

English Style



The BITLESS BRIDLE™

by Dr. Robert Cook

U.S. Patent No. 6,591,589

Western Style



USER'S MANUAL

The Bitless Bridle, Inc.
1200 Nursery Rd.
Wrightsville, PA 17368

email: info@bitlessbridle.com

Phone: 717-252-2058

Fax: 717-252-2059

Toll free: 866-235-0938

IMPORTANT:

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

"Putting a bit in the mouth of a horse about to work is akin to muzzling a horse about to eat."

Dr. Robert Cook

AVOIDANCE OF ACCIDENTS

Sound physiological arguments indicate that the Bitless Bridle™ is safer than the bit method of control. Experience with the bridle since 1997 supports this statement. *Nevertheless, equitation is an inherently risky activity and The Bitless Bridle, Inc., can accept no responsibility for any accidents that might occur.*

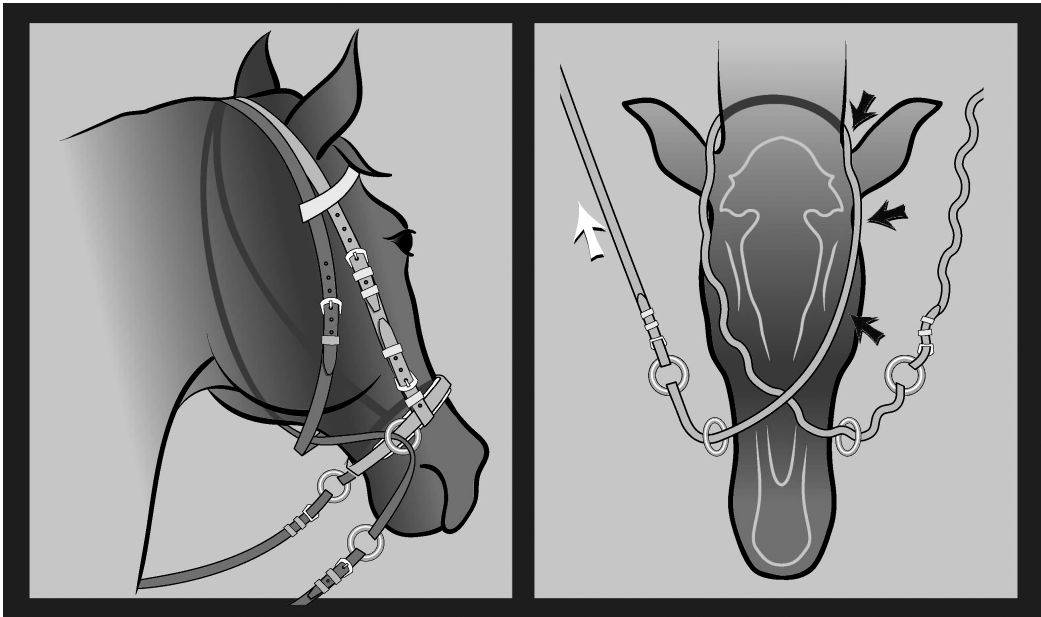
CAUTION

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, as does the bit, 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 impression passes. In effect, the horse becomes lighter on the forehand 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 longed in the bridle before being mounted. Most riders do not feel it necessary to do this but it is, nevertheless, of interest that a horse can be longed in the bridle and this facility has, in any case, some advantages for training purposes.

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.

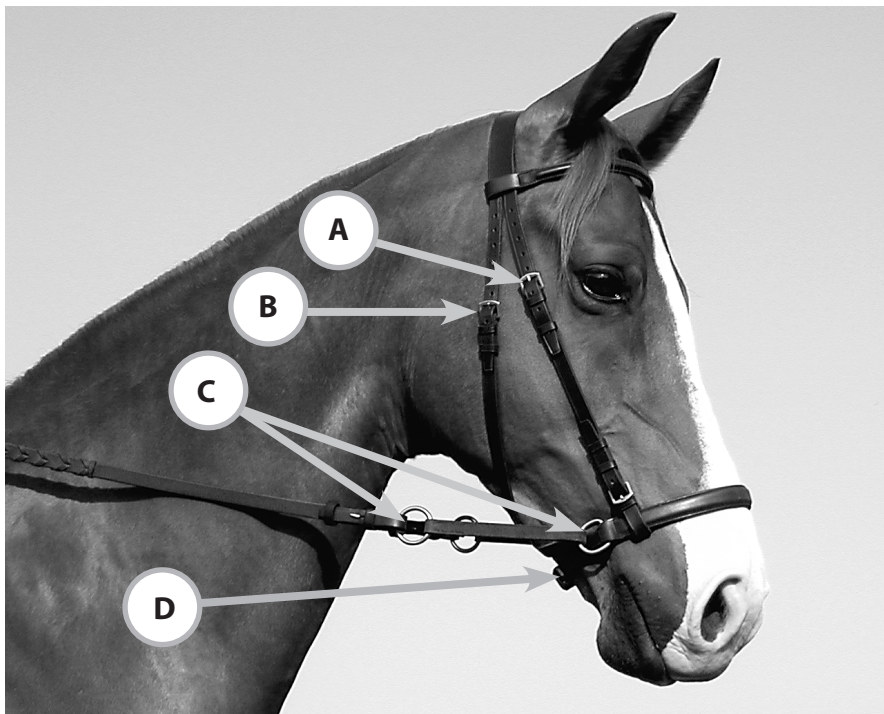
The Bitless Bridle™ provides 'brakes' that are better than a bit. Unlike the bit method of control which the horse can disable by placing the bit between its teeth, at no time can the rider be left without any brakes at all.

Horses bolt because of fear or pain. By removing the bit, the rider has eliminated one of the most common sources of fear and 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 spread open 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 & PROBLEM SOLVING

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.**

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/hoof trim problems. Try riding or longeing your horse bareback to determine if your saddle is a source of trouble. You may want to consider switching to a barefoot trim for your horse to eliminate metal from your horse's feet as well as the mouth.

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.

TYING (Reins removed):

IMPORTANT: Do not tie your horse using the cross-under straps.

Take the right cross-under strap, bring it under your horse's chin and use a scissor snap (or something similar) to connect the O-ring on the right cross-under strap to the O-ring on the left side of the noseband.

Do the same with the left cross-under strap, hooking it to the O-ring on the right side of the noseband.

To tie your horse you can either snap your lead to one of the O-rings on the noseband, or fasten a third scissor snap to the loosened chinstrap then attach your lead to the other end of that scissor snap. Don't forget to fasten your lead with a quick-release knot or, better still, by using a pressure-release device.

TYING (Reins attached):

Do not tie your horse using the cross-under straps.

Hook your lead rope to one of the O-rings on the **noseband** (not the cross-under strap) – OR – hook your lead rope to the loosened chinstrap using a scissor snap.

You may want to experiment with other ways to tie. If the snap on your lead rope is big enough, you may just want to hook it directly to the loosened chinstrap (being careful not to pinch!)

It's always best to tie your horse using some type of 'quick release' snap so you can easily and quickly free your horse if necessary.

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.

LONGEING (Reins attached):

Fit the bridle as you normally would for riding. Attach the reins to the saddle or surcingle with bungee cords to simulate gentle hand pressure, then clip the longe line to the O-ring on the noseband.

MAINTENANCE

The leather bridle 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.**

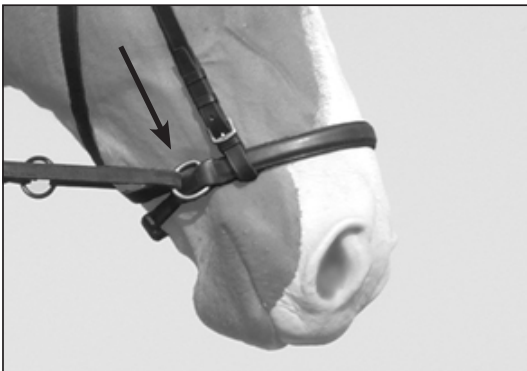
If neglected, nylon webbing absorbs dirt and becomes stiff, abrasive, and unsightly. This can be avoided by regular washing. A great convenience is that nylon bridles can be put in a washing machine.

Beta bridles are the simplest to maintain. To remove mud, drop them in a bucket of water. To remove grease, add a little detergent to the water.

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.

Dr. Cook's research concerning the effects of bitted and bitless riding is on-going. You can participate by requesting a questionnaire from our office. Returning the questionnaire to Dr. Cook will help his research and may enable him to offer further advice. The questionnaire may also be used as a diagnostic tool, prior to adopting the bridle, as a means of recognizing the nature and source of unacceptable behavior.

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.

If you would like to help The Bitless Bridle gain acceptance in equine disciplines such as dressage, hunter-jumper and racing, you may contact the governing organizations for those disciplines:

United States Equine Federation
www.usef.org

Fédération Equestre Internationale
www.horsesport.org

For more information on how to submit requests for rule changes to these organizations, see our website.

The Bitless Bridle™ "No-Risk" Satisfaction Guarantee

If you purchased your Bitless Bridle directly from us, our policy allows you to use the bridle for 30 days and return it for a full refund if you are not completely satisfied (*please note that shipping costs are not refundable*). On the other hand, if you purchased a synthetic bridle and you like it so much that you are now kicking yourself for not having had the courage to buy a leather one, you can return the synthetic bridle and we will give you full credit for it against the cost of the leather bridle upgrade. This way, you have nothing to lose by giving the bridle a trial and a great deal to gain.

If you purchased your Bitless Bridle from a catalog, tack shop or other distributor, contact them directly to see what options they offer, if any.

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