) pushes inoffensively but persuasively on the opposite half of the head (*black arrows*). Where the head goes, the horse follows. Horses respond better to being pushed than pulled. They also prefer to receive the aids distributed painlessly over a large area of the head than painfully and focally in the mouth, an exquisitely sensitive region.

Braking:

A squeeze on both reins hugs the whole of the head and triggers a 'submit' response. This applies more effective brakes than that provided by a bit. The Bitless Bridle™ provides communication by applying painless pressure across the poll, behind the ears (a region of particular responsiveness), down the side of the face, under the chin and across the nose.

THE AIDS

The aids are the same as with the bit method of control. From the rider's perspective there is very little difference in the way you communicate with your horse, though you will probably eventually discover that you can ride with a lighter, more subtle hand.

Most horses (and riders) take to the bridle on the very first day. They do not require weeks of adjustment. A few riders have reported that, at first, the horse feels a little heavier in the hand than with a bit but this im-pression passes. In effect, the horse becomes lighter on the forehead and most riders sense that the horse becomes more collected.

If a rider wishes to introduce a horse in stages to the feel of the Bitless Bridle™, the horse could first be long lined in the bridle before being mounted.

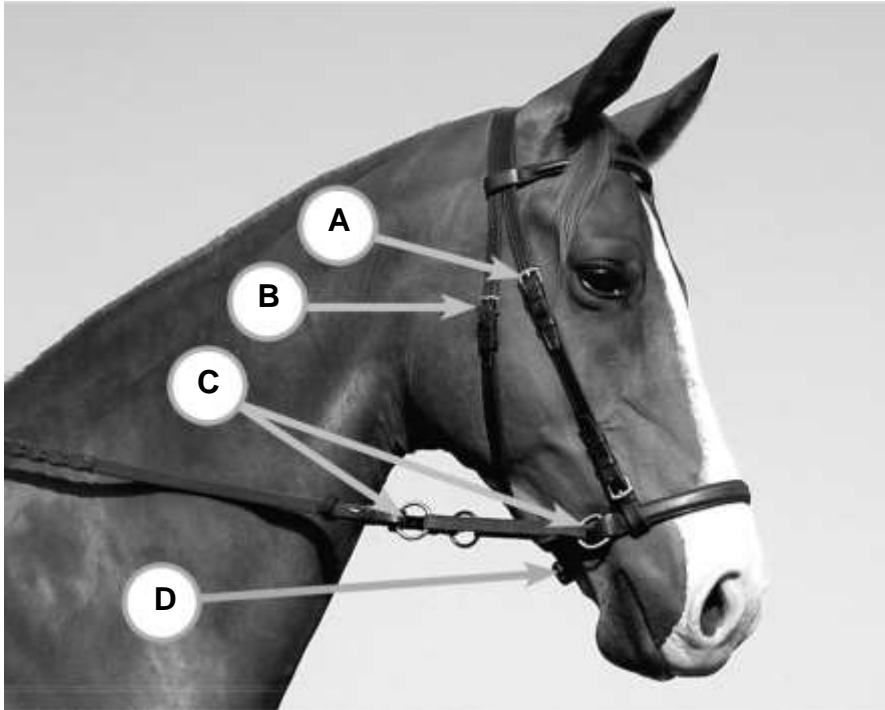
Riders should strive for light contact and an independent seat. The reins should not normally be used as a safety harness and the means whereby riders retain their seat or restore their balance. Nevertheless, if it should become necessary, the reins can be used in this way without hurting the horse.

Horses bolt because of fear or pain. Pain in regions other than the mouth can still be responsible for bolting. For example, pain in the back or feet (from saddle or shoes) should be considered.

It is not recommended that riders attempt to stop a runaway horse by simply hauling on both reins at the same time. If equitation ever comes to a trial of strength, the horse is going to win.

If, when using the Bitless Bridle™, a horse should ever show signs of bolting, the rider can regain control by steering the horse into a circle. If this is not possible because of the surroundings then the rider can "saw" the reins to bring the horse back into control. Unlike the situation when using a bit, this rapid alternate traction on left and right rein (also referred to as "rattling" or "shaking" the reins) can be practiced without hurting the horse. Apply this aid vigorously and with authority, to get your horse's attention. Remember also to sit back, deep in the saddle. Finally, all horses should be trained to respond to a verbal "WHOA!"

FITTING THE BRIDLE TO YOUR HORSE



Step 1: Unbuckle the chinstrap (item D above), leaving all other buckles fastened, and spreadopen the noseband. Slip the bridle over the horse's ears much like a normal bridle, making sure the cross-under straps go under the jaw and the noseband is over the nose. Loosely buckle the chinstrap, it will be tightened correctly later.

Step 2: Adjust the left and right cavesson buckles (item A above) so that the lower edge of the noseband sits approximately 1.5 to 2 inches above the corner of the mouth.

Step 3: Adjust the left and right cross-under strap buckles (item B above) such that there are at least 3 inches of cross-under strap between the ring on the noseband and the attachment ring for the reins (item C above).

Step 4: Tighten the chinstrap buckle (item D above) until you can just get one flat finger under the chinstrap. Make sure you have not trapped either of the cross-under straps under the chinstrap.

Step 5: Attach your reins to the O-rings on the ends of the cross-under straps. Check that the browband sits comfortably and is not pinching the base of the ears.

Once the bridle is properly adjusted, the chinstrap is the only buckle you need to release to bridle or unbridle your horse.

ADJUSTMENTS & PROBLEMS

Fitting problems:

We receive occasional reports from riders that the bridle does not seem to be effective on their particular horse. Issues include problems with steering, problems with stopping and headshaking or other indications of discomfort. These issues can be caused by the following:

1. The chinstrap is too loose. **Tighten the chin strap so that only one flat finger can be comfortably inserted between the underside of the jaw and the chin strap.** The chin strap should be sufficiently snug so that the headstall does not slide when rein traction is applied. If this happens, leverage will be lost and skin abrasion could develop. One sign of the noseband being too loose is that the cheek straps of the headstall (*item A at left*) bow-out prominently when traction is applied to the reins. Some slight bowing is normal, but if the bowing extends out two inches or more from the face, an adjustment to the chinstrap is needed.

2. The noseband is not low enough. The correct placement of the noseband is lower than most other bridles. Placing the noseband too high will result in some loss of communication, which can cause problems with steering and stopping. **We recommend placing the noseband 1.5 to 2 inches above the corner of the mouth. But all horses are different so you might have to play with this to find what makes your horse the happiest.**

3. The noseband is too low. Occasionally a horse will show discomfort when the noseband is placed at the recommended position of 1.5 to 2 inches above the corners of the mouth. If this occurs, **first try using less rein pressure.** Secondly, try moving the noseband up a little. Your level of communication is reduced as the noseband is raised, but this may be just what the horse needs. It is important to make sure that the noseband is supported by bone and not placed so low that it is supported by the soft fleshy part of the nose. If placed too low, the noseband will obstruct the nostrils and could cause head shaking or even rearing.

Other problems:

Teeth with sharp edges: The cross-under straps of the Bitless Bridle put pressure along the horse's cheek, which may press against the sharp edges of teeth. This problem can be solved by having the teeth floated.

Other pain or discomfort: With the pain of the bit removed, your horse may become more aware of other painful problems such as a poorly fitted saddle or shoeing/h hoof trim problems. Try riding or longeing your horse bareback to determine if your saddle is a source of trouble.

Habitual behavior: Your horse may be accustomed to using any one of a number of bit-aversion techniques to override your ability to communicate your commands. The Bitless Bridle's communication cannot be evaded, and some horses may become frustrated and throw a bit of a temper tantrum when they realize they no longer control the show. Patience and groundwork will eventually teach your horse to accept your cues.

There are numerous other less common reasons why your horse may not respond correctly to the Bitless Bridle. If you have problems with your horse in the Bitless Bridle, please contact our customer service department (see the front page for contact information). We will work with you to try to find a solution.

CONVERTING TO A HALTER

LEADING:

You can lead your horse by taking the reins over the horse's head and using the reins themselves as a lead shank. Use a scissors snap to unite the two O-rings of the cross-under straps to make the halter even more secure. Alternatively, remove the reins from the Bitless Bridle, bring the two O-rings at the end of the cross-under straps together and hook your lead to **both** of the rings.

LONGEING (Reins removed):

Convert into a halter using the "reins removed" instructions above, then attach your longe line as you normally would to the O-ring on the noseband

MAINTENANCE

The leather bridles must be kept in good condition, with regular cleaning and conditioning. Pay special attention to the cross-under straps, particularly where they pass through the O-rings. It is important to keep the leather supple and well fed to avoid the leather cracking at this region of high friction and wear. **As with any leather tack, any components showing signs of cracking should be replaced.**

If neglected, nylon webbing absorbs dirt and becomes stiff, abrasive, and unsightly. This can be avoided by regular hand washing.

Beta bridles are the simplest to maintain. To clean wipe down with a damp cloth.

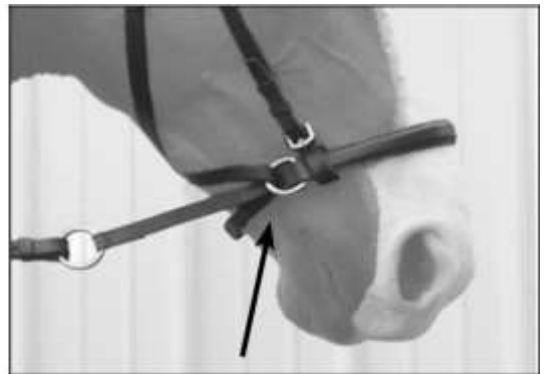
HOW TO ASSEMBLE THE BITLESS BRIDLE:

The Bitless Bridle™ comes fully assembled, but if you disassemble it for cleaning or conditioning, follow the steps below to ensure proper reassembly:

1. With the cross-under straps removed, put the bridle on your horse and buckle the chinstrap.
2. Make sure the O-rings on the noseband are pushed down and lying flat against the chinstrap.
3. Take the buckle end of the cross-under strap (not the end with the O-ring) and feed it *from the outside* through the O-ring on the noseband, under the chin, up the opposite side of the face to the crown piece and fasten. (See photos below)
4. Repeat the process on the other side with the second cross-under strap.
5. Attach your reins (or lines, if you are a driver) to the O-rings on the ends of the cross-under straps.



Cross-under strap through O-ring correctly



Cross-under strap through O-ring incorrectly

THANK YOU

YOU CAN HELP

If you and your horse love this bridle, please help us to promote the cause of a more harmonious relationship between horse and rider. Your positive comments to other riders would be sincerely appreciated

We also welcome your feedback, both positive and negative, since we use this information to improve our product and literature. Feel free to contact us via any of the methods shown on the front cover

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