

THE HEADSHAKING SYNDROME

Editor's Note: 'Headshaking' is the term that seems to have become fixed to this syndrome, so it is the one used to identify the problem for the purpose of this section. However, headshaking is a poor descriptive choice and certainly not the most characteristic symptom of the syndrome. **Head tossing or nose flipping** would be better labels. Affected horses do not rotate their heads like a dog with ear trouble. The spasmodic movement of the head is a sudden elevation of head and neck in a vertical plane, not a horizontal one. Remember too that the word 'syndrome' is used in medicine to describe a number of symptoms occurring together and characterizing a specific disease. Head tossing is only one of a collection of symptoms caused most commonly, in my experience, by bit-induced nerve pain (trigeminal neuralgia). Other symptoms include muzzle rubbing, sneezing, snorting, head shyness, hypersensitivity to bright light, wind or rain, grazing on the fly, lachrymation, and excessive blinking. All these symptoms are most commonly triggered by exercise under saddle (in a bitted horse) and exacerbated by warm ambient temperature (i.e. it is a syndrome that is much worse in the summer months). The syndrome is likely to be accompanied by any number of 90 other behavioral aberrations that horses exhibit as the result of bit usage.

- Robert Cook

I have been delighted with my new Bitless Bridle. I bought it to try with my Intermediate endurance horse, as I have always wanted to go bitless but am also not mad on hackamores!!!! After 4 weeks, she is very relaxed & happy in it - far less **head shaking and rubbing her face with her left fore**, never **snatches** and even quicker to respond to voice commands. The physiology makes sense and it seems to work in practice ... excellent product.

- Claire Shorthose BVMS MRCVS (Cheshire, UK) 10/15/04

I purchased your bridle this summer. Then I did not get a chance to use it.

I have just this week ridden several times with it with my 14- year-old Quarter Horse and a 9-year-old Tennessee Walker

The Quarter horse I have had since he was two and he has always **flipped his head**. The weight of a hackamore, halter or any type of bridle always annoys him. No amount of discipline would break him of the habit and it was for this horse alone that I purchased the bridle. I have been using a mechanical hackamore and he tolerated it the best. The problem is, sometimes other people ride him and they are way too rough for such a severe piece of equipment.

I put your bridle on him, he flipped his head once, shook his head and never flipped it again!

I was concerned about the Walker as there were a lot of comments about whether a Walker would gait with this bridle. My Walker did not flip his head but was always trying to **push through the hackamore. Halters and a bridle were like shooting off the starting gun at a race!** I put your bridle on him and he was not quite sure what to do. After a couple trips around the pasture, some turns and

stops, he relaxed and was very nice to ride. Then I went around a couple times with him collected and gaiting, it was heaven!

So Thanks. And thank you for offering the money back guarantee, as I would not have tried the bridle without it.

I send out information to a large number of local horse people about local events and other news about horses. I just sent out your web site and information on your product.

- Lani L. VanderBeek, 9/29/04

My family purchased a horse in March -- a 5 yr old Pinto mare. Shortly after we got our new mare we named MARIAH, she started **tossing her head** and becoming **difficult to control**.

I e-mailed the previous owner and asked her what kind of bit she had been using. She said she used a full cheek rubber broken snaffle bit. So I ordered one. The response from Mariah was worse than it had been with the twisted wire snaffle we had been using. I returned it immediately. I decided to try the kind of bit we had been told was fairly mild called a Robart Pinchless Spinner ball snaffle bit. But one day while using this bit and riding Mariah out on the trail, her **head came up so fast and high, she hit me in the face and made my nose bleed**.

I knew something was wrong then. At first I thought it might be behavioral and tried different training techniques to get her to stop tossing her head -- riding the horse in circles, holding the horse's head up in air with your hand so they'll want to keep their head down, doing neck flexion exercises, etc -- all of which did not work. I even had her teeth floated and found out the previous owner had Mariah's wolf teeth removed. Then I began talking to my vet and looking on the internet and found out it could be a medical problem. If this is related to the trigeminal nerve in her eye which branches out and runs along her upper and lower teeth, no wonder she would be more sensitive to having a bit in her mouth than most other horses.

Luckily, I have a friend who owns a Bitless Bridle and asked her if I could borrow it to see how Mariah would behave. She was great in an arena but I knew the true test would be on the trail. A few days ago I took her out on the trail for the first time in months with the bitless. It was great! Hardly any head tossing at all. I was amazed.

I am definitely convinced the bitless is the way to go. I tried using a halter on her while riding on the trail yesterday and it just wasn't as good. We did tug-of-way with the reins almost the whole time.

- Sue Schedin, Eagan, MN, 8/25/04

Here is my day #1 Bitless Bridle story:

I have a very sensitive and sweet green broke Paso Fino horse four yr old "SHORTY." He has had basic "John Lyons" round pen reasoning training. He continued to work well in the round pen/saddling/bridling until about the fifth time I placed him in a snaffle bit. His **behavior changed for the worse dramatically**

overnight ... hopping around when trying to saddle, attempting to rear, not allowing me to mount, extreme head shaking and lowering of the head, attempting to buck or rear, turning in circles, refusing to move forward, clumsiness/tripping/almost fell, walking in a zig-zag fashion. The poor guy was just completely stressed and fearful. I also noticed that he began to rub his head on anything he could find after the bit was removed.

So, I decided to buy one of your bridles. I knew about the Bitless Bridle, but allowed others to sway me to use a "gentle" snaffle. I am not an experienced horse trainer and am just getting back into riding after a long time. The customer service staff was wonderful in stepping up the shipment to second day air. I needed the bridle as soon as possible, because I was not ever going to put a bit in his mouth again! My intuition and now my observations were telling me I really screwed up!

The Bitless Bridle arrived today and we rode tonight. I had to work with SHORTY for 30 min. to get the bridle near his head. I know he thought the leather smell was the bitted bridle coming at him! We finally got the bridle on him and he relaxed to let us make the proper adjustments. No problem fitting the bridle, the fit was perfect for his cob size head. He let me mount, though reluctantly, and we rode in the round pen for 20 min. The head tossing and lowering stopped immediately. He began to relax and moved nicely, no thoughts of bucking or rearing. I felt confident enough to move out of the round pen. SHORTY decided to head back for the barn, but we worked through that and he soon headed down the rode on his own accord. Yes, he actually walked in a straight line! We had a lovely one-mile ride. He soon relaxed, lifted his head and moved into his little Paso gait at times, he really did seem to feel free. SHORTY had no difficulty halting, in fact he stopped in a much smoother and timely fashion. Additionally, I felt much more relaxed and confident. I was not constantly having to correct SHORTY. Funny thing, when I took the Bitless Bridle off of him, he opened his mouth like he did when I would remove his bit! It will be interesting to see how long it takes him to figure that one out!

SHORTY and I have a lot of growing to do. I already feel after one ride that I am moving in the right direction with this Bitless Bridle. It is nice to know that I cannot hurt him and he now has a chance to do the right thing without constant correcting. One more comment is that I see a few (very few at that) negative comments out on the web. I want to say that anyone that thinks they are going to be able to stop a runaway horse with a bit is dreaming.

Thank you so much for being involved with this product. Needless to say, your credentials are impressive and your research educated me to the problems associated with bits. This bridle just makes sense. I listened to your interview on the horseshow.com and I agree with Rick Lamb that this is one of the greatest innovations in the horse world since the stirrup. This bridle was definitely a miracle for the situation I was dealing with. I am sure we will be purchasing an additional bridle for our other Paso Fino that we are training.

- Sharon and John Wentz, Taos, New Mexico, 8/17/04

Subject: My story of finally going totally bitless....

I purchased the Bitless Bridle from you several years ago and tried it on my TB/Paint dressage horse. I liked it immediately and he took to it immediately. BUT we were met with a lot of criticism and discouragement at the barn we were at. My

dressage instructor did not want to teach me in it and I was told I would not be able to show in it so it would be better not to let my horse get used to it. So I gave in and didn't use it for dressage.

I did continue to trail ride both of my horses in it (the other is a 16 hand Clydesdale cross) and occasionally used it on my own in the ring.

Meanwhile I was having continuing **problems in my lessons getting my horse to go forward and accept the bit!** I had gotten him as a 4 year old and I suspect he was ridden in draw reins and tie downs and the like...trying to make him into a Western horse. I also suspect a fair amount of abuse went on along with this "training". **He would back up down the aisle when I first tried to put a bridle on him.** He would **refuse to stand to be mounted** and all of those types of evasions. The biggest problem I would have with him over the years would be going forward into the bit, getting him to not **curl up in a ball and avoid it** and various forms of **spooking and behavior issues.** Over the years I would say he has exhibited MOST of the symptoms that you have listed on your website. I couldn't even list them all...there are so many! He also exhibited many of the signs of **Facial Neuralgia or headshaking...**the most prominent being **an almost obsessive need to rub his face on his foreleg.** He also did the **head flipping and yawing, sneezing, snorting, gagging, trying to spit out the bit, get his tongue over it, opening his mouth and even got the hiccups.**

I moved my horses home about a year ago and I noticed that his symptoms were getting progressively worse. He even **bolted** and took off on me one day on the property for no reason. He took off through the trees and I had to bail out. He was becoming more and more **dangerous, spooky and surly and determined to get rid of the bit.**

I suspected he had a problem with his teeth of some kind. I had always had his teeth attended to regularly by the veterinarian but this time I called a dentist. I couldn't get an appointment for a month so in the meantime I stopped riding with a bit and used my Bitless Bridle exclusively. It struck me after the second or third ride that the horse had changed dramatically. He was relaxed... there was no more spooking and he was now able and willing to work and concentrate. I noted this but decided to see what the dentist had to say. He finally came with my new vet and she tranquilized the horse so they could really see what was going on. It took all of 5 seconds to find a badly impacted wolf tooth, which was immediately removed. I was told not to use a bit for five days and then it would be OK.

In the meantime I continued to use the Bitless Bridle and gave it more like two weeks before I tried the bit again. Alas, back came all the old symptoms...**tense and spooky, yawing, refusal to go forward, not concentrating, choppy gaits...and on and on.** In addition the horse was **not tracking up evenly behind.** He had been diagnosed with loose stifles so I worked on getting his muscling around the right stifle back in shape (it had deteriorated over the winter as I didn't have a ring to ride in at the time)

Anyway, I started to experiment. I would ride bitless for a few days and then ride with the bit. I knew that physically the horse's teeth were OK now so I was able to compare his behavior both bitted and not. The difference between the two was amazing. I began to ride more and more with the Bitless Bridle and got to where I would only use a bit once a week or once every two weeks. He would object to the bit every time but would finally make an attempt to cooperate, But it was never the

same results as with the Bitless Bridle. I began to get incredible trot extensions across the diagonal when bitless. I could not get them before when I schooled them in a bit. I could do very nice shoulder-in, leg yields, renvers, halt from my seat, walk pirouettes, backing, and wow, a forward canter! My horse was so happy and so willing to do anything I asked...the spookiness was totally gone. He was focused and trying so hard to please me and listen to me. All of his other problems and symptoms started to disappear, one by one. His gaits are fluid and true and he is moving straight and even tracking up evenly now. Makes me wonder if there was a stifle problem at all???? I do believe now that it was all caused by rein lameness. It was not from me hanging on the reins...it was from something before I got him no doubt as he would object to the bit even on a totally loose rein. It was as if he **could not breathe with it.**

I am totally convinced that this horse can never again go in a bit. I have tried every kind I could think of on him and nothing helped. He obviously has a very real physical aversion to a bit and after reading all the literature on the website I am convinced of it. His aversion came out in so many physical and mental ways with him. He should have been your "poster child" for the Bitless Bridle. I only wish I had realized it sooner and not listened to trainers and instructors that really didn't know what they were talking about. I now see how couched in tradition they are and how reluctant to change they can be. Most do not even want to "hear" of anything new. I think that if they were to start using a Bitless Bridle they would have to start really using their seat and legs and train the horse instead of riding from front to back. I bet most would not be able to do it. They need to start to put their money where their mouth is.

I have a new trainer now. I rode one lesson with her in a Myler bit (probably the most tolerable of all the bits I have tried) and the next lesson with the Bitless Bridle. She was totally blown away by the difference in the horse. She was so enthusiastic that she borrowed my bridle that day and tried it on all three of her horses. She is convinced too and is ordering a bridle for herself. In addition she is getting another of her students to try it as well as a friend who is about to start backing a young horse.

I have shared all this information with her and we are very interested in petitioning the USEF about this. I am willing to ride tests Hors Concours in the meantime. I will not hang a fake bit on the bridle. I believe the dressage rules must be changed and people need to be educated. I tell everyone I can about this and hope that one day we will be able to ride in a recognized show bitless. After all... the first thing we should all be concerned with in dressage and riding is to "do no harm" and certainly riding a test in a Bitless Bridle is doing no harm...and in fact is doing our equine friends a big favor.

By the way...I also jump this horse and he loves it. I used to have a problem with him **rushing and taking off after fences, diving and trying to buck...**no more. I jump him bitless and he is just superb! It is like I have a totally new horse...a much nicer version of the horse I love! I also have a baby Haflinger horse in OH that will be coming home when she is a yearling. I plan to never put shoes on her and never to put a bit in her mouth. She will be the lucky recipient of my new-found knowledge and enlightenment. None of my horses will ever wear a bit again.

Thanks so much for your website and your bridle and the work you do. If you would like me to fill out a questionnaire or anything I would love to do so.

Lila Culhane-Erb,. Bangor, PA, 8/15/04

Lila subsequently completed the questionnaire. She documented that, when bitted, her horse exhibited 48 problems. After using the BB for a month, 43 of these problems were solved; a success rate of 90%. Here is my response to her e-mail

Thank you so much for taking the trouble to complete the questionnaire. I have studied your responses with great interest. Even though I have now seen many reports from riders who have solved huge numbers of problems by using the BB, I do not recall anyone who has solved quite so many as you! Congratulations! I count that you had 48 problems with INKY when bitted and that 43 of these were solved by using the BB. This represents a success rate of around 90%, which is most impressive.

You listed one problem that I have not previously associated with the bit ... hiccups. If you could expand a little on this item I would be most grateful. A 'hiccup' is something that is officially recognized and encumbered with the grandiloquent name 'synchronous diaphragmatic flutter' or, less pompously, 'thumps.' The spasm of the diaphragm, responsible for the hiccup, occurs in synchrony with the heart beat, hence the name. The problem is not common but occurs most often in long-distance endurance horses and is considered to be a sign of stress, dehydration, or some metabolic disturbance. There is, however, a non-synchronous form of 'thumps' that has also been documented.

Did INKY produce this sign after or during exercise I wonder or was it something that occurred at rest? Anything more you can tell me would be valuable.

Thanks again for your input.

... and Lila's reply

I was happy to fill out the questionnaire for you and want you to know that this horse has made a remarkable turn around from riding him bitless. I am now doing dressage and jumping him in the bridle exclusively and he is totally relaxed and forward and happy to do anything I ask of him. Thank you so much...I now have a horse that is fun to ride again.

About the **hiccups**... Indeed, I know it is not a common thing for horses to have. When I first told my old trainer about it she did not believe me until she experienced it herself when riding INKY and also saw and heard them when I was riding. It would occur when I would start to ride...usually as I started to trot. At first I tried to ride through it and give him a totally loose rein thinking they would go away but usually that did not work. He would get even more **agitated** with every hiccup and it seemed that **it either hurt him or he had trouble breathing** as he would **swish his tail** and want to **stop trotting**. He **resisted cantering** at all when he had these spells of hiccups. It also did not occur EVERY time I rode and I could never quite figure out what triggered it but I would guess it was stress more than anything. It never occurred out on trails ... just in a ring situation when I would be schooling. I am assuming now that it was caused by anticipation of having to work **on** the bit??? There has never been an episode when riding bitless.

I will tell you that a few days ago I attempted to ride INKY in a bit again just to see if he would even accept it. It was a disaster! He was **not even happy at a walk** in it and **refused to halt!** He knows perfectly well to halt ... just from my seat but would not and instead commenced to **pulling and walking through the bit with clenched teeth and jaw.** When I asked for the trot (on the softest contact possible) he **ran around with his head up in the air** at first ... next his **head was down on the ground like an anteater.** I kept trying to post to a nice steady rhythm no matter what he did with his head but it was just getting worse. **He couldn't even trot in a straight line** down the long side of the ring. He **refused to even come back to a walk** now and **almost ran us into the fence!** He was definitely fixated on the bit and making his opinion known to me.

I went back to the barn and put the Bitless Bridle on and went back out to the ring to see what would happen. Voila! I had a perfect horse again ... very nice and relaxed ... lovely halts and transitions. I rode for another 40 minutes and it was a very nice ride ... leg yields, shoulder-ins, up and down transitions, etc.

I have also been using this bridle on my Clydesdale draft cross and he also goes well in it. My new instructor is totally sold on the bridle after seeing the difference it made in INKY. She purchased one for herself and has been riding her own three horses in it. She is also having some of her students use it and would like to be a Bitless Bridle instructor. She is a certified riding instructor.

We have been figuring different techniques to use with it. For instance, we find it is best to half halt using both reins with even pressure with this bridle...as the concepts of inside leg to outside hand and half halting with the outside rein really don't apply without a bit. We both ride with more aids from our seat and leg and feel that using this bridle will really show people how much they rely on the reins, which they should not be doing. We both feel we could take a horse to Second Level with the bridle but are not sure about past that yet. I think you could probably achieve enough collection with it for Third Level. I don't even want to ride levels higher than that because I think that the extreme collection required for horses then is just not good for them, or natural. I also feel that using double bridles is a nightmare and abusive...and would never use them on my horses even if they accepted them.

I have had many discussions on a dressage website (ultimatedressage.com) that I frequent about this bridle. Many of the older "purists" and people who have never even tried it are against using it. I think a lot of people are just not open to change and the idea that they might have to rethink their riding and teaching skills is scary to them. Many have agreed, however, that it may have a use at the lower levels and for certain horses but they keep quoting "tradition" and "rules" which in my opinion is not always a good thing. There are a lot of other riders on the website however that sent me personal emails regarding the bridle, so I know there are others interested and a lot that would like to see it legalized for dressage, especially at the lower levels. Many would like more information about it, so I refer them to your website. The "purists" contend that it will never be legal. We shall see.

If there is anything else I can help you with or clear up for you please don't hesitate to ask. I will keep you apprised of my progress with the bridle. I can foresee only good things at this point. I have a baby Haflinger horse that will be coming home next Spring/Summer (she is at the breeders in OH as she was just weaned) when she gets a little older. She will be trained in the Bitless Bridle exclusively.

Thanks again for a much needed product and all of your research.

- Lila Culhane-Erb.....and Inky and Splash...and little Gracie!, 9/10/04

... and my reply on 9/16/04

Thank you so much for the additional information about your horse and, in particular, about the hiccuping. Refreshing my memory about my own questionnaire, I was happy to discover that I had, in fact, anticipated that a hiccup should be one of the clinical signs caused by the bit. Line 54 addressed this possibility. I have now added the word hiccup to this line, in order that others don't miss this symptom. With this and another correction, it now means that your horse exhibited 50 problems and 45 of them were solved by the BB. INKY is certainly a poster horse for the BB.

But returning to the hiccup, I now have a few more questions. For example:

1. Over a period of one year when using a bit, how often did INKY develop hiccups?
2. On any one occasion, how long did the hiccuping last?
3. What was the approximate frequency of the hiccup in terms of spasms per minute?
4. How loud was the noise? How close to the horse did you have to be before you could hear it?
5. As the rider, I imagine you could feel the spasm resonate through his whole body? Did it coincide in any way with foot-fall?
6. Did you notice any synchrony of the spasm with INKY's respiratory rate? At the trot, such an observation might be difficult, as breathing sounds are not especially prominent (unlike at the canter)
7. Thinking back to these episodes, would you now associate the onset of hiccups with whether or not your horse had a stomach full of either food or water?

I was most interested to hear that this was something that only occurred in the ring, and generally at the start of a trot. In regard to your useful comments about the applicability of the BB to dressage up to third level, I have recently spoken to a dressage trainer who would support the BB even for advanced level performance.

Thank you for your thoughts about half halts. I shall have to bone up on this matter before I can fully understand what is meant by 'inside leg to outside hand' and half-halting with the 'outside rein.'

But I understand completely and agree with what you say regarding the way the BB encourages riders to rely less on the reins and more on 'seat and leg.'

Now, the questions about Inky's hiccups:

1. Its hard to say how often Inky had the hiccups over a years time. At first it seemed to happen when the weather turned cold and I thought it had something to do with the dry cold air in his lungs but that was not it as it started to happen more often at other times of the year as well. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to it. It appeared to me to be linked more to the difficulty of work we were attempting. I got the feeling it was related to stress he may have been feeling or the anticipation of the work. Sometimes it would happen several times a week and then not for a month or two. I realize this is not much help in pinning it down.
 2. The hiccups lasted for some time...maybe 5-10 minutes. Many times I just went back to a walk with him and then ended it there as every time I would start to trot it would start again and he would get very agitated and was not able to work.
 3. Spasms per minute....I would say approximately every 10 seconds give or take.
 4. The noise was quite pronounced. You could hear it from the ground with no problem. An instructor standing in the center of the ring could definitely hear it. One instructor commented that it sounded like it must be painful to him. I think it was.
 5. I do believe the spasms did coordinate with the footfalls of the trot...which foot I am not sure! And yes, as the rider you could feel it through his whole body. It was very disconcerting.
 6. I could not tell you honestly if they synchronized with his respiration rate.
 7. I do not think it had anything to do with a stomach full of food or water, as I did not feed him before I rode...other than perhaps some carrots/apples with his vitamins...which I still give him and he does not get the hiccups. Most of the time when I boarded him out...he was out when I got there and I brought him in and gave him his vitamins and then rode him.
 8. Yes, this only occurred in the ring and when I started to trot. My girlfriend reminded me also that it occurred when I was lunging him as well...I had forgotten that but she remembered it one day when she was in the ring riding and I was lunging him. He had a sore back at the time as I remember because he had outgrown his saddle and I was not riding him till I got a wider one for him. Ah ha! I lunged him with the bit ... which I think explains that as well.
- Now... a few additional comments and observations of late....
I lunged him in the Bitless Bridle the first time over the weekend. He went lovely in it ... no antics ... no hiccups. First I just attached the lunge line to the two rings together under his chin. Then I attached side reins ... one to each ring. It worked really well. He was relaxed and forward and very well behaved.
- We also had a very big breakthrough this past Sunday. I managed to get Inky to **load on the trailer** with almost no fuss at all. This is a MAJOR thing for this

horse. I had expected it to take anywhere from 40 minutes to an hour to get him to load as he is notoriously very bad about it...to the point where he will get part of the way in and then fly out backwards and around the side of the trailer and back up and try to pull you down the drive. We had many sessions with trailer loading lessons earlier this summer. It got progressively shorter in duration but it was ALWAYS a big stressful deal.

On Sunday ... he just tested once to see if he could back out which I let him do and then I said...that's it...let's go...and he looked at me and walked right in. 'I was totally blown away by this. He went in with me and put his head down to eat carrots that I had in a bucket there (before I could pick it up) and when he raised his head he banged it on the chest bar. He then backed-out and I thought...that's it...he won't get back in now. But again I was surprised...he went right back in with me. My husband helped me and put up the butt bar. Then I loaded my other horse and we took them for a short trip around the block and back home and unloaded them with lots of praise and treats.

Now I know a lot of people won't agree with me but I think this is directly related to the use of the Bitless Bridle. I really and truly feel this horse knows now that I am not going to hurt him. He is finally starting to really trust me. I felt that immediately on Sunday and then on Monday afternoon he demonstrated his new found trust in yet another way. I was grooming him on the crossties and he was really relaxed and dropped and "let it all hang out" if you know what I mean. I figured what the heck ... he was pretty dirty, so I tried to clean him and low and behold he actually let me. Again...this horse previously required that he be tranquilized to **clean his sheath**. Granted I didn't do an elaborate job but the fact that he even let me was again amazing to me.

I have owned this horse 4 1/2 years and it is only now that he is coming around. Coincidence...I just don't think so. Anyway, I thought you might be interested in these things as I do really think it's all related to a lack of pain and whatever he was experiencing from the bit before. I could not ever in good conscience ever put a bit back on this horse...I would feel like I betrayed his new found trust.

I think that is it for now. Please do not hesitate if you have any other questions.

-Lila, 10/2/04

Subject: Bitless Bridle. Thank you, thank you!

Ten months ago I obtained a beautiful Registered Tobiano Paint, nicknamed "SLICK". Since I have not ridden in almost twenty years, and then only for a short time, I would have to consider myself a novice. All I knew for sure was that I loved horses, and had some strong opinions concerning same ... most of which were belittled by so called "horse people".

To make a long story short, when I first saddled and rode Slick, I noticed that he **coughed, gagged, threw his head, and thrashed his tail ...** in other words, a very unhappy guy. I tried beginning with a snaffle bit, Mitmar bit, eggbut bit, bosal and hackamore, (which worked the best). Everyone said to wear spurs, use a whip, and a more severe bit. Obviously none of these suggestions were acceptable.

Then I stumbled upon your creation. Sorry, I do not remember where I first heard about it. I went to your web site and read everything there. Finally, I had found someone who makes sense, (and with whom I whole-heartedly agreed!). I ordered the Bitless Bridle, (the synthetic), and ... I could not believe the change in SLICK ... no more gagging, no more fighting the bit, (there isn't one!!), no more head throwing, etc., etc. He is a happy boy ... and so am I!

By the way, I have since found out that this beautiful creature was badly abused by his first owner/trainer. He is now learning trust and confidence, in great part due to your Bitless Bridle.

Again Sir, Thank You.

(Yes, you may use this letter in any way you deem necessary).

- Bennett Carey, 8/13/04

Subject: We absolutely have a better horse than we thought!

Recently, I emailed you concerning your previously owned Bitless Bridles to see about getting one for our 8 year old Arab mare QUEENIE. In her background, I explained that she was abused by previous owners (the owner prior to us admitted to hitting her with a shovel), and that we had a lot of trust issues to resolve, especially when it came to using a bit.

If you even showed her the bit (without the bridle) lying in your hand she would go spastic...she would **run, snort, shake her head and you could not catch her at all**. When we would try to ride her using only a halter with attachable reins, we had absolutely **NO control** over her, and she would try to **rear** if we tried to gain control with only the reins and halter.

Shortly after contacting you we received our first Bitless Bridle. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for such fast service (we received our bridle in less than two days after placing our order!!) The first day, all we did was introduce our Arab to the bridle by letting her smell of it. She has to do this with any new equipment that we get for her before she will let us use it or get near her. After she determined it was 'okay', we attempted to put it on her. She apparently thought that it might have something to do with a bit, because havoc ensued. She **bucked, reared, ran away, shook her head, snorted ... the whole nine yards**.

A day later, we tried again and discovered something odd. She will let us put her Bitless Bridle on, but we have to do it from the ears first! This entails bringing the rein straps that go under her chin down over her nose, which she doesn't seem to mind at all! But, the funniest thing has occurred. She feels so safe and trusts this bridle so much, that when we pull the rein straps over her nose, SHE OPENS HER MOUTH TO ACCEPT A BIT THAT ISN'T THERE!!!! This is a horse that would **NEVER EVER let you put anything into her mouth before, not even a wormer syringe!!!** NOW...onto the riding part...

We have such ABSOLUTE CONTROL of this previously **UNCONTROLLABLE MARE** that she is an absolute PLEASURE to work with! No more head shaking, no more trying to rear, no more putting pressure onto her bridle to 'balk' against her training.

She seems to have found her purpose as a horse again, not just to be a brood mare. We still have a long way to go in her training, as we are now working with lateral flexion WITH THE BRIDLE, and are to be training her soon for pole bending. I cannot stress enough in what a DIFFERENCE this bridle has made in this horse. We are currently working with her in her round pen for safety purposes, but we have RIDDEN HER THE ENTIRE CIRCUMFERENCE OF HER PASTURE WITH THIS BRIDLE, at a TROT & WALK, and experienced ABSOLUTELY NO PROBLEMS WHATSOEVER ... NO HEAD SHAKING, NO ATTEMPTS TO REAR, EASILY TURNS WITH MINIMAL PRESSURE AND DIRECTION, and most of all LET'S US PUT IT ON WITHOUT FUSS OR PROBLEMS!!

Anyone that reads this would not believe the success and changes that we have made with this horse. I will gladly recommend Dr. Cook's Bitless Bridle to anyone and everyone I know, and cannot wait to upgrade to a leather bridle. We will not be sending in the neoprene bridle for exchange however...that is how much we love this bridle!!!

Thank you again for being so concerned and interested in our needs, for your prompt service, and for the bridle that has made a complete turn around in a horse that even our vet said WOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO BE TRAINED!!!! THANK YOU, THANK YOU, AND THANK YOU!!

- Bobbie Eads R.N. and Donna G. Bradford, 8/4/04

A few minutes later, this postscript arrived ...

I know I just sent you a very LONG email regarding our 8 yo Arab mare, but after reading some of the testimonials, I remembered a few other problems that your Bitless Bridle solved...it's hard to remember them, because they have DISAPPEARED!

My mare used to **THROW HER HEAD** way up high when we tried to bridle her, and at 16.2 hands it was an impossibility to put a bridle on her. She has STOPPED DOING THIS. We still have to let her smell her bridle first (I think this goes along with her trust issues), but she no longer throws her head up in the air. When we are working in the round pen, she no longer keeps her **head held way up high**. This horse LOWERS HER HEAD, LICKS HER LIPS, and is GENERALLY SO RELAXED we feel she might go to sleep while working!! I have to use a mounting aid to get my foot up in the stirrup to ride, but our 10 year old boy can MOUNT HER FROM THE GROUND WITHOUT HER HAVING TO BE HELD! She even stands still when I mount her by using a bucket to get up ... without her being held. **Before the Bitless Bridle, she would NOT STAND STILL TO BE MOUNTED, she would swing her hind quarters around, and cause all sorts of mounting problems.** She would **not tolerate the stirrups banging against her sides**. This has all been eliminated.. I can pull the stirrups out from her side and let them fall against her without her FLINCHING OR MOVING. I feel that your Bitless Bridle has contributed to this miracle. She has done so well with this bridle that when lungeing and doing ground work SHE RESPONDES TO VERBAL COMMANDS ALONE!! I **no longer have to have the lunge whip in my hand for direction**. I no longer have to make the whip make a 'pop' noise to get her to trot or cantor, and I no longer have to pull on the lunge line to make her whoa.....she does it all with verbal commands only!!

Once again, thank you for the difference in what many people, including our equine vet, said would be a completely untrainable horse!!! (We just LOVE proving people wrong!!!)

- Bobbie Eads R.N. & Donna G. Bradford, 8/4/04

I'm writing this letter to thank-you for including me in the petition to the USEF regarding the acceptance of your Bitless Bridle into competition. I really appreciate your effort in this matter.

I also wanted to share with you a recent experience that I had while riding in my Bitless Bridle.

Let me give you some background on my horse. She is a 3 1/2 year old Friesian mare that I have known since day one and owned since she was 6 months of age. I am, and have been responsible for her training, so up to this point, it has been slow, fair and consistent. Her training under-saddle began in earnest just this past spring.

My horse's comfort is my first priority. I own two Bates saddles with the interchangeable gullet system and the Cair panels. I have gel pads and fleece pads, covers for my girths, etc. I wanted to train this mare so that her whole life could be resistance free and she would never be exposed to the painful situations of poor fitting tack and inconsiderate riding.

I have plans for my mare in dressage and low-level eventing. (I emphasize, LOW.....☺...as eventing is definitely not a Friesian horse specialty!!!) In order to compete in such sports, of course, the horse must wear a bridle with the bit in their mouths. So naturally, much of her training has involved a bitted bridle. (I use the Myler comfort-fit dressage legal snaffle)

To summarize, here are a few of the behaviors that a very well adjusted, happy, quiet mare began to exhibit, the further into bitted training we got. Nothing horrible, but they were changes that didn't go un-noticed.

1. **Head tossing** – this didn't last long (one or two days), but she did go through a period of "unexplained" head tossing. (possibly tooth issues, or, I used a flash noseband for a few sessions and I think it was bugging her.....)
2. **Reluctance to move forward**
3. **Difficulty maintaining focus**
4. **Difficulty steering** – I have to use a lot of opening rein and she tends to throw her shoulder to the outside.
5. **Difficulty maintaining a balanced, timely "halt"**

Now, a few of these behaviors are resulting from her lack of experience and responsiveness to the seat and leg. I would be considered a competent dressage rider and can independently use the aids, so I know I am capable of "quiet hands" however my mare seemed to be having difficulty concentrating on and understanding what was being asked of her. I'm sure once she better understood the lateral aids and the meaning of the seat she would better follow through, even with the bit. But ... was there a better way to help her understand what was being asked? My mare is wonderful, and very cooperative. She enjoys working with me and always has a fantastic attitude. So when I see these telltale behaviors, the first

thing that comes to my mind is that she's trying to tell me she's uncomfortable ... she's being distracted from the task at hand.

At this point, I remembered the Bitless Bridle that I had received as a Christmas present from my husband two years ago. I decided to use it during the next few training sessions and evaluate what happened.

It took DAATJE two lessons before I began to see what I feel are some of the distinct benefits and advantages to the Bitless Bridle. Within these lessons, here's what I found:

1. Instantly better steering. Within a few minutes, she went from feeling **insecure and confused** about the rein/seat/leg signal to rounding into the bridle, through her back. I have better control of her shoulders!
2. Instantly better halt! Instead of **bracing through her jaw and the underside of her neck**, she drops her head and stops willingly! Obviously she's more comfortable this way!
3. More forward into the bridle. She began to be more willing to go forward from my leg.
4. Instant response. Just the slightest squeeze of my fingers and she's bending in the desired direction with no signs of resistance.
5. Improved leg yield. She is able to translate moving sideways instead of forward much clearer now that the bit is not bothering and distracting her. All I have to do is flex my calf muscle, position my seat and over she goes!

Here's the instance that I especially wanted to share with you.....

DAATJE and I school in an open field. There is one section of the field that DAATJE finds very scary. (There is a tree and a shadowy spot where the boogiemer hides out ☺) She always needs reassurance and often **stiffens her body and rushes** past this portion of the field. What I do is sit deep in my seat, hold her steady with my seat, and ask her to "soften" into the bridle with my rein aid. With my regular bridle, I found no change in her posture when confronted with this scary situation. If anything, she rushed past a little faster. (her inexperience with the seat aids must still be taken into consideration, but here comes the exciting part.....) In the Bitless Bridle, when the same aids were applied, she flexed at the poll, lowered her head, slowed her tempo and RELAXED her neck/shoulders!!! I was ecstatic! This bridle truly comforts the horse and reassures them in a positive way that everything is OK. She is definitely more confident in her work.

I am impressed, to say the least. I hope you are encouraged to pursue the USEF to the ends of the earth, if need be, to allow this bridle into competition. It is just fantastic. Thank-you a million times over!

- Sarah Isherwood and her Friesian mare DAATJE, 7/14/04

I just received my beta Bitless Bridle and took it out to the farm this afternoon. I have a 6 yr. old Quarter Horse gelding who has an **aversion to the bit**. He's always been a **head tosser** in a bit, even with a full cheek snaffle with complete slack on the reins.

So . . . after working some exercises in the round pen, I brought the Bitless Bridle into the picture. He balked at it, threw his head up, THEN I remembered: well heck, this is something new to him, he's never seen it before, it smells different, etc. So I worked for an hour and a half, sacking him out with it and letting him get familiar with it and feeling assured that it wasn't gonna kill him. FINALLY, he lowered his head and allowed me to slip it on over his **ears (another touchy issue with this guy)** and adjust it. I noticed though that the brow band (in front of his ears) is bowed and doesn't lay flat. I tried adjusting it with no success. Any suggestions?

I saddled him up and took him for a spin around the round pen with no real problems. At first he did throw his head up when asked to back but after a couple tries, backed with ease and no tossing. Tomorrow we go out on the trail and I will keep you updated.

➤ - Donna Kelso, 6/26/04

P.S. I forgot to mention that when my 6 yr. old QH gelding had the Bitless Bridle on, he licked his lips quite often and held his head lower. A sign of relaxation? Relief not to have a bit in his mouth? I found this very interesting.

My response to the question about the browband

You could try flattening the browband with a warm (not hot) iron. But if this does do the trick we will send you another browband. Give our office a call on the toll free number.

I shall be interested to hear how he responds on the trail. The lip movement is a good sign and I would expect his head tossing to regress gradually.

I purchased a beta bridle about 3 months ago and have been riding my Percheron/Thoroughbred cross in it. WE LOVE IT! I acquired him about two years ago. He was very green with some major bit issues- **head tossing, falling behind the bit and ear pinning**. I believe these were created by the lady I bought him from, pushing him too fast to make a sale and souring him in general.

I have been studying natural horsemanship and decided my guy needed to lose the bit for a while and we would start retraining at a later date. I had been riding him in a halter and lead only for almost a year and a half. Then I came across your web site. I agonized over purchasing a bridle for a while and finally did so. Boy am I glad!

I am currently training with a 3rd level dressage instructor and me and my "T" can finally canter. I was afraid to do so in the bridle and hesitant in the halter due to not knowing how much brakes I had. But with my instructor's encouragement and trusting in the Bitless Bridle I believe I have more brakes than I will ever need. And no fear of ever hurting his mouth. And he has lost all of the **falling behind the bit** act.

I can't imagine why I would ever go back to a bit. I know I cannot compete with out one and it seems to me that this piece of tack should be considered the ultimate

refinement of any discipline. If my horse can complete his training this way shouldn't he be considered an even better trained mount. Put me on your petition list for allowing the Bitless Bridle to be used in competitors.
Thank You for your Bitless Bridle

- Bonnielee Barnett and BABY T, 4/24/04

I had suffered a serious accident on my Quarterhorse, RUSTY. It was almost THE END for both of us. When I finally committed to riding again, I started with a Tom Thumb, to a snaffle, to a rubber broken snaffle, to the Bitless Bridle. I have been using the bridle for a year.

I cannot say enough about the bridle. Both RUSTY and I love it. There is not all that **head tossing** going on that one sees with conventional bridles. The only problem I have found, and I am not sure it is a problem but rather just the fact that it is spring and RUSTY is full of himself, is he will sometimes ignore pressure from the reins. The situation is corrected immediately with an attitude adjustment and we are on our way.

We both appreciate such a neat invention, Thank-you,

- Jane Albright and RUSTY, 4/19/04

Thank you for your kind comments. May we add them to our collection? If so, perhaps you would care to enlarge on the nature of the accident you so blessedly survived? Also, I am not quite sure what you find you need to do to regain RUSTY'S attention when his mind wanders? Do you see-saw the reins perhaps?

Please feel free to add my comments, or portions of my comments, to whatever list you want. The accident ... Rusty went **straight up** and I went off his back and had to be life-flighted. I suffered a concussion, my entire right side was nothing but broken ribs, a high impact fractured clavicle that required three surgeries and is still healing, two years later, and a knee injury (required one surgery), as well as some rather awesome bruises.

Everyone wanted me to sell RUSTY for meat. I almost got rid of him (not for meat but to a more experienced rider) but I have never been a quitter. I moved him to a new barn where I got a lot of support, was fortunate to hook up with a natural horse person who taught me how to ride and the rest is history.

It took a tremendous amount of dedication and desire for RUSTY and I to work through it all. I am 54 years old and just started riding when I was 51. I am convinced, had I been using the Bitless Bridle at the time, and had I been practicing more natural horsemanship and listening to my horse, the whole accident could have been avoided. I also know I am 90% responsible for the accident.

I do know I am thrilled with the bridle and will never use anything less for RUSTY. In retrospect, I cannot believe I ever used a bit in the first place. They are cruel and totally unnecessary. Both RUSTY and I appreciate this great invention. Also, RUSTY behaved a lot better yesterday. I think I did not have the bridle adjusted quite right. I did some fine-tuning and the problems are gone.

I will gladly tell anyone you would like how much I think of the bridle. I have told everyone I meet about it. The sad part is, most people do not want to give up the bit and the control they perceive they have with it. How sad. They do not realize they have less control with the bit than they ever would with the Bitless Bridle. A bit is harsh on your horse's mouth and can cause unwanted reactions such as **rearing**. And what about the horse that gets the bit between his teeth? I find Rusty to be much more responsive and softer with the Bitless Bridle.

Everyone I have loaned it to has found their horse readily accepted it and responded accordingly. If it is the cost that is scaring off a lot of people, they need to consider the amount of money they spend trying to find the right bit/bridle combination.

- Jane Albright and Rusty, 4/21/04

Just thought I would write and let you know how I have been getting along with your bridle. It arrived last week but I had my first ride in it on Sunday. My Welsh cob mare is 5 yrs old and has always been **difficult to ride**. In the bit she was a **confirmed bolter**. I couldn't get her to stand or slow down, she **shook her head constantly** and she **spooked at anything**, I just hung on for my life!

After 12 months of 'hanging on' whenever we went for a ride and trying everything from a straight bar snaffle, Myler bits and shank bits, I purchased a rope bitless bridle. It helped a lot. I could slow her down, the brakes were much better and I felt in control. The problems that I then had were more worrying. The rope bridle dug into her nose when I asked her to stop, it started to rub away the hair (it was not adjustable) and it often slipped down her nose causing it to press on the fleshy part of her nose causing her to become stressed and the **headshaking** started again. Worried for her health I stopped riding her in it.

It was then I found your web site. I saved up and bought the beta bridle. It arrived in six days (I'm in the UK) and I was amazed at the quality. It looks just like an expensive leather bridle and it is really soft and flexible. It took me ten minutes to adjust it to fit her and ensure all the straps were right.

Our first test ride in the bridle was also our first hack out on our own (previously too dangerous to ride alone on this mare when bitted). For the first mile she napped and shook her head around. Then she started to push her head out. She tested the bridle by turning to look into the fields and making sure the bridle wouldn't hurt her. All of a sudden, my little horse's ear pricked up, she walked forward freely. I didn't have to kick anymore. We enjoyed an hour and a half hack like this. When asked to stand the first time she tried to ignore it but stopped when I alternated rein pressure.

We had a trot. Known for her short bouncy trot I was quite surprised when she stuck her head out and just went for it Welsh cob style, her little legs flying out in front. All the time I was in control and could collect and lengthen her stride at will. I was over the moon.

Now came a more difficult task, canter. She normally **bucks** like a bronco for the first few minutes. Not this time. We loped along happily and she stopped as soon as she was asked. Not surprisingly when we encountered a pheasant stuck in a hedge

it made us both jump! Normally we would be heading home at about 50mph if this happened. This time she jumped but as soon as I collected the reins she stood and when asked to she walked past. Sure she didn't like the pheasant but she was under control for the first time, real control. The rest of our ride was uneventful and pleasant.

Upon arriving back to the yard I dismounted and waited for her to start **rubbing her head up and down my body**, a rather painful and annoying habit when she was bitted. She didn't do it. She stood quietly while I untacked her. And she could tuck straight into her hay net without me worrying about her not being able to chew because of the bit in her mouth.

We have now had several rides each one better and better than the last. She is no longer fidgety to mount. She has stopped biting me when I tack her up and she is no longer **headshy**. Over all I just wanted to say thank you. You have enabled my mare and I to become a willing team out on a ride and in the yard. It has made a huge difference to our lives being able to enjoy one another's company, without the need for control through what I now know was **bitted cruelty**.

Thank you

- Julia & a very happy Welsh cob mare, CLEO, 1/27/04

P.S. Since her attitude change through this bridle I no longer need to carry a riding whip, as she listens to me rather than artificial aids.

My 12-year old son, John, used our new Bitless Bridle for the second time today on his 4-year old horse, ZIP. John had absolutely no problems controlling ZIP. They had a great ride! Both the kid and the horse are quite happy. ZIP showed no signs of some of his old problems that I think were related to the bit. **No head tossing, no grabbing the bit and refusing to stop, no rubbing his face on his front legs, no more turning around and trying to bite John's toes, no bolting for the gate.** I honestly think the new bridle has helped solve numerous problems and will contribute to a much better riding relationship between John and his horse. Thanks for all your help. I attached two cute photos of John riding ZIP in his new bridle.

- Robin Thripmaster, 1/12/04

My invoice for the Bitless Bridle (BB) is dated 8/14/03 and I just want to say that I am definitely keeping mine! I love it and want to THANK YOU so very much for such a great product. I'm definitely a convert. I'll never use anything else and am in the process of selling my hackamores, bits, and bosals. Because as far as I'm concerned, BB is the only way to go!

Thank you so much –

- HI-TIME (HT) and Diana Brozas, Chino, CA, 9/8/03

P.S. As you requested, some comments and feedback on your product. Please excuse the length because I am so jazzed that I want to go on and on but don't want to waste your time. If you want to use any portion of this letter for your ads feel

free. Also, I am getting lots of questions and compliments about the BB at my stable. Hopefully, I'll make some converts.

Some notes on my Bitless Bridle (BB)

Background

I always loved horses but growing up in the city rarely got a chance to ride one. When I was 50 I decided to take up riding as a hobby and after two years decided to buy my own horse – my first horse at 52! I bought my horse from a family that boarded at the stable where I ride, thinking that it was a good thing to buy from people that I knew. They told me that the horse was quiet, calm and gentle and the reason they were selling him was that they had three other horses and didn't need a fourth.

After buying the horse, I began to hear other stories. HT had **kicked down the bars of his stall** more than once, **bit** and **charged at other people and horses**, and the family that I bought him from **couldn't ride him**. It consisted of a mother in her 50's, a daughter in her 20's and a granddaughter about 8. HT would **run away** with them and **bang them repeatedly into the poles of the riding arenas**. The mother had had him in training but still couldn't control him although the trainer said he was a good horse. She admitted to **jerking him hard and repeatedly on the reins**.

In the two years I have had HT we have come a long way. He no longer bites or charges people or horses and does not take me into poles of the arena. He still goes **crazy at the canter** and is **hard to control**. His previous owners rode Western and I ride English. I noticed that he responded better to hackamores than bits. Naturally, like many of your customers, I have quite an assortment of bits that don't work from the mildest snaffle to a twisted wire one. As for the hackamores – he responds much better with them. I have more control but he will get **angry** sometimes and **grab the shank of the hackamore** thus leaving me powerless to control him. I recently bought an English hackamore so that solved that problem but then I saw your ad and decided that maybe bitless was the way to go.

My ultimate goal is lightness and even with the twisted wire HT lugged on the bit. Although the hackamores were better, I still had the following problems:

1. He **tossed his head** continually, so the trainers suggested using either a tie-down or a martingale.
2. He tried to **cut corners or veered to the right** instead of staying on the rails.
3. He **grabbed the shank** so I had no control
4. He got **excited and broke his gait**, i.e. when I asked for a walk he would speed up to a jog. When I asked for a jog he would speed up to a very excitable trot. Forget the canter, I was not up to that yet.
5. He **stumbled** repeatedly. I checked his feet, no health or shoeing problems.
6. He would **rub his head** on me when I dismounted and praised him ... rubbing hard like he wanted to rub off the bridle. This was an improvement because when I first got him he **used to go to the pole of the arena and try to rub the bridle off there**.

These were my experiences that led me to order the BB.

Ordering the BB

I saw your ad in *Horse Illustrated* and sent away for the literature. I was shocked when I received it to see the prices. I was only interested in leather and a choice of \$153 or \$209 was very high. So initially I threw it in to the trash but then fished it out and reread it. I decided to do as you suggested and looked up your website. I spent over two hours reading assorted letters from customers and was very impressed. You not only printed the raves but you had the 'so-soes' and even the 'don't likes, refund my moneys!' I decided to call for more info.

When I called, the lady I spoke to was so nice and helpful that I immediately changed my mind and ordered the BB. One especially great thing she did for me was when I told her my measurements were 40 1/2 and 21 she suggested I get a full size with a cob noseband. This was a great suggestion and really made me feel like you people care about your product and the customer! Thanks!

When I received my BB I was astonished to see the quality. It was well worth the \$153 price tag. In fact I was so pleased with the quality that if you sold other leather horse products I would order them from you!

Using my BB

I was scared. Would it work? Also I noticed from your assorted letters that people had problems fitting it. I read your directions three or four times and, armed with a tape measure and the picture of how it should fit, I had it fitted perfectly in less than 20 minutes. HT liked it – in spite of it creaking. Because, unlike my normal custom, I had not oiled it since I was not sure if I would be keeping it.

As you suggested, I rode HT in one of the small arenas. I noticed immediately he responded better to steering directions than with a bit or a hackamore and stopped just as good. I then asked him for a jog. At first he was a little excited but after two circles of the arena he was calm. For the next 20 minutes I rode a totally different horse. I couldn't believe it. The next day was even better!

Footnotes:

1. When I got off HT he didn't try to rub his BB off. He actually stood still and let me praise and pet him!
2. **I couldn't get him to back up at all with a bit.** It turned into a pulling match with HT lowering his head as I pulled harder and harder but standing firm and not backing. With a hackamore he would back with normal cues. With the BB he backed so easily and willingly that it was like he didn't need a cue – he was reading my mind!
3. I read in a book about "riding with ribbons of silk." I now know what that means because HT no longer **lugged on the bit.**
4. With a bit, I **couldn't get him to half-halt.** It would only excite him to a faster gait. I had better results with the hackamore. With the BB it is so easy!

After the first day I brought my BB home and gave it a loving oil job!

Posting Trot:

Calm, relaxed, **no head toss, no runaways.**

What can I say? This is the horse of my dreams. What happened to the other one I used to ride before I got the BB? The one who **ranaway with me, tossed his head, stamped and stumbled around?**

My Trainer's Experience While Riding:

HT had been so bad with his runaways that I and my trainer had decided to stop the riding lessons and do groundwork. Before BB we were doing two groundwork sessions a week and I had been gingerly riding HT the other five days.

After going BB I noticed such an unbelievable improvement that I told my trainer I finally felt willing to try riding lessons again. I told him about HT's improvement but that I had a new piece of equipment that I was using – the BB. My trainer had never heard about it but after my raves was dying to see it in action.

Was he impressed – or at least initially? Hey, I'm not a fool and neither is he! He started out saying it was a great piece of equipment and exactly what HT needed. But would it surprise you after a while he amended his statement and started to say that it was his training that had made the drastic difference on HT, not the BB. My trainer is great but you and I know the truth – it was the BB. No ifs, ands, or buts.

My trainer is in his 40's and at this point of his career is super careful. He frequently tells me that his days of breaking wild horses are over – too many injuries. He would only get on HT after I tired him out first. Well, after watching me ride HT calm, mellow and obedient, he begged (**and I really mean begged**) if he could ride HT. Wow! It was so beautiful because he is a very good horseman. He was having such a good time that I had a hard time getting him off of HT in spite of the lesson time being up! He was doing everything – 20 meter canters, leg yields, shoulder ins, etc.,. But I did have to laugh – you will too – at his first stop. Because he looked like a cartoon. He leaned way back in his saddle and pulled way back. You could see he didn't believe that he could stop HT (who is 14.2 hands, 675 lbs but thick-necked and strong) without a bit. I already knew better - the BB definitely stops a horse.

Hope all these raves make you feel good! Thanks again for such a great product!

Hope I didn't make this too long?

... and a second report that accompanied a completed questionnaire

In August I bought your leather BB and now use it exclusively, even for lunging. So now all my other tack, headstalls, bits and hackamores have gone to the consignment store. A few days ago I ordered a nylon BB just as a safety measure because I will never use anything other than a BB again so I wanted a spare. I prefer leather but since my leather one is in good condition & the hot dry California climate rots leather, vinyl, and rubber, I figured nylon was the best spare to have just in case my leather need to be replaced while I'm waiting for a new one.

HT & I are now cantering. It's not perfect but we'll get there. Before BB he **threw his head all over, refused to stop, ran out of the arena**, etc.,. I had two trainers. Audrey rode him in the big arena and he ran away with her & she was a good rider. She cautioned me to not canter him at all until she calmed him down & to stay out of the big arena. When she left the facility in March, John, who took her

place, told me to not canter without him & only in the round pen. Both trainers insisted on tie-down/martingales & single twisted wire bits.

I've moved to a new facility & am now trainerless but am riding (including the canter) in two bigger arenas with her BB. The gates are never closed but HT doesn't ever think about running out of the arena. Nor do I need the tie-down/martingales which are on consignment. I get on HT & ride – no lunge at all – something both John & Audrey told me I must do before every ride. HT **consistently gets the right lead.**

My current problem? He loves the canter so much that he keeps asking to canter rather than trot! Could also be he's not stupid and knows that a canter gets two treats vs one treat for a walk or trot.

It was very hard to fill out your questionnaire because HT has changed so much that I can't believe I ever had those problems – **taking me into the arena fence poles, head tossing, speeding up instead of stopping, running out of the arena.** One thing that I still get misty-eyed over is when I put on his BB. He extends his nose and lets me fiddle around. Ditto with taking it off. I really do get misty-eyed thinking about how he **now enjoys being bridled!** I can't thank you enough.

- Diana Brozas, Chino, CA 11/5/03

Subject: Magnificent bridle

I just wanted to let you know that this morning's ride was wonderful. I purchased the bridle for the horses that I have been leasing. The mare that I have been working with the most, an 8 yr old paint mare named MISS BEAUTIFUL, **tossed her head** a lot, **fought the bit**, and just would brace herself against it, let alone her problem of **dropping her inside shoulder**, causing her to lose balance often. After trying several bits on her, I came to use an eggbutt snaffle with a french link. She liked this bit the best, but her **head tossing worsened**. Thus I came to the Bitless Bridle.

She is now more **responsive**, her head tossing has stopped, with the exception of at the canter (pretty good considering it was her first time in the bridle). Over all, our ride was like a dream, I had the horse that I wanted to lease, not the monster she was becoming. To tell you the truth, her **steering** was better, her **balance** was better, she still drops her shoulder a little, but I'm sure it will improve over time. The thing that caught my attention the most was that ALL of our **transitions improved**, were seamless and wonderful overall.

Our **jumping** was much better, her **striding** improved, she wasn't as **lazy** and was more willing to move, and over jumps, I wasn't as worried about catching her in the mouth because of her powerful jump. We only did some cross rails and it is my goal to go higher with her and I think the Bitless Bridle will help me do it!

I cannot praise this bridle enough, but say that if anyone is even thinking about it, just buy one and take it on a trial, I still have about 26 days of my trial, and I will keep you updated, but thank you once again for making this bridle available to the public!!

- Cyndi, 8/1/03

I have a quick question for you. My horse only exhibits **headshaking symptoms outdoors**, so we are led to believe that his condition is related to allergies. With that said, his attitude indoors is less than stellar! He doesn't headshake or need to **rub his nose**, but he **does not like to move forward**. Sometimes he can be as stubborn as a mule about it, **planting his feet and refusing to move**, or trying to **buck or rear!**

So, here is my question for you. Could this behavior indoors be related to headshaking? What it boils down to is that I spend SO much money on him already that I'm afraid to buy yet another thing that won't work for him. It sounds like your product would help horses that have problems with the nerves in their face rather than the allergic reactions or am I getting this wrong?!? Help!

- Laura Bushner

Having assured Laura that the BB was likely to help her horse, she purchased a bridle and wrote again

I was excited to receive my Bitless Bridle today and went right out to the farm to try it on ANTAR! After fitting per the instructions, I went to the outdoor arena and put him on a longe line to see how he felt about it. Everything was A-OK, so I hopped up on him and tried it out myself.

I rode only a short time, as it was very warm today and the bugs were terrible, but what I noticed was that ANTAR didn't get **frustrated**. I didn't see the **chomping and grinding** at the bit or **refusing to move forward!** He did **headshake** more than I would like, but I was able to keep him going at a trot with little **resistance**. That alone is a miracle! Do most headshakers stop headshaking right away or is it a process? Is it a learned behavior that he needs to unlearn or replace with an appropriate response? [Ed: Some respond immediately and others require time, though most show enough early improvement to provide hope and encouragement. It is worth noting, however, that though the bit is the most common cause of headshaking, it is not the only cause. If a headshaking horse fails to improve when the bit is removed, a search should be made for other possible sources of pain (for example, a poorly fitting saddle, girth pain, or pain in the back or hind legs)]

I do question if I have the noseband tight and low enough. ANTAR has a typical Arab face with a smaller nose. I had the noseband on the tightest hole, but as I rode him I could see it shift up and down a bit on one side. Should it do this? [Ed: It is normal for the noseband to ride up the face a little in response to rein pressure but the amount of movement should only be slight] The rest of the headstall fits just fine. Perhaps I should punch another hole or two for the noseband.

- Laura Bushner

I was pleased to read that your first impressions of the bridle were good. If your horse has been a headshaker for some time, it may take a few weeks before this sign shows a significant regression. The neuralgia caused by the bit cannot be expected to necessarily disappear overnight, though many horses do show an immediate reduction in the severity of the pain. But keep going and I think you will find that your horse will improve day by day.

The noseband does need to be LOW AND SNUG. Check the measurements once more but as long as the specifications are correct you do not need to punch any more holes. With pressure on the reins, it is to be expected that the noseband will move up the horse's face a little and that the cheek straps will buckle out a little. Do not worry about this.

I am attaching a questionnaire to help you understand the effect of a bit. Perhaps you would like to complete it and return it to me.

I would be happy to fill out the questionnaire for you, but I don't have Excel on my computer. Any ideas? Could you send me a hard copy? As a side note, I rode inside today due to the rain and my horse was WONDERFUL!!! You have to know that I hate riding in the indoor because ANTAR usually refuses upward transitions and we end up in a power struggle. This bridle seems too good to be true! I only hope his behavior and headshaking outside continue to improve!

- Laura Bushner, 7/9/03

P.S. Do the regular beta reins come in one piece, rather than split like the rubber reins? The tie keeps coming loose on me!
[ED: Your local shoe shop will sell you some wax to rub on leather laces, which will prevent this problem]

I did receive the questionnaire. Thank you for sending it through the snail mail! I checked into my email account to find out why your reply wasn't accepted into my mailbox. Hopefully that is fixed.

I've ridden ANTAR several times now with the bridle and am amazed to find that I have my horse back. The **headshaking** is decreasing, just like you predicted. He had three head nods yesterday, but no **rubbing against his leg**. The **resistance to trot or canter** is gone! I'm so happy to be working on shoulder in and half pass again, rather than just trying to get him to move period! I still ride outside with his Guardian Mask (he has **uveitis** in one eye) but thought on a cloudy day I might try him without it. I worry that one day the headshaking will get worse again, but I guess I'll have to deal with it if that should happen! A few weeks ago I thought I wouldn't be able to ride my horse again. Words cannot describe how happy I am:)

Thanks again,
Laura Bushner 7/16/03

The honeymoon seems to be over for my horse ANTAR! We have had some rough rides in the past two weeks. Although he rarely needs to rub his leg, or has head ticks, or refuses to move forward anymore, he's taken to **raising his head in the air like a giraffe and shaking his head vigorously five or six times**. He does this at both the walk and trot. So far I've been able to work him through it, but I'm

worried that we are working our way back to where we started ... my stubborn horse **planting his feet and not moving!** Any thoughts on this?

Thank you for your time,
Laura Bushner 7/25/03

ANTAR probably still has occasional bouts of residual pain (facial neuralgia). This is not too surprising and it would certainly account for the modified shaking that he is now exhibiting. But be of good cheer ... this is early days and there is still plenty of hope that further regression of the neuralgia will occur. Please keep me in touch. In the meantime, keep on with the present regime.

Does he show the giraffe behavior on days when the light is strong or the temperature particularly high? If he does, this would tend to confirm me in my suspicion that this is a persistence of the trigeminal neuralgia in a modified form.
7/25/03

Yes, it has been sunny, hot and humid here for the past week or so. I've tried to ride early in the day to minimize the effects of the weather. Thanks for the encouraging words:) ... I'll be patient and consistent with ANTAR while hoping for the best!

- Laura Bushner, 7/26/03

Overall I'm very happy with the Bitless Bridle. ANTAR **doesn't get as frustrated while we ride and no longer grinds his teeth**. With that said, I'm sad to say he still has **major headshaking issues**. I cannot ride longer than 20-25 minutes or it becomes dangerous. We'll be trotting/cantering along and he'll **nose dive to rub his nose on his leg**. He is learning that blowing out through his nose is encouraged and it helps with the itchiness or tingling I think he's experiencing. Are there some horses that never get better? I know that this is a broad question ... probably one that you cannot answer. Is there something else that I can do for him? He rides with his Guardian Mask loosely over the bridle to protect his eyes. I'm in the process of filling out the questionnaire and plan to send it in soon. Any thoughts on my situation would be great!

Thanks,
Laura Bushner, 8/30/03

I will be in a better position to help you if you first send me the completed questionnaire. But in the meantime, check that:

1. Your horse does not have any sharp premolar teeth. If buccal ulcers are present, these could explain the persistence of headshaking.
2. Is the browband too tight under the ears? Perhaps you need a longer browband?
3. How much rein pressure are you applying? The lighter the better. If the noseband is too high you will be using more pressure than you need to maintain control. Please check the manual and make sure you have the bridle fitted correctly.

For how long has your horse been headshaking? The longer it has been present, the longer you will have to wait for the problem to regress. Patience and the passage of time will certainly help, so don't give up hope. Many headshakers respond well in

the first week but others take two or three months for the problem to subside. I do not recall many horses that failed to respond at all.

You might find that your horse will improve if you remove the mask. This will only continue to irritate hypersensitive skin. Less is more. Give this a try and let me know the result.

- Bob, 9/1/03

... and, in response to an inquiry, a long-term follow-up, one year later.

ANTAR and I have become a team over the past year! We have worked through some key behavior issues. There is no doubt in my mind that the Bitless Bridle has helped him. My spooky and spunky Arabian would often take the bit and run if something didn't sit well with him. Now I can get him back under control rather quickly! I find little resistance during the fall, winter and spring rides, whether I'm inside or outside.

Unfortunately, the summer is another story! This summer has been the worst one yet. When outside, he begins to headshake within minutes. When inside, he starts lip popping from the moment I get on, but I can continue my ride for up to 20 minutes before he starts headshaking. I guess I've just accepted him for who he is and what he's capable of at this point.

Thanks for your concern and hope this info helps,

Laura Bushner, 8/10/04

[Ed: This series of reports on ANTAR provides a cautionary tale. Obviously, not every headshaker is going to respond to removal of the bit, even though this can be expected of the majority. And in this case, one cannot offer the explanation that headshaking is due to pain in the back or feet (from saddle or shoes), as such a problem would not be seasonal. Sadly, we must conclude that a minority of horses suffer a permanent bit-induced facial neuralgia. The moral that I draw from this experience is that is important to remove the bit before it does permanent damage. I don't know the age of this particular horse or for how long it had been ridden in a bit before the bit was removed, as the questionnaire was not returned. I will ask again for this further information.]

Dear Bob.....feel the love coming your way?

Roberta, my good horse friend & I have been riding together for years. She has a 20 yr old spotted saddle horse-mare, with more energy than most horses at 5 yrs old. "SHADOW" has been a **high-headed, head shaker**, wants to gait out as if she is running away from something. Roberta & SHADOW are always in a "circle fight" to keep her from wanting to "gait out". She **clamps onto her bit and becomes numb** to anything that Roberta asks her to do. In the wooded areas, Roberta would have to find trees with a circular path so that she could circle her into submission, hence, as soon as she would catch her wind, off she would go. In the past, we have loaned her every bit we have purchased, at least a dozen or so. At one time she was going to give up on her and put her back out to pasture as a broodmare. Long story

short - this mare came up lame in the stifle, and all the vet checks could not find anything physically wrong with her, so Roberta gave her the winter off. This year, she seems to be sound. So Roberta has taken her for a few rides around the ring. SHADOW , after getting bitted up - started her antics again, **head shaking, being high headed - "gaiting out" quickly**, and Roberta did the circle dance with her.

So here comes the saving grace - Dr. Cook's Bitless Bridle.

Today , I took mine (ZIP'S) down to Roberta's, fitted SHADOW with it. As soon as she had the headstall on, the corners of her mouth got VERY PURSED and wrinkled, I *think* she was waiting for a bit. Her jaw line was hard as a rock. In the gangway, I worked with her gently with the side rings, letting her understand that this was all she had to do. Her pursed wrinkled corners of her mouth got soft and the wrinkles went away. Her jawline relaxed. Roberta was shocked.

We took SHADOW in the ring. Roberta normally walks her around the ring one time before mounting - as SHADOW has had the habit of headshaking for a few minutes before she mounts. Maybe it was SHADOW'S way of getting endorphins so she doesn't feel pain (This is what I intuitively feel from SHADOW). Well to Roberta's surprise - no headshaking going on. (in the past it is **VIOLENT headshaking**). Roberta mounts SHADOW, and still no head shaking. She walks out slowly, and after a few times around the ring, she LENGTHENS out and maintains a beautiful swaying walk that Roberta HAS NEVER experienced . She did a few serpentines, a few halts - no high headedness, no fighting.

So as it turns out Roberta & SHADOW may have a new lease on trail riding. The one thing that SHADOW has not, WILL NOT and refuses to do, is to back up while Roberta is in the saddle. So that is her assignment this week. And to write down her headway each day. I left ZIP'S bridle with her so she can do her "homework" and give me some feed back for you. Roberta is 55 yrs old and a very accomplished & skilled rider. Today was a new beginning for her. What a delight to see SHADOW do what I call "the long and low" (I stole this from the dressage ring).

I cannot wait to try this with my daughter's Holsteiner. He needs a draft size. If I could get one of each size, I would go from horse farm to horse farm, asking to do a demo with the "owner & horse". This is a miracle product. Each time with the BITLESS BRIDLE is a testimonial to your work. Thank you, my horse thanks you, and to whomever I can get to listen to me - will thank you. Looking forward to sharing more stories.....

- Bonnie Burnett & ZIP, Roberta & SHADOW, 9/1/03

I come from New Zealand and have ordered a Bitless Bridle. I have an ex steeplechaser (racehorse). He is a very keen jumper so can I jump him in a Bitless Bridle? Also I have quite strong hands so will he be Ok? Sometimes he can be quite a handful. He is **prone to headshaking and has an allergy to metal** and a very thick tongue. I am hoping that a Bitless Bridle is the answer. Thank you for your time and all the great information on your web site.

- Jacky Hendry, New Zealand, 8/21/03

Headshaking horses respond well to the bridle and I think you will be pleased with what the bridle will do for you both. Yes, the bridle is a great help to show jumpers.

Your horse will pay better attention to the jumps, will not raise his head as you approach a jump, will not rush his fences, and will not take off on the other side of the jump. In summary, he will jump higher and better. Is this what you want? Tell me if I am wrong!

Even though you have 'strong' hands, you cannot hurt a horse with this bridle. Let me know how you progress.

Robert Cook

Subject: YIPPEE!

Got my bridle within 10 days! Very good service. After riding round the farm for a couple of days we went out hacking for about an hour on Sunday. I can only say that BOBBY was joyful! **No headshaking or chewing and his head was up and his ears forward the whole time!** He still rubbed his head on me when I took the bridle off but I'm guessing that even if he has some facial neuralgia it will take a while to subside! Anyway doesn't look like I'll be sending the bridle back. I've always wanted to try a bitless bridle but didn't like hackamores and didn't realize there was any alternative! We haven't galloped up any fields yet but BOBBY was very responsive and light in his Bitless Bridle on Sunday and he is well mannered most of the time anyway, so I don't think we will have any problems. Hope that this is a positive enough comment. So far I am delighted and so is BOBBY!

- Susanne McGuinness, 8/5/03

- **Here follows a lengthy correspondence with a rider whose horse was shaking its head before the Bitless Bidle was introduced (probably because of bit-induced trigeminal neuralgia) and continued to do so for some time afterwards. Three explanations eventually surfaced. First, the horse needed some time for its neuralgia to regress, secondly the noseband was being placed too low on the horse's head, and thirdly the horse needed its teeth floating.**

- I have just learned of the bitless bridle and found your site on the internet. My horse definitely needs a new method of whoa/go/trot/canter/walk. **It is a battle to get the bit in his mouth.** I use the simplest one. I changed to an apple bit and that worked for while. I went to a hackamore, and that works best. But I know it is heavy on his nose. I work with him fine for about 1/2 hour, and he decides he wants it off. He has a big lower lip and can reach out and **grab the reins with the bit or the shank on the hackamore.** I am definitely going to buy and try one of your bridles.

- I am presently training on a western saddle and use a training fork with his reins. Can I use this with the bitless bridle? Can I use my western reins on it? If all works well, then I will purchase all the proper stuff

with the bridle. I was originally trained in hunter/jumper and want to learn dressage with him (I am approaching a little old lady in paddock boots and am less likely to fall off in dressage!). But **I want his full attention** when I go that route. When he decides he wants to attack the reins/shank, he is lost to me. I can make him go, but I do not want to **fight** with him. I want him to do it willingly.

-

- He is part quarter/part thoroughbred, has long lanky legs and is absolutely beautiful in a trot and canter. He has a quiet power within him (I am not sure that he knows it.) and is basically a fun loving, sweet horse. I know you do not need to know all this, but like all horse owners, I like to talk about my horse. Thanks for any information you can provide on my questions.

-

- Catherine Woody, 1/8/03

- Hello Catherine:

- Please excuse a quicky as I rush to catch a plane. You will have to explain to me what a training fork is. If it's a martingale, you will not need one with the Bitless Bridle. However, you can use a martingale, as long as you use a rubber stop to prevent the martingale ring running forward and hooking over the ring to which the reins attach.

-

- Yes, you can use Western reins.

-

- Your horse will love the bridle and will listen to you with his full attention.

-

- Let me know please.

- - Bob Cook

I had great success with THUNDER (my wayward horse) last night! :-) He started his **head tossing immediately**. I had my trainer watch me very carefully -My hands did everything wrong when I tried to correct him. To keep the story short, I did whatever he told me to do. Thunder and I walked this way and that - in circles and lines and curls. Every time he wanted to misbehave, I corrected him immediately even when I anticipated a maneuver on his part. After a bit, he settled down with few protests. I walked him for over an hour. We may make it yet. The bridle is great. He well earned his treat last night. I think I did too.

- Catherine, 2/14/03

>Hello Catherine:

>

Thanks for your two e-mails and encouraging progress reports. THUNDER should not be **shaking his head**. A few horses react like this to the unfamiliar feel of the bridle but this reaction should quickly subside. Please check that the browband is not tight around the ears. Let us know if you need a longer browband. Also, make sure that the buckle of the chin >strap is not balancing on the edge of the jawbone.

>

Yes, you do not need to be applying **strong rein pressure**. If you can relax this it will help. Use more seat and legs and less rein aid.

I look forward to further bulletins.

>

- Bob Cook. 2/16/03

It looks like his browband and chinstrap are OK. What I did yesterday is loosen the connection, by one hole, between the head strap and the chin strap. I got on him, and all seemed to work. I did not have to force him to go, he did not shake his head (he thought about it, but did not do it), and he whoaed with very little pull. I did not ride him for very long yesterday. It was cold and late, but I wanted to check your suggestions.

After I had my wonderful 1 hour ride on Thunder, I went back the next day. For about 45 minutes it was great - then he decided **not to budge**. I sat on him for 15 minutes, and every time I tried to make him walk, there was **great head shaking**. I finally got him to walk without any shaking before I got off him.

I went back the next day to ride - and almost immediately he starts the **head tossing**. We walked a little and then he does not move. I finally got off and we did ground work. When I felt comfortable with him trying not to bite the reins or bobbing his head, I got back on. With a bit of coaxing we walked. He was not happy but he responded.

Last night, after I loosened the notch, I was surprised when he did not do anything but what I asked. I did not have to turn his head or give him a little kick to start him. Tonight I have a regular lesson on him. I will let you know if this works. THUNDER has a way of going along with the program for awhile and then deciding he does not want to do it. With the bit it may have been that it took a little while for it to build up. Anyway, thanks for your advice. Will keep in touch.

- Catherine

I may have finally found the right 'settings' for my THUNDER. Loosening by one hole made it too loose. So, we (trainer and I) shortened to move the nose band up. The nose band was actually on the end of his nose passages. **[ED: If the noseband is**

placed too low on a horse's head, this obstructs his nostrils and is another source of headsahking] He seems fine with this arrangement. He stops with just a tug when he is walking. At a trot, I have to pull a bit more. I worked on that last night, and he is adjusting accordingly. He tried a bit of head bobbing, but I did not let him get away with it. His lip looked for that rein. He settled down, and I settled down, and we actually had a good ride. I had a nice easy trot on him by the end of the lesson.

Just for some background, I call THUNDER my party animal. He loves to play and follows me like a puppy dog. He always wants to shower me with horse kisses and nuzzles. He does not want to work for me - so we have had many struggles. He is mule, but he is learning that I am more mule. With the bit (I used the gentlest one - even changed to an apple bit.) or the hackamore, he would do fine for awhile, and when he decided no more, he could reach his big ole lip around and bite the reins and **shake his head**. When I first got him, he took the bit fine. Then **one day** no. I have a feeling that someone flailed it in his mouth. I do think it did bother him because **it got increasingly harder to use the bit**. He did not like the heavy hackamore on his nose. The beauty of your bridle is that it works, it is gentle, and he cannot bite the reins.

I got THUNDER when he was 3 (he is now 7). I had a trainer work with him for about 6 months. Circumstances changed, and I ended up taking care of my horses for almost 2 years and did no riding. At my age I decided I'd better get back on my horses or just hang it up. So I moved them to a boarding barn. I have a mare that I have absolutely no problem riding. She is well trained, and I am confident on her. Problem is she was abused by a polo player and has back problems. I needed to be trained on THUNDER. When I started riding him, I was nervous, and I know he picked up on that. We initially did a lot of round pen work. He would **stomp his foot and bob his head at me** when he did not want to work. I did not give in, and we have good round pen sessions now. In the pen, he will **buck and shake his head at me**, but settles into working. My biggest accomplishment since this weekend is that he will walk when I say walk - sometimes with a little encouragement, but he goes.

I got on my first horse when I was 51 and was trained in hunter/jumper. I worked my way up to 2 feet jumps and had good balance. I had a wonderful horse that was so graceful in her movements. Unfortunately, she had seizures, and I had to put her down. After that circumstances changed, and here I am today relearning my confidence on THUNDER.

My greatest fear is my horse running away on me - which has happened in the arena with my jumper horse. At that point, someone said, 'why don't you get to know your horse? Sounded reasonable, so I started flatwork schooling and doing groundwork and spending a lot of 'pasture time' with her. I have continued that with my two now.

This is getting a bit lengthy, but this might help to understand THUNDER (or my fears) a bit more. Thank you for your suggestions and help. I feel THUNDER and I now have a way forward. He will still try to protest, but we will work through it. When I can finally canter on him comfortably, I will send a "We did it!" note.

- Catherine, 2/18/03 > >

Dr. Cook,

Just a quick note to let you know I had a mostly successful ride on THUNDER this afternoon - we have a loooooonnnnggggg way to go. We had a talk in his stall. He wanted to **nuzzle**, but I would not let him. We - or I - talked and told him what I expected. I saddled him up and we did a little work in the round pen. I took him to the big arena - a bit hard to mount, but I am learning that also. I walked him around - he tried the head bobbing, but I gave him a kick and turned him in a circle. When he does not want to walk, I just pick up the reins with one hand and move the other hand like I am going to grab the end and tap his neck with it - and he walks. When I first asked him to trot - great **head bobbing and tossing**; I pulled him into a small circle and kept him moving at a fast walk/slow trot. Pretty soon I trotted him in a straight line - towards the fence and whoaed just before the fence. I kept doing that. He is a bit hard to whoa at the trot with this bridle, but we are working on it. Pretty soon I trotted him in some circles. He was nicely paced, but not a totally happy camper about it. If I felt he was going to toss his head, I whoaed him or circled him. Me thinks we made some progress today - not sure who was better, Thunder or me! I did it today without my trainer!!! :-) Moving the nose band up did not work with the trot whoa. He tended to **toss his head up with the whoa**. I moved the band back down and the head was better with the whoa.

I mailed the questionnaire to you yesterday.

- Catherine, 2/21/03

Hello Catherine:

>

It sounds as though you are doing fine and just need to persevere now and gain more confidence. You can rattle the reins to get your horse's attention at the trot without fear of hurting him, so do this with vigor.

>

Your horse is not being stubborn by returning to his bit snatching habit when you use the bit. He is simply telling you to get rid of this annoyance. Have you visited the excellent website Newsletter run by Dr. Jessica Jahiel. I think you would find this very helpful.

Robert Cook, 4/2/03

Dear Dr. Cook,

Thanks for the Jessica Web site. Good source of information. THUNDER and I are actually doing well together. I found a book among my stuff called "Learning to Ride in Harmony" by Ray Hunt. I have been following his instructions and spending a lot of time just walking and visualizing Thunder being a part of me and learning his rhythm (as Hunt says, it is like dancing).

I am keeping loose reins and getting him to move off my legs. Working well. I was having trouble getting him to whoa from a trot. Hunt says to quit pulling on him; take him to a walk, then whoa. It works--all with body language! :-) Last night we 'danced among the grains of sand!'

When I trot, I keep a soft, but somewhat firm hold on his nose. **Rarely does he do a head toss anymore**. When I used to jump, I was so in tune with my horse. I was quite focused (for me it was focus or fall off). The book made me realize that this is

what I was not doing with Thunder. Thanks for you help. Thunder and I are on the road to "Harmony."

- Catherine Woody 4/23/03

Just a quick note. Yesterday I took THUNDER to the big arena. There were 3 other people and horses in there, one of which was a young 14 year old girl who is learning to ride. Her personality is 'I already know how, and why isn't the horse listening!' She was the only thing different for THUNDER. As soon as I boarded THUNDER, we both picked up on an unpleasant energy.

I walked him around, but neither of us could focus very well. I know he really sensed what I was feeling. I mentioned to the trainer (who is also my trainer) that there was a different energy in the arena. His comment was "Yes I know." I kept THUNDER in and let him watch the activity. After everyone left, it really did not dissipate. THUNDER did some **serious headshaking and foot stomping**. I calmed him, walked some, and got off. It was an interesting experience.

Catherine 4/24/03

[How very interesting. Keep me in touch please.](#)

Since the day of the 'bad vibes' ThUNDER has not listened well. I think the bad vibes were from the little girl's father. But that aside, THUNDER and I have lost some of our attunement. When I ask him to trot, he does his **headshaking and some foot stomping**. I get him out of it and we trot. I am also having a **difficult time again of 'whoaing' him**. He slows down, and I have to pull a bit on his nose to totally stop him. I had him so that I would 'think stop' and he would whoa. From a trot, I would take him to a walk and then whoa. It was beautiful. I have been practicing in the English saddle and I get unbalanced when he head tosses. So, I am going back to the western and restart the 'harmony' training. He certainly is teaching me horse lessons!

I took the bitless bridle to a friend's to try on her Arabian. Worked beautifully. Her horse was much like THUNDER with the bit. I made her practice on THUNDER. She was a bit reluctant, but saw that it worked fine. I suspect she will be getting one for her horse.

Catherine Woody, 5/5/03

Hello Catherine:

>

Please double check that you have the bridle fitted correctly. As long as this is correct, it may be that all that is needed is now the passage of time. A horse that has developed facial neuralgia from a bit may still show some head pain for a while after the bit is removed. This could take six to eight weeks to dissipate completely but I would expect you to see gradual improvement during this period.

If you persevere I think you will find everything begins to fall into place. The Western saddle may help you while the headshaking persists.

>

Robert Cook

Rode him in western last night and he did fine--and I did fine. I have a bit of anxiety when I ask him to trot in the English and I think he feels that I am going to have my trainer work with me on the longe line to get my seat in the trot on the English saddle. Also, when THUNDER doesn't want to do something, he protests. He had a bit of an attitude in the round pen last night, but when I hopped aboard, he was fine. His bridle seems to fit OK. I do check it.

My friend purchased a bitless.
Thanks,

Catherine Woody . 5/7/03

>

The headshaking stopped abruptly after his dental work last month [Ed: A reminder that sharp edges on the cheek teeth should always be considered as a cause of headshaking. This is especially important with the Bitless Bridle because of the need to have the noseband snug. If a horse has sharp enamel edges on his teeth, the snug noseband presses the cheek against these edges and causes the horse pain]. He does have a passion for beta biothane, however, and loves to mouth the reins. I have a broken hand in a cast for two months. It is the dominant hand and entirely useless. A miserable week passed, unable to ride and no one to help me. I took the BB out to the field and held it wide open. People make fun of my "pet horse, but I don't know anyone else whose horse will approach at liberty and bridle itself. With horse in hand and step stool beside, I was able tack up and ride by myself. The sun shone and the birds sang ride.

Sometimes THUNDER is like a giant puppy dog--gives me horse kisses and snuffles all the time. Our riding is getting more consistent and better. Thanks for your help.

- - Catherine Woody 7/28/03

Here is a bit of information about my trusty steed. Generally, things have been going well with THUNDER. About a month ago, I took a Martha Josey barrel racing clinic. (All were interested in his Bitless Bridle. One of the trainers said he moves really well for me--which, of course, made my day!) After he (and I) settled down, I think he actually enjoyed the outing. It was intensive and at times, I wondered why I was there. THUNDER did **some head shaking, but only when we were in the wait mode.** [Ed: A horse that is being held back from others will toss its head in frustration but this is a normal behavioral response and not part of the Headshaking

Syndrome, any more than is the head tossing that occurs when a horse in the field is bothered by flies] He had had his bridle on for more than 6 hours. I just let the reins hang loose and let him shake his head. When we were taking our turn to do the exercise, there was no problem. I actually think he got into showing off. Since I was trained in English, THUNDER and I did the 'post and trot' demo for the group, and I really feel he strutted his stuff. He had a perky trot.

I found that the cross of reins under his chin kept getting twisted. Is there anyway to prevent that?

Back home at the arena, he has done **a little bit of head shaking**. I find that if he is a little bit cranky, he shakes his head. His skin is sensitive. I use a soft brush when I groom him. With the season change, his fur is becoming silky. I have also discovered that he reads (or feels) my moods very well. If I get cranky or mad at him, he shuts down. Other than that, he is my love bug.

By the way, I am not a barrel racer. I trotted and went from 45 sec. to 42. The outing was good for both of us.

- Catherine Wood, 10/1/03

"I am returning your beta bitless bridle for a full refund. Not because I am disappointed with it but because I am so delighted with it, that I have now bought your padded leather one.

Six months ago, I bought a very green 5-year old Irish hunter. As we brought her into work, we found that after 20 minutes of exercise she began to **headshake**. And when asked to canter she would **rear**. Needless to say, we tried all sorts of bits, gadgets and tricks with her, even to the point of almost considering the old advice 'There is only one way to stop a horse from rearing (what's that then?) ... break a bloody bottle over 'er 'ead' - to no avail. Eventually, whilst researching headshaking and rearing on the Internet, I came across your website.

Within two days of using your bridle, my mare became the most light, delightful, responsive and honest ride that I have ever known. She now works happily in outline, jumps, willingly and obediently does everything asked of her and just loves it. Now I wonder how on earth I ever came to take it for granted that the best way to work a horse was to strap a pile of iron into its mouth and add leverage. It seems so outrageous, ridiculous and almost criminal now.

Amongst other things, I work as an Equine Bowen Therapist and, as such, am positively committed to equine welfare. I have had no hesitation in recommending your bridle to fellow therapists, horsey friends, and clients. I tell them that your bridle does absolutely everything that your website promises and that I am convinced that your work is a tremendous contribution to our thinking about equine welfare."

... Thank you again,

- Candy Clarkson, Theale, UK 6/28/03

Firstly I wanted to thank you for spending the time with me on the phone yesterday - it was muchly appreciated. Secondly, I am still awaiting the questionnaire - please send as I am sure it will have some valuable info for me.

Lastly, I rode ROTHKO in the bitless this morning, and yes, things [the **headshaking**] already seem 60% improved. I love its design and the way it looks. The brakes are incredible - instant response. Turning better too. I did not ask him to go "on the bit" or "into the hand" (as the French call it) - I just wanted him to get used to the concept first.

- Portia - the Zimbabwean! 7/9/03

I took ROTHKO on trail this morning, and it was prime headshaking conditions even though it was only 7am - bright blue sky, riding through hedgerows, dust in the air etc etc etc. And I was blown away by how awesome he was; no headshaking and one rub of the nose. And so so less resistant. We have to pass emus on this trail, and as you can imagine this can blow any horse's sense of calm, let alone a very precious German warmblood. He was so less resistant passing them, and I think before it was coz I rode him with too much hand. I am truly amazed, and cannot stress the fact enough that you are a genius. Finally a vet who knows what he's talking about! I think ROTHKO and I are on the way to a truly connected relationship!.

Portia 7/14/03

Subject: MORE QUESTIONS

Thanks for the reply about the saliva - that all makes sense, I will just wait and watch.

I am finding some interesting things, in that ROTHKO is super sensitive, and I almost think that the nose band is too strong for him, so I have heightened it a lot, (as suggested by customer service) and still have as much response from him when I need to give a hand aid.

I am finding that the cheek pieces under the jaw are twisting and I think that pisses him off too - any way of correcting that other than me consistently checking my reins??

I am also wondering if there is a way to ELIMINATE the NOSEBAND all together?????

Any ideas???
> Portia 7/24/03

No, you cannot dispense with the noseband but I suppose you could train yourself and your horse to use less and less rein pressure? In the meantime, the higher placement will reduce the pressure on the nose. Alternatively, you could put a sheepskin wrap under the noseband to soften the effect.

The twist comes from your hands and runs forward. How about marking the reins in some way, so that you know which side is which?

Rothko is obviously taking every opportunity to tell you how he could be even more comfortable. I salute him.

Hi Dr Cook - hope this finds you well and immersed in projects. I have another question - my trainer has noticed that whilst I am riding, ROTHKO is **banging his lips together**, kind of like a goldfish, which makes a cupping sound. I have seen him do this in his stall, and thought it was a boredom thing, or baby horse thing, he only does it when there is nothing to eat and it looks like he is just whiling away the time. Anyway, he's doing it in the bitless when I ride him - does this mean anything?

Obviously I don't know if he did it with a bit as there was the flash noseband in place.....There is still saliva around his lips but this seems to be less.

Any ideas??
Portia, 7/30/03

Just thought I would update you on our progress with the Bitless Bridle. I have found KALEIGH to be exceptionally receptive to the bridle. She does start out **long and low** but eventually has a natural head carriage. Not only is she enthusiastic about our rides, she has developed an ego. She has accepted contact with the reins nicely and she now meets all our "obstacles" head on with no **fear, inconsistencies, or hesitation**. It is wonderful. I am anxious to see how quickly she progresses to second level dressage now that she is reaching for contact with my hands.

We started another older thoroughbred in the BB. She is twenty. After the track she evented to Prelim and 2nd level dressage with great **interference behind**. Her hind legs are a mess. On her second BB ride she was acting like a four year old! She was very easy to rate even though she asked repeatedly to canter and really move out. This is a horse that came to us with **very little enthusiasm for any time under saddle**. It was nice to see the change in her attitude. Now we will wait and see if her interference behind diminishes.

We have also started a gelding (he is thirty) in the BB. This is my husband's horse so I am giving you this information second hand. I have not witnessed this ... just listened carefully as he explained. SUNNY is very stubborn and hates to go out alone. David took him out for a trail ride alone in the BB. We have been riding him very nicely in a short-shanked hackamore as he is easy to rate and maneuver from one's seat. Dave explained that even though the bridle was properly fitted, SUNNY'S **lower lip "dangled"**. David continued to watch this display as he finished getting ready to ride. After mounting the lip continued to "dangle" leaving his lips separated but jaw clenched shut.

Apparently, SUNNY was particularly **stubborn and resistant** to the bridle and ride in general. The lip continued to be a display and he **tossed his head** at various times. I have given his explanation thought and wondered about SUNNY'S oral health. He had his teeth floated in May by an equine practitioner. We did not use sedatives and she described his oral health as above normal for his age.

Do you have any thoughts on this display? I hope to actually witness Dave riding SUNNY so that I may update you. Before that, do you have anything specific that I should try or examine or watch for when that day comes? Dave has since gone back

to the hackamore until I get a chance to watch him ride SUNNY in the BB.

We have not tried the Arab/welsh gelding yet as he is taking some time off for a leg injury. He will also prove very interesting as a BB candidate. He is a competitive trail horse with head carriage issues and **symptoms of trigeminal neuralgia**. His progress will be great for supporting issues on the Bitless Bridle.

You mentioned a questionnaire? We would like to contribute any information that would benefit the humane treatment of horses. As equine rehabilitators and licensed veterinary technicians we are privy to great experiences and resources. We have read many of your publications on the advantages of bitlessness. We look forward to adding our information in the hopes of making the case stronger for the Bitless Bridle.

In all, we are amazed by the reactions of just our horses to the BB. Because our horses have come to us for rehabilitation, they are the perfect candidates for study. They definitely have expressed what they don't like.

Good sharing information with you and any thoughts you might have on SUNNY would be greatly appreciated. Thank you. Hope to hear from you soon.

- Kathleen Hulle, LVT. 7/11/03

Many thanks for all your comprehensive feedback. I appreciate the trouble you have taken to give this to me.

The relaxed lower lip is something that is seen from time to time. A variation on this display is a horse in which the whole of the soft tissues of the chin vibrates during exercise. Both these displays are, in my opinion, merely a sign of happy relaxation and are nothing to worry about. In fact they could be regarded as a good sign. It is interesting that you say that in spite of this display, the mouth is still shut.

The headshaking is another matter but perhaps this will disappear as SUNNY becomes accustomed to the different feel of the bridle. But check that the browband is not irritating his ears.

I am attaching a three-part article that includes the questionnaire. The article will be published in Germany later this year.

Bob 7/11/03

I have recently begun working with a ten year old Thoroughbred gelding who has been out of work for approximately two years. (Short five minute trots on the lunge line). He suddenly began exhibiting "classic **head shaking**" behavior after a lungeing session with the lunge line running through the bit and over the poll. During that session, he became somewhat rambunctious (not unusual for him) and then **suddenly began shaking his head**. I was interested to find a site on bits and this behavior since my immediate thought was that the bit may have "smacked" him in the mouth. I thought the behavior would stop once the bit was removed, but he has continued with **classic signs of head shaking with just a halter on and without being worked**. Some days are better than others. My question is... if his

head shaking was indeed induced by injury from the bit, is the condition permanent, or can I expect him to improve if the bit is not re-introduced?

- Karen Stotka, Rhode Island, USA, 5/6/03

I think you are likely to be correct in suspecting that the bit is the cause of your horse's headshaking. Removal of the bit is the logical course to correct this problem but you are also right in suspecting that the neuralgia may not regress immediately. I would certainly anticipate signs of a definite improvement, however, in the passage of time. This may occur over a period of weeks or months, depending on the severity of the facial neuralgia in the first instance. Is it possible that this horse was given two years at grass because of a headshaking problem in the past? Have you owned him all this time?

I am a little puzzled with regard to the manner in which your lunge line was rigged. Could you expand on this please.

I am attaching an article that will give you more information on headshaking, together with a questionnaire that I hope you may feel inclined to complete in due course. I am especially interested in collecting information on headshakers when the moment that this started appears to be identifiable.

Please keep in touch and let me know how you progress.

WRC 5/6/03

It was an egg butt snaffle. I did examine his mouth and found no obvious sign of insult from the bit. I am truly puzzled by the whole thing because even though he does get somewhat "unruly " on the lunge, on that day he was actually being fairly good and I did not think he did anything exceptional that would have caused injury. Still, I do not want to rule anything out in trying to pursue possible remedies for him. I do still wonder about the bridle, and not only the bit, because he has improved over the last several days until he is haltered. About five minutes after the halter is put on him, he begins to **sneeze and rub his nose**.

Thank you for the further history and explanation about the lunge-line rig.

It certainly sounds as though the **headshaking** is of recent origin and stemmed from the lungeing. Presumably, the lunge line turned your snaffle (was it a snaffle?) into a gag bit, which is a rather severe form of bit. This might well have initiated an attack of facial neuralgia. But be of good cheer. I would expect this to subside, given time and no further bit trauma. Have you examined his mouth for any sign of actual damage to the bars or tongue?

I wonder why you are thinking of some chiropractor therapy?

I found a reference on-line of a case that had success treating head shaking chiropractically and, as I said, I do not want to rule out any possibilities yet. I also spoke with a local veterinarian who also does chiropractic and she said she has had some success treating head shaking chiropractically.

Another interesting note: a few days before the headshaking began, I noticed a **bump on his face just to the inside of his left eye**. It was hard, not sensitive to the touch, and the skin was not broken. The woman who boards him said that it was definitely new. I am suspicious that he could have had some kind of trauma at the

junction of the bony plates in his face that could have started this. He has free roam in and out of his stall and access to a small paddock at all times, so there are many possibilities!

I am happy for now that he is no longer hiding in the corner of his stall. He does venture out, even into the sunlight and is acting more and more normal... until he is haltered. At least it is a start, and I will continue to pursue it to see how he progresses and if we can find a solution for him. Thank you so much for your interest... I did download your questionnaire and will return it when I have a better handle on how he reacts. I will let you know how things progress.

- Karen Stotka, 5/18/03

First I want to say that long lining my Shire in the Bitless Bridle took care of the problem I was having. Definitely no bit was required and he's doing wonderfully.

I am writing because I was watching a rider who had some weird contraption on his horse's head because of headshaking. When I was told about the headshaking, I remembered your Bitless Bridle website had articles about this problem as being associated with the bit and a neuralgia? I went to the site but also thought I would write you so that perhaps you could refer me to other information. I did not mention the Bitless Bridle to the rider because I wanted to double check the website first. The rider is a physician so I want to provide him with solid information on why I am suggesting he try the Bitless Bridle to help his horse (especially since this help is unsolicited!).

Any help you can give me is greatly appreciated.
Thanks again and I love the Bitless Bridle! So do my horses!

- Carlotta E. Groves, DVM, PhD, 5/5/03.

To sum up the bitless bridle in one word? AMAZING!!! I ride a 10 year old Quarter Horse mare, "HALEY". She's always accepted a bit but would display her **nervousness** at times by **head tossing** and **chewing** on it. I've tried several bits and the last one I've been using was a Myler with 5" shanks and a medium port which seemed to help some. After discovering your website through an advertisement in Western Horseman, I ordered one.

The very first time I used it was on a five- hour solo trail ride! She seemed heavy on the reins at first till she figured it out. HALEY is definitely more comfortable! The displays of nervousness are GONE! We've been out 6 times now and she is so light on the reins and relaxed. I never worry if I'm being tough on her mouth anymore so I'm more relaxed and can concentrate on more important things like enjoying the ride! I give my horse's comfort and well being high priority! I want what is best for her and the Bitless Bridle plays a HUGE part!

I can't thank you enough! All the bits I have are dust collectors now! Several riders at the barn have already placed their orders for your great product!

- Roger Daigle, Cornwall, Ontario, Canada, 4/11/03

From: "DJ Sproat" <buckskin@netcom.ca>

>

I have been reviewing your website with great interest. Particularly around the "headshaking" issue. I have a horse with a similar problem - but not exactly. No vet has yet figured out the issue. Let me describe and maybe you can advise if I am dealing with trigeminal neuralgia - and if the Bitless Bridle may help.

It actually started at a horse show a couple of years ago. I had gotten annoyed **with him and yanked on the reins causing him to fling his head up and almost fall over side ways. After that he started rubbing his nose.** I put it down to the stress we were both feeling. He would be happily moving along, not necessarily with any rein pressure - then suddenly stop, **drop his head and rub his nose on his knee.** He would do this if we were on the trail or in the arena. **Almost tossed me over his head** a couple of times due to the sudden stop and drop! As I said, I thought it was stress, because he would do it on the trail when horses were walking away from him (and he was being left behind) or if they were passing him. If not allowed to rub, he can become almost frantic. Often ends up **sneezing and snorting** several times. **Slight discharge** can result. Then he is fine for a while.

I tried laying him off. I've tried antihistamines, herbal breathing supplements (he hates the garlic!), Echinacea, bedding changes, wetting his hay. I've stopped short of having him endoscoped. Nothing has made any difference. I do use Vick in his nose sometimes. And will dose him with cough or airway medicine. Not sure it helps.

Now - the problem is - **he does this whether he has a bridle on or not.** He can be longeing with a halter and still drop his head and drag his nose in the dirt or rub on his knee. People have seen him do it out in the field, all by himself, when nothing is happening at all. I've seen paint on his nose and head where he has obviously rubbed on the fence too. And he **does it in his stall.**

It is clearly worse if he is in the bridle and being pushed; working or in side reins. But it happens sporadically. He is really bothered for a few seconds, then he is fine for minutes. Sometimes when he is really being pushed or "stressed", he may show a few seconds of actually **headshaking. Not tossing, but a rapid shake, like a dog.**

Time of day, weather and temperature make no discernable difference. He is a Morgan, so has a high head carriage. But not a naturally relaxed one. Left to his own devices, he will develop a ewe neck. He doesn't easily round his back or come under himself. He **drags his hind feet.** Trying to lope over poles is torture for him. Our main activities are English Pleasure (saddleseat), Western Trail and Carriage Driving. Dropping his head to rub his nose is especially dangerous in carriage - since he can catch a line on the shafts. I don't want to check him up, but I may need to start.

Note - I don't use a noseband. And he doesn't like a bosal. He wears a full fly mask in the field (in the summer) because **flies in his ears drive him nuts!**

So - what do you think? Is it trigeminal neuralgia? Or am I dealing with something else? Do you think your bridle would help? Is there any value in having a chiropractor check him? Perhaps a subluxation in the poll (from the jerk) pinched or damaged a nerve? Any ideas? As I said, I've consulted two different vets. One thought of allergies and so we tried the antihistamine. Another wondered about photic headshaking, but I've never seen any correlation to light. I've done a lot of research - and a nerve-damage angle seems possible. Especially due to the incident at the horse show. But I'm just not sure. I'd appreciate any info. Something is obviously bothering him and I want to help.

Thanks very much!

- DJ Sproat, 2/14/03

Your comprehensive description enables me to say with some confidence that your horse has a bit-induced trigeminal neuralgia. At the risk of you thinking that I am trying to push a sale, I most earnestly recommend that you remove the bit and stop using side reins. Use of the BB is both diagnostic and therapeutic. There is a 30 day warranty, so if your horse shows no signs of improvement after a month you can return it for a full refund. An investment in the BB will be money far better spent than by going along other diagnostic pathways (endoscopy, radiography, chiropractory etc.).

I am attaching a questionnaire for you to complete now and return to me. After a month's trial, I hope you will feel inclined to complete another questionnaire. Also attached is an article that will give you further information about the headshaking syndrome.

Please keep in touch.
- Bob Cook, 2/16/03

Thank you for your prompt reply, Dr. Cook:

I have attached the questionnaire. Looking back, it seems clear to me that my horse was pre-disposed to having trigeminal sensitivity. Then, with my fit of bad horsemanship - I pushed it over the edge.

I did have the chiropractor out today. He found my horse was locked in the Atlas area (C1 and C2) - which other research has implicated (anecdotally) with headshaking. I am hoping this will help to put ALEX back to the pre-nose rubbing stage. Then, by avoiding the bit, we can work comfortably again, and not cause further sensitivity.

In the meantime, I have jury-rigged a fair representation of your bridle to use right away. If it helps, I'll be very interested in the Driving version that your site mentions you have in prototype.

I'll keep you posted.
Thanks again,

- DJ Sproat

I have attached a follow-up version of the questionnaire. I have used my mock-up version of the bitless bridle about 10 times. At first I thought it was making no

difference. But recently I have noticed ALEX is rarely rubbing his nose or sneezing. When I updated the spreadsheet, I noted that it appears the signs that showed up most recently are among the first to disappear. This is not consistent across the board - but the whole thing (due to non-scientific observations) is subjective anyway - isn't it?

He is still **sour (ears back)** when working in the ring. But is more willing to move on. And when stretching out during roadwork, he will drop his head and appear quite happy - even at a canter.

So, I would like to inquire about your Driving Bridle. I really don't want to have to hang the heavy Liverpool bit in his mouth at this point. Do you have a version that is ready to market - or is it still in test/prototype? I would be very interested in purchasing one - or in helping to trial it for you if you aren't yet ready to make it available to sell. Do you have photos and details? I'd like it to be black - Beta is fine - must have blinders and must have brass hardware.

Thanks very much,

- DJ (Sproat), 3/18/03

"I have a 17 year old Fell mare, BRODIE, who is used for driving. I have owned her for two years and from the start she exhibited the odd "**head shake**" which originally was put down to possible bit evasion. Last spring she developed **classic symptoms of a head shaker**.

We have investigated all the normal possibilities - nose net, back treatment, teeth, etc. - and she has been "scoped" so we know there is no major nasal problem.

Before moving onto investigate a drug regime (which we would not start until the spring) I would like to try a Bitless Bridle. At the moment she drives in a normal Liverpool bit. Would this be sensible for driving? BRODIE is extremely well behaved but can be strong when she wants to be.

Your comments would be gratefully received.

Geoff Hughes, Tavistock, Devon, UK

You pose an interesting question and my answer is 'Yes.' I firmly believe that the same principles that make the Bitless Bridle a safer bridle for riding than a bitted bridle apply at least equally but probably more so to driving. Drivers rely even more on communication with the horse's head than riders. A pony with trigeminal neuralgia, which is what your pony has by the sound of it, would particularly appreciate the removal of a rod of metal from its mouth. The FAQ's on my website have recently been updated, so have a look at these and also the Users' Comments, specifically those on headshaking.

So yes, I think it would be sensible to try the Bitless Bridle. You could use an open bridle (i.e. the current riding headstall, which has no blinkers) or you could wait until

we produce a driving bridle, as we plan to do. However, this particular project may not materialize anytime soon. So as your problem is of some urgency, I would encourage you to consider the existing option. If it does not work (improbable) our warranty is such that you simply send us the bridle back for a full refund, so you have nothing to lose.

The only thing that I would wish you to understand is that, at the present moment, we have very limited experience of bitless driving and little or no feedback on how this works. But I would not encourage you to consider doing this if I did not think it did not offer you a reasonable chance of solving your problem. Obviously, you could adopt the same cautionary steps in the introductory phase as we recommend for riders.

Please let me know what you decide and keep in touch.

-Robert Cook

Subject: Driving Pony

Thank you very much for your prompt reply. I thought you may be interested in the following and also be able to give me a little more advice.

Yes I would agree with your "diagnosis" of probable trigeminal neuralgia as BRODIE certainly seems extremely uncomfortable when the head shaking is a problem. Although we have not yet moved onto a drug regime, or any form of nerve block, the only thing that seems to help alleviate the problem on occasions is a nose net and even that is not guaranteed.

So this weekend I have experimented with "going bitless" using a simple Hackamore and a familiar route of about 1 mile.

1. First step on Friday was to long rein in her normal driving bridle with Liverpool bit. Her **headshaking** was so bad that I was relieved not to be driving and there was excessive **nose blowing** etc. On return she immediately needed to **rub her nose**.
2. Due to lack of daylight the next step had to be left until Saturday morning when I long reined the same route in the same bridle but with the Hackamore. There were two (very slight) headshakes and nose blowing only occurred towards the end of the route. On return there was no attempt to rub her nose.
3. I then put back the Liverpool bit hitched her to the carriage to drive the same route. Within yards (still at walk) the head shaking and nose blowing started. She did, of course work harder this trip round with a lot of trotting, but she returned breathing very heavily and needed to rub her nose again.
4. Sunday Morning she was ridden the same route by a friend with the Hackamore and an open bridle. There was virtually no head shaking and again the nose blowing only started towards the end of the route and there was no nose rubbing after the bridle was removed.
5. We then fitted the normal driving bridle with the Liverpool bit with the intention of repeating the same route. Within yards the head shaking and snorting started

again and BRODIE was so clearly distressed she was turned round after only about 150 yards. When the bridle was removed she again needed to rub her nose.

As you can imagine I am now very keen to try driving bitless. However, I am not keen to use an open bridle as BRODIE has always been blinkered. I know you are to develop a driving version eventually but, in the meantime, do you think we could add blinkers to your standard version? As a moderately scientific type (ruminant nutritionist if that counts!) I would be very keen to evaluate progress and feedback the results to you. I know that there are several vets in the UK (both in practice and in research) who would also like to watch the progress

Any thoughts?

- Geoff Hughes, 1/26/03

What a very interesting series of tests ... all of them supporting the proposition that the bit is the trigger for the headshaking. There is no reason NOT to try adding a set of blinkers to our standard riding headstall, though I would encourage you to consider an open bridle before you go to this trouble. You could long-line your pony first in order to get some idea of how she would react to not having her range of vision significantly reduced. Then, if all goes well, drive her in a small paddock etc. Make sure you have fitted the bridle LOW AND SNUG, as described in the manual. Also, thread a piece of cord through the browband loops in order to make yourself a throat latch.

Even though you fit the headstall snug, the riding bridle will tend to bow-out at the cheek straps when rein pressure is applied. This will have the effect of letting in some light and will render DIY blinkers rather ineffective. In our driving bridle, we plan to design the cheek straps in such a way as to overcome this feature.

But I am not convinced that carriage horses benefit from being virtually blindfolded by blinkers ... are you? Horses have their eyes on the side of their heads in order that they CAN see behind. If they are accustomed to a carriage being there, I do not think they will mistake it for a monster. My hunch is that the most common reason why a carriage horse bolts is because it is running away from bit-induced pain in its mouth, rather than because of a fright from behind.

Did I send you the attached questionnaire? If you fill this out it will give me more information with which to help you.

I shall be most interested to read further bulletins from the West country. My father was a Cornishman, though I was born in Birmingham!

Yes, they (the Bitless Bridles) got here just before Christmas! I have already shot the video of my horse working in a snaffle bit. It is exceptionally wet here at the moment, and the ground is bottomless, so we haven't been riding since Christmas. As soon as the weather improves I will get some footage of him in the bitless. I have ridden him in it twice, with excellent results both times; much more settled and confident, and able to take the lead out on a busy road without problems! Most importantly, there was no **headshaking, pulling for more rein, or excessive headrubbing**. Thank you!!"

- Chris Chapman, UK, 1/2/03

"I just wanted to say thanks for sending the Bitless Bridle!!

My 9-year-old TB mare CHILLI **shakes her head, fights the bit, won't bridle willingly**. Actually, CHILLI fits probably 80%+ of the 'YOU NEED THE BITLESS BRIDLE IF YOUR HORSE ...' section!!

I bought CHILLI as a jumper. I later found out that she needed a bit more training and getting used to than I thought. I believed I would be in schooling shows this winter. Now, I find that I am **constantly fighting her** to do basic flatwork!! After falling off her twice (I hadn't fallen off for 3 years!), my confidence was, to say the least, a bit rattled.

So, I started with the walk. Once I had complete control, we did a trot. The trot took a LOT longer than I planned!! But, now, I can safely ride without the standing martingale because she usually doesn't **fling her head up** as much. Then, onto the canter. Let's just say it was like riding a roller coaster! She **half-reared, "leaped", her head was constantly tossing and she gave the occasional buck**. But then, she **wouldn't move at all**. CHILLI is a VERY forward moving horse. She just GOES. No leg needed. We cleared that up (it was the saddle; the padding was too hard for her).

Anyway, I had a few days of riding before the Bitless Bridle came. I tried it out last night. Fitting was actually easier than I thought it would be. I started with a walk. CHILLI was VERY confused. She kept chewing to try and find the bit. Then, when we moved into the trot, she started making little snorting noises. She did this for a few laps, then let out a huge snort and stopped the noises. She was eager to move but never tried to fight me into the canter. I did quite a few walk-trot, trot-walk, etc. transitions. Every time, CHILLI seemed to be stopping faster and with less of a fight. I also noticed she kept her head down through most of the workout.

Since it was -10° (probably -15° in the arena!), I didn't want to make her work too hard so, swallowing my fears, I asked for the canter. She went into it but stumbled and I had to resume trotting. Usually, if she starts to canter but she's forced to trot, she keeps trying to leap into the canter. She did it once, then stopped when she realized I wouldn't let her. After a few more rounds of trot, I asked for the canter. She did 4-5 lovely strides before I asked her to stop (that was as much as I had confidence for!).

For the 1st time, I'm pretty impressed. There were a few arguments here and there and she tried to avoid the pressure a few times but seemed to really relax in the end (when I cooled her down, her walk was so BIG, I almost toppled off!!). I'm going to hopefully ride longer tomorrow night.

Thanks again,"

- Lauren Gallant, 12/3/02
>>

Thank you for the first bulletin on Chilli and congratulations on the progress you already report. I hope you will give me further bulletins in due course. I am attaching an Excel file for your consideration. If you can download these files, it may interest you to see the huge number of additions I have now made to the 'If your horse ...' section!

- Bob Cook, 12/3/02

On Tuesday night, everything was going really well. I asked Chilli for about the third canter transition that night. Suddenly, before I knew what was happening, she had **reared up and smashed me in the face**. Before I could recover, she was up again but I luckily kept my face away. I was really rattled and shocked at her behavior. She has been doing little "half rears" lately but these were normal sized!! I did canter her where she reared and she seemed fine. Could she just be seeing what she could get away with without a bit?? Or do you think it was because she was frustrated because she couldn't avoid the contact???

Anyway, last night was much better (although I didn't canter). I did a lot of transitions and I noticed her **backing up was a lot smoother. Her halt was faster too**. Although, she was being a grouch with the other horses in the arena, it was a pretty good ride and I was pleased. I'll probably try the canter again tonight. Thanks,

- Lauren, 12/5/02

P.S. Would you like me to fill out that questionnaire and send it back to you??? didn't really specify.....

Rearing is, as Dr. Jessica Jahiel emphasizes, "the single most dangerous behavior that a horse can exhibit." Before you even think of riding your horse again, please visit Jessica's excellent Horse-Sense website. Carry out a search on 'rearing' and spend an hour or two reading and thinking about her good advice on this serious topic (www.horse-sense.org).

You do not say how long you have owned this horse but I gather she is a recent purchase. How much do you know about her past history? A nine year-old mare has to have a past and the more you can get to know about it the better. She apparently came to you with a list of problems including but not limited to **difficulty in bridling, head shaking, napping, rearing, leaping, bucking and constant fighting with the bit**. Many of these are probably long-standing problems and it is unrealistic to expect that they will all disappear overnight when the bit is removed from the mouth. Nevertheless, it sounds highly probable that your mare does have a bit-induced trigeminal neuralgia (acute facial pain) and I would say that, given time, there is a good chance of this regressing.

In the short term, however, your mare may well have neck and back pain from the use of a standing martingale to keep her head fixed in one position. Rearing is most frequently caused by pain and back pain is certainly something for you to consider. Are you sure your saddle is correctly padded and fitted? You mentioned a padding problem in your first e-mail.

You have already done something important with regard to the possibility of mouth pain, by removing the bit. Your mare may simply need more time for the facial pain to regress but check that her teeth are not sharp. The snug noseband of the Bitless

Bridle could be pressing her cheek against a sharp enamel edge on her first molar tooth. The noseband on the bridle has to be fitted low on the head but if it is too low it could obstruct breathing and this could be yet another cause of rearing. Read the manual again carefully and check that the bridle is fitted correctly.

How sound is your mare in her feet? Sore feet could cause pain when the pace is increased. It would be a good idea to get your veterinarian to check out your mare for this and a number of other possible problems listed above.

I do not think that your mare is simply trying to see what she can get away with. As Dr. Jessica comments, it is much more likely that she is saying "I hurt" or "I am afraid." Neither do I think she is frustrated because she cannot avoid the contact. The pressure exerted by the bridle is well distributed and it would be difficult or even impossible to cause pain in a healthy horse from normal 'contact' ... and I assume you are not using excessive rein pressure? Nevertheless, a horse with a pre-existing hypersensitivity or frank pain in her face, brought about by the bit in the past, may still be showing some fear or apprehension concerning even the very slight pressures exerted by the Bitless Bridle. An episode of facial neuralgia in man is triggered by stimuli that to a healthy person are of no consequence. Time will help but, in the meantime, a return to some ground work (lunging and long-lining) would I think be advisable.

As I have already mentioned, the history of this horse is important. I might be able to make some further comments if you complete the questionnaire so, yes, please do this and let me have it back as soon as possible.

I say again, read before you ride. Take care,

- Bob Cook, 12/5/02

I bought CHILLI in August. Here's the info I got with her:

REGISTERED NAME: Reddi Fe Dem

BIRTH: March 16, 1993

TATTOO: W 37030

SIRE: **RED SULTAN 1977** by VILLAMOR out of RAMA LASS

DAM: **CHAMPAGNE CRYSTAL 1989** by COUNTRY LIGHT out of SUSAN TORREY

COLOUR: Liver Chestnut

HEIGHT: 15'3HH

BREED: Thoroughbred

ACHIEVEMENTS: - Age 3, raced in two races

- Age 4, showed Hunter Flat
- Age 5, one full year of endurance; started jumping
- Age 6-7, hacked
- Age 8, showed Jumper

We did not see most of these problems or even heard about them "before" we bought her. My saddle was just custom fitted to her. The old stuffing was too hard and causing her withers to be sore. CHILLI has really good feet but her shoes had to be changed a while back because she kept bending them on stones in the outdoor arena. That's sort of what I meant about the pressure. She was constantly **fighting the bit** and **pinning her ears back and avoiding the pressure on her mouth**. I hated to see that so I got the bridle. She may be thinking that she can't trust this bitless thing. Maybe she thinks the bit is suddenly going to come back and hurt her??? I don't know. I'm not an expert!! I'll send you that questionnaire soon. I haven't had the time to fill it out.

-Lauren, 12/6/02

My reply the same day, after the questionnaire had been received:

The completed questionnaire is useful and gives me a better idea of your horse's problems. There appear, however, to be three inconsistencies in your answers. You had told me earlier that before you switched to the Bitless Bridle (BB) your horse did fight the bit, buck and half-rear. Yet in the questionnaire you say 'no' to fighting and bucking both before and after the BB, and 'yes' to rearing after but not before? Of the four major problems (the four 'F's) your mare exhibits at least three and probably four if you concede the 'fighting' issue.

Putting these items on one side, I count 30 problems that your horse had prior to using the BB. After only 5 days of BB, 16 of these were solved and 14 remained. Out of these 14, at least seven could be attributed to facial neuralgia and probably more than seven.

From the above I conclude that your horse still has significant facial pain. In the passage of time, I believe that there is a good chance that this will regress if not disappear completely but it may take several weeks or even months for a full regression to take place. In the meantime, there is reason to anticipate a gradual improvement. My recommendation is that you should stick to ground work for the next two or three weeks, in order to give your horse time to recover a little and also to get more accustomed to the feel of the BB on her hypersensitive face. In other words, treat her as an unbroken horse and continue with this approach even when you start to ride her again.

I hope you will continue to keep me in touch. Your horse obviously has serious problems and needs very careful handling but I see reasons for hoping that most of her problems can eventually be overcome. Be patient and give her plenty of time.

12/12/02:

Just wondering.....how do you hook up the lunge line to the bitless bridle? As far as I can tell, it doesn't mention anything in the users manual (unless I missed something). I don't want to do it wrong and end up causing more damage than repair!!

"Go to page 4 of the manual and read the paragraph that starts "If a rider wishes ..."

Thanks! I've been posting on a horse forum about CHILLI'S problems. Most of them say I should drop the Bitless Bridle and get a Myler bit. I feel pretty uncomfortable replying because I feel this bridle has already improved CHILLI but these people also have very good advice. At this moment, I don't know what's best for CHILLI. For 3 days, CHILLI was amazing. Smooth, balanced, "elastic" like trot. Then, the last two days have been horror ... head shaking, fighting, etc.,etc. I believe it may be a physical problem. Teeth, muscle, chemical imbalance (suggested on the forum). I don't know. I think I'll be keeping the bridle.....we'll see how it goes.....

A follow-up comment, six weeks later, on 1/26/03

“Well, for an update:

We had a vet come in and look at her. She needed her teeth floated (the barn owner told us she had gotten them done in May but it really was the May before that!). Her back also was sore. The vet said she probably didn't have enough time to heal from the saddle. So, he recommended 6 weeks off and selenium and Vitamin E.

She's been really bratty lately (and I don't blame her!). Rearing, spooking, kicking her stall wall ... she's REALLY not a stall horse ;) I've been up every day for the past 6 weeks to walk her. The vet is coming back in Tuesday and I hope she's better. When I do get back on her, the Bitless Bridle won't hurt her anymore so I expect she'll be much more happy and relaxed. She's getting a little stiff so it will take some time to get her back to how fit she was before. I borrowed a book about horse fitness and arranged a schedule (sp?) that won't hurt her. I'm very happy that it was her teeth and back, not the bridle! I'll tell you how the vet check goes and, if she can be ridden, how she responds to the bridle. Thanks again.”

- Lauren Gallant, Wilson, NC, 1/26/03

[Many thanks for the follow-up information. I am glad that your veterinarian found an explanation for the problem. Please let me know how the next phase goes.](#)

Come to Canada!!

Just got your bridle and tried it yesterday afternoon for maybe about 15 minutes. Since it was minus 22 degrees I didn't want to ride too much. But I was in absolute complete shock at the immediate improvement of my horse. After my first try there was no more **head shaking** or **rubbing**, no more **tripping** or **taking-off**, and he seem so much more relaxed which he normally isn't. Also since he's a pacer who I have been trying to train to a trot, it's made the trot seem to come more naturally. My usually **agitated, grumpy, mean**, horse went in one day from hating me to actually being affectionate with me, and patient and calm. To me that's the best thing in the whole world, since I thought we didn't have any sort of emotional connection or partnership, which I feel is very important. I think we are now on the road to a very meaningful relationship.

My point is that the BB has done wonders in one day and it is completely obvious [that it is] the more humane way to ride. My horse has **breathing problems** with the bit that I believe have now gone away, [though] I need to ride more and see. I think that absolutely EVERYONE should own one and bits should go back to the dark

ages from where they came. But... how can everyone get one if they are not sold in Canada? My headstall cost a fortune with the exchange rates and duty (not your fault) and now my reins are too long and don't match 'cause I couldn't afford the reins.

Do you have any idea when you may expand to Canada? Every horse person I know would buy one and you would certainly have a lot of business. But unfortunately, since they are not sold at our local tack shops not very many people know about them up here, when they should.

Anyway you need to move to Canada and fast because I know so many horses that are getting punished for misbehaving when they are just reacting to the pain of the bit.

DO IT FOR THE HORSES!!!!

Thank you for my bridle, I will NEVER EVER EVER put a bit in my horse's mouth again!!!!!"

- Alex Zaichkowski, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1/23/03

From: [Barbara Sisk](mailto:Barbara.Sisk)
To: customerservice@bitlessbridle.com
Sent: Sunday, September 28, 2003 10:49 PM

Subject: Amazing

I used my new Bitless Bridle on my very spirited gaited saddle horse for the first time today. The barn manager where she is boarded warned me to be careful because I wouldn't have enough control. To my delight, she took to the Bitless Bridle very quickly. No more **head shaking, whoa actually meant something to her!**

I am delighted and as many others have said, I won't ever put a bit in her mouth again. Thank you!

- Barbara Sisk, 9.29.03

"I live in the south of Ireland, 3 miles away from Adare, Co.Limerick, which has a long history of fox hounds and show jumping locally.
<http://www.crc.hostinguk.com/index.htm>

I bought a 6 year-old Irish Sport Horse (ISH) 7 years ago, ASKEATON LADY, as I felt that I could not progress in a sport I loved, without owning my own animal. I confess to buying the animal on looks and temperament and not on accomplishments. From the start she **carried her head very high** and **avoided relaxing her neck**. After a short period of riding, I loaned her to a friend for three years for breeding purposes, solely as I was unable to ride for a few years due to family commitments.

I brought her back to Limerick aged 9/10 (note: at this stage in my riding, I was a total novice, knew nothing about what I should/shouldn't do with regard to horse

training). I started to use running reins in order to encourage her to drop her head and was altogether too severe with my rein contact. **One morning while out riding she started to toss her head quiet strongly** and ever since has what I know now to be headshaking syndrome. At this stage as well as headshaking she had developed a habit of **flapping her lower lip**. I tried to do some cross-country and hunting and in the process banged a front tendon, with the result she was out for a year.

When I brought her back to work, I decided to use the help of a professional dressage instructor to help my riding and training. We **progressed very slowly**. When the trainer rode her she would improve and relax and I was able to ride her successfully. However, at home the progression was good some days and worse others.

With the encouragement of my instructor, I made a conscious decision this year to address the problem of headshaking as I felt at this stage my own riding was not contributing to the problem. I tried a nose net, & a long lasting steroid prescribed by my vet, with not much success.

To cut a long story short, I bought your bitless bridle 2 weeks ago, and can say at this stage that I feel that I am now making steady progress. My mare had **developed very one-sided**. So I work 2:1 to get even sided, and she does not resist being worked on her difficult side. I have show-jumped in Clonshire...my local riding school (see web site above) with a much happier horse. We are keeping the fences low (90cm) in a course and I can honestly say she is progressing step by step each day. Flat work has improved. I cannot say that the headshaking has disappeared altogether, but I can now maintain contact with much less resistance, and when she does try to shake off the contact, it is quite easy to get it back again. So overall her flatwork has greatly improved. I don't need to spend 1/2 hour getting her to relax and work somewhat willingly. One thing I have been watching out for, from reading the comments at your web address, is her **need to rub the sides of her head on her forelegs after a riding session**, which she did religiously after every session. Yesterday, after 45 mins flat work, she barely rubbed her head, when I removed the bridle and put her out in the field.

When I first started to use the bitless bridle, she continued to flap her lower lip against her upper lip quiet loudly. This had always disappeared when show-jumping, and I think it is reducing while doing flatwork. I would hope that it will eventually stop completely?

In parallel to using your bridle, I started a course of CHM from Lenry's http://www.lenrys.com/new_products.htm; a chinese herbal medicine for upper respiratory conditions. As I observed this year, that she had a quite noticeable **white nasal discharge and snorts a lot**. This course lasts for 5 months, and as she loves these biscuits, I will continue the course until complete.

In addition I have removed her dusty timber shavings in preference to rubber matting, as she starting coughing when I changed the bedding. She is now used to the rubber matting and lies down.

LADY is out in pasture every day for at least 6 hours a day, and longer when given a day off.

So to conclude, with

- 1) using the bitless bridle
- 2) removing a dusty bedding
- 3) daily pasture turnout
- 4) dust-free haylage when required
- 5) CHM to help clear the nasal passage
- 6) Training regime that is progressive and not over taxing

I am very hopeful that the head shaking, lip flapping, and nasal discharge will disappear or reduce to negligible proportions such that I can work in easy partnership with an animal that I care a lot for, and would love to see her display the talent that I always thought her capable of."

- Brigid-Anne Duggan, Ireland. 9/23/02

"Thank you for your interesting feedback on LADY. I am especially interested in collecting data on headshaking horses so I am happy to add your comments to my collection. It is rather unusual for someone to be able to pinpoint the exact moment when headshaking commenced.

I am not sure whether you have an Excel program on your computer but in the hope that you do, I am attaching a questionnaire that I would ask you to complete after a little more time has passed."

... and another e-mail a week later

"I have completed the attached questionnaire. I did my first 2002 competition yesterday and got a clear round into the jump-off. In the jump-off I had 4 faults because I got too near to the 2nd fence of a double with a single stride related distance. But what really surprised me was that, I almost missed the last fence in the jump-off and had to do a 45 degree turn around 2 flower pots. The horse wasn't the slightest bit fazed and jumped it beautifully. I was amazed, now I know that my persistent flat work is paying off and she is so much more tuned in with the new bridle.

I can't say that the head shaking is completely gone, but now my horse is rideable and can be re-collected easier. I can still admit to feeling that her symptoms largely disappear altogether when working with crisp, frosty conditions and the bitless bridle. Which leads me to consider the use of a homeopathic remedy called Capstar...you may have seen it advertised on the web. While my horse has wonderfully improved using your bitless bridle, I am curious to take a step further with the homeopathic remedy. I will decide in the next few weeks.

In the meantime, I am riding a horse that is 75 % more rideable [compared with] prior to using your bridle. I love using this bridle. Gone are the days of slobbering bits."

- Brigid-Anne Duggan, Ireland, 9/30/02

A letter from Dr. Cook to a customer in New Zealand who had returned her bridle because it appeared to cause her bucking, rearing horse to start shaking its head.

"Like you, I am disappointed to hear of your early experience with the bridle. I rather wish you had let me know about this BEFORE posting the bridle back to us, as I think I could have helped you to overcome the introductory **resistance** and **headshaking**.

It might have been that the browband was too tight. Alternatively, a few horses (very few) take a little time to get accustomed to the different feel of the bridle. Perhaps these horses have some pre-existing sensitive areas that cause trouble in the first few days.

I have learned recently that, rarely, a horse that did not previously shake its head when ridden in a bitted bridle might start doing so in the Bitless Bridle if the buckle of the chinstrap is irritating the jawbone. In these cases, a sliding guard of leather or some other material on the chinstrap will cure this problem.

Similarly, headshaking may commence with a Bitless Bridle noseband that is set too low. In an average sized horse, the bottom edge of the noseband should be no more than 1.5" from the corner of the mouth. Lower than this it might cause headshaking and resistance because of airway obstruction. Higher than this it might, in a headstrong horse, result in some loss of control and the need for the rider to work harder than necessary. Each horse is an individual and in a few horses it may be necessary to find the sweet spot for the noseband by trial and error. But these are very much exceptions to the rule. The great majority of horses can be fitted immediately by following the 1.5" guideline as above.

In the current User's Manual we recommend that, when the noseband is at the correct level, the chinstrap should be cinched up snugly, leaving a space of only one flat finger between the back of the jaw and the strap. Again this guideline is satisfactory for most users. For example, trail riders will find that at this adjustment, their horses can graze comfortably without the need for the chinstrap to be slackened off. Certainly, for satisfactory control, the chinstrap should not be slacker than this. However, if a rider requires closer contact with their horse, in order to get an instant response for say dressage, barrel racing, polo or some other discipline requiring fingertip control, he or she may choose to cinch up the noseband so that it is even snuggler. A space narrower than one flat finger could be chosen or even no space at all. In the latter case, the chinstrap could be in contact with the skin but not actually pressing on it. If a chinstrap is pressing on the jaw constantly, this can be yet one more reason why a horse may start headshaking.]

If a horse has some bony eruption (exostosis) at the point a strong ligament (the ligamentum nuchae) attaches to the back of the skull at the poll, the bitless bridle, by pressing on this area, may result in an evasive response from the horse. I recommend in these cases that users pull the poll straps of the bridle back away from the skull so that the pressure on the ligament is not applied close to its bony attachment.

Anyway, it is now too late for these suggestions. Thank you for trying and your refund will be on its way as soon as the bridle returns."

"I just wanted to say thanks for the great and personable customer service I received when I ordered a new noseband for my bridle. The lady was incredibly knowledgeable and efficient.

I'd also like to put a word in for the bridle. Shortly after I bought and brought my 7 yr old cremello Palamino horse home, it became apparent that he had not been well taken care of. He was **impossible with a bit in his mouth**, no matter what kind. The soonest I could get a dentist was one month away so until then, a friend told me to try the bitless bridle because it sounded like the problem was his teeth. So as the "alternative" I bought one and it was wonderful. He had 2 hours worth of extensive dental work done (evidently the first time he was treated) and I tried the bit again - **headshaking, nervousness** etc. My trainer said it was anticipation of fear of the bit. Why make a horse go through that?

So I only use the Dr. Cook now, there's no **headshaking**, no **fighting** trying to get a bit in his mouth and I don't have to worry about hurting him. I walk in the stall, tell him "it's OK, it's the Dr. Cook bridle, it doesn't hurt" and he sticks his head out for me. There's only one buckle, no fooling with all those other straps on my Pelham bridle, I don't have to have four hands and it doesn't make SHERWOOD scared.

After researching the Dr. Cook bridle, I look at bit abuse and attaining poll flexion through double bits (herniated disks etc.) in a whole different light. Thank you for a good product."

- Lisa Jones, Sherwood, MD, 7/4/02

... and another e-mail later

"Thank you for the response, Dr. Cook. Absolutely, please add to your collection. We have a farm on the Chesapeake Bay in Sherwood, hence his name. I rode the first 20 yrs of my life and then didn't ride for as many and then decided to have another horse. The way I was taught to ride in the 60's and 70's is no longer "correct" so I had to relearn.

I had to have a trainer come and help me with SHERWOOD and she kept referring to "getting him into the bit." Well I don't care about that concept anymore. If I hadn't found your bridle and had to fight with Sherwood to put on his Pelham double rein bridle each time I rode, I think I just wouldn't ride. More people should know about the pain/problems bits inflict.

I'm asked, as all riders are, "do you ride English or Western." I then have to explain, "Well, I have a flat close contact for the ring and Australian (no horn) for the farm and I don't use a bit, I use a Dr. Cook Bridle". Then you have to explain that one to them. So I photocopied about 10 of your brochures and just hand them one.

Sherwood is as much a part of our family as my child is, he is here for me to teach me patience and compassion (being abused and needing proper training). How could anyone "regress" to a bit after using your bridle? Once again, many thanks."

- Lisa Jones, Sherwood, MD, 7/9/02

"BUB loves a bitless!..I purchased one of your bridles about 3 months ago for my new horse Nuggett (we call him "BUB" too) after I read about it on the internet. BUB has all kinds of issues, two of which are **the farrier** and **having a bit put in his mouth**.

I'm assuming he's been handled roughly, as he's head shy anyway. Bitting was a terrible ordeal. Once he had it in, he seemed okay and submissive, but he **threw his head** a lot and seemed generally **surly**. He got to a point that I literally could not get one in his mouth; he would **rear to avoid it**. I didn't want to fight with him, nor did I want to let him get away with that behavior. I addressed issues I could think of, including using a very gentle eggbutt snaffle and having his teeth floated and assessed, and it was obvious it was a behavioral thing.

I gave the bitless a try. We had to lure him into getting the bridle on with carrots, and only over his halter. I didn't want to take his halter off because it was almost impossible to get on! The first time we used it, he was a bit confused by it, and I may not have had it adjusted properly. He backed up when I would ask him to halt. Other than that he turned well. Threw his head a few times when I put pressure on it to halt as well. The second and third times were MUCH better, although I was still using the bitless OVER the halter and I don't think I could adjust it well enough. He was giving his head though, with very little fight at all. After I had used it maybe four times, no fight. He actually held his head low for it.

Then, of all things, he lost his halter out in the pasture. I had never tried to halter him out there, only in his stall, and it was never easy. So I went out there thinking I would never catch him ... and he let me halter him easily! Now, only a couple months later, I can remove his halter to put his bitless on with ease. He doesn't get nervous, worried, or angry. He just gives me his head. The bitless works fine, control-wise as well, it is only the horse that needs some help with his neck-reining and "following his head."

I have such positive feelings about this bridle. Nuggett is a family horse; he doesn't have the usual vices like kicking, rearing, and biting. He knows his manners. But there are things he is **frightened** of, namely having his feet worked on and being bitted, and I hope to work him through those things. Regardless, I don't think I'll ever use a bit in his mouth because he just doesn't need it, and how much happier he must be without that worry. Some other trail riders at the barn use hackamores, which they suggested I try with Nuggett, but they seem so restrictive and harsh and uncomfortable, not to mention how physically damaging they can be. Nuggett doesn't think about his head and mouth now while we ride. He looks up and out and watches what and where we're going. I can tell it is a good thing.

We are also trying to go shoeless. After two episodes with the poor farrier, who is a gentle man who does a great job, we decided to pull the shoes. He is a quarter horse who has beautiful feet, but I didn't know how he would do barefoot. It has been about a month now and he hasn't had any noticeable soreness. He is on the road to being a "natural horse," and he seems a lot happier and more relaxed because of it.

I thought you might like to know about my positive experience with the bitless bridle, and its positive effect on Nuggett. Now that I use it on him without the halter beneath it, the action is much better. The only thing I have had a problem with is the long piece to which the reins attach will sometimes slip and I'll have one side longer than the other, especially when I am working him in a circle going one

direction very long at a time. Other than that it seems fine. I just might move up to a leather bridle on down the road; looks a little prettier. I love the rubber reins, nice on the trail.

Thank you so much for a wonderful product."

- Shelley Lampe, Fairdale, KY, 5/24/02

From a user in the UK.

"My bridle has finally arrived today. However I was most annoyed to find that I was faced with an £18.50 sterling bill for customs. I was under the impression that the \$25 was all part of the shipping charge; this is one hell of an expensive bridle!!!!!!!

[Ed: The Bitless Bridle can now be purchased direct from agents in the UK, Germany, Canada and Australia. See the Home page of www.bitlessbridle.com and information about our Associate Clinician program. Agents in additional countries will be appointed as suitable qualified people are found. October 2004]

On the positive side I would like to say that after following, carefully, the fitting instructions, I rode my Thoroughbred out for the first time in a week, expecting him to be uncontrollable. But I could not believe the transformation. He responded wonderfully. Although he shook his head a few times in response to the pressure on his nose and poll (whereas before he **shook with pressure on his mouth**), he was an absolute star!! Prior to wearing the Bitless Bridle he would constantly **grind the bit in his teeth** and attempt to get his **tongue over it, rarely taking up contact** with the bit. Basically, he was totally **disinterested in his work**. But I now look forward to many a hack without the **constant pull** on the reins and without having a horse that clearly hated having a bit in his mouth. Thank you from a satisfied owner of a **headshaker**."

- Annette Heale, England, 5/27/02

"We love your bridle.

I was first introduced to your bridles by my neighbor. We were riding together one day when her Icelandic horse **bolted**-with my horse quickly closing in, not wanting to be left behind. Her horse had done this several times to her, and was not a pleasure to ride with. She then knew that something had to be done. She purchased one of your bridles and began using it to trail ride. The change in this horse was unbelievable! Her horse was so pleasant and willing that I could not believe that it was the same horse!

I purchased one for my husband to use on his Saddlebred. She **hated the bit** and was **uncooperative when we tried to get her bridled**. (She is over 16 hands, and could pull her head way up out of reach.) She was also a **head tosser**. Since purchasing your bridle, we have had no problems. My husband can easily control her and we have a happy horse.

This winter, my 25 year-old Morgan lost a tooth. I decided to try your bridle on him and, to my surprise, this seasoned horse did better in your bridle than in a snaffle bit. He understood all of my cues, and even **stopping** was a breeze, in fact he stops better with the bitless! I have been using the bitless bridle on him ever since and have ordered a second bridle so that my husband and I can ride together. Neither one of us wants to use a bit!

- Mary Taylor, Ashburnham, MA, 4/28/01T

"After having a conversation with my local vet, Dr Ken Marcella, and speaking with your customer service department, I am excited to say that I have ordered a bitless bridle to try on my 5 y.o TB, LOGAN. After 2 years of frustration, searching for a bit he will accept, dealing with what appears as a split personality (kind on the ground, **Nervous Nellie while being ridden**), I am looking forward to giving your bridle a go. However, one question remains.

I have several other young horses that I plan to show on the "A" circuit in the hunter classes. As you are aware, traditional tack is expected under these circumstances. My 4 y.o has not displayed any problems accepting a bit, thank goodness. Even so, from your research and experience, should a bit be used? Which bit is the "kindest"- or are there several ones from which to choose?

I have spoken with the Myler brothers several times about their biting system, as well as Alixe of Dewsbury/Kangaroo bits and finally Sprenger KK bits. Obviously, after reading your site, the first choice is bitless. Until, however, the rules are changed or someone is willing to stand in the face of tradition, I would love to find the "best" choice among bits.

Thank you for your time and the sharing of your knowledge. Again I look forward to trying the bridle."

- Leah Hinnefeld, Ganton, GA

Leah Hinnenfield called on 4/24/02 with the history of her 5 y.o. Thoroughbred, LOGAN. The account below is something I compiled on the basis of our telephone conversation

LOGAN has been in the present owner's possession for two years, at which time he was retired from the track as an unraced three-year-old. Since then the owner has spent hundreds of dollars on buying different bits, paying dentists, vets and behaviorists, all to no avail. The horse has been from trainer to trainer into the bargain.

Clinical signs include ... **objection to being bridled. Curls upper lip and panics at the site of tack. When ridden, spooks at the slightest thing, freaks out, panics, explodes, doesn't breathe, behaves like a loose cannon, swings his head around so hard that he trips and falls down. Has difficulty in holding leads.**

Owner has been terrified to ride him in a field or anywhere except in a ring. So now he is ring sour and bored into the bargain. She was thinking of donating him to a

charity when she came across our website. Her veterinarian recommended the Bitless Bridle, he having known two people who have had good experiences with it.

Has ordered a bridle Fed Ex today and promises to give me a follow-up

"I want to thank you for taking time in your day to speak with me. I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation. Since then I have had an opportunity to read the articles on your site and have found them fascinating. Additionally, I spoke with my vet, Dr Ken Marcella. He has a copy of your book (one of them?) and offered to loan it to me.

I look forward to tomorrow and testing the bridle. I am sure LOGAN will be pleasantly surprised. I will give you a full report with a summary of his problems while bitted.

I simply wanted to express my gratitude for a moment of your time."

- Leah Hinnefeld, Canton, GA

4/27/02: My First Ride

"I wanted to share my excitement over my first ride in the bitless bridle, as well as share my gratitude to you for your research and development of this product.

I am still in shock at the difference the "bb" made in my horse.

First, I will give you a little reminder of his history:

Logan is a 5 y.o TB. He was broke to race but never made it to the track. I purchased him as a coming 3 y.o. Since I have owned him, I have tried perhaps 20-30 different kinds of bits on him. They have ranged from single-jointed snaffles, to French links, mullen mouths, ports, happy mouth, Waterford and rubber bits. NOTHING worked.

The horse was a **terrible spook, tripped, and flipped his head while ridden**. He would constantly **stick his tongue out or flip it over the bit**. He is a very quiet horse with excellent ground manners but once I would climb on he would take a 180-degree turn in temperament. He felt like a **cannon ready to explode** at any moment-and often did. He was annoying to ride and, quite honestly, I have never felt very safe on his back.

I heard of your product and finally decided to try it out since you offered the money back guarantee. I will be very honest; I purchased the bridle fully expecting to be disappointed.

My bridle arrived two days ago and I was able to try it on LOGAN yesterday for the first time. I would like to add that the Beta material was nicer than I expected, very soft and pliable. It was also very easy to adjust.

With my heart pounding I climbed on my spooky young horse, bitless, and wondering WHY I would do such a thing.

He went like a QUIET, normal young horse. I only wish I had a before and after video of this difference in my horse. He was relaxed, never spooked, never tripped,

kept his head and mouth quiet. It only took a few minutes for him to adjust to the new bridle and he was responding with a lightness that I couldn't describe.

I had to wait a day to write you because yesterday's letter would have been pages of emotional garble on how happy I am. I still get all giggly when I think about the change in my horse. I can't wait to ride him again today.

After riding him yesterday I called customer service and ordered a leather model of the bridle. Again I can't begin to express how excited I am that I have your bridle. It has already changed my relationship with this horse and has provided a kind, humane way for him to be ridden and not be so frightened of the idea.

Please feel free to share my experience with anyone interested in the bitless bridle. It could literally change the lives of many horses."

- Leah Hinnefeld, Logan and Belhaven Farm, Canton, GA, 4/27/02

"CONGRATULATIONS. The day could not have ended better. And although it is already late, I want to congratulate you on your pluck and courage, and to say that I am as delighted as you are at the happy outcome. Not that I expected anything different. After our telephone conversation, I typed a history of your horse, for the record, as I knew that there would be good things to follow. And if you wonder how I could be so bold, please read the attached unpublished article ('The Effect of the Bit on the Behavior of the Horse.' ... now available on our website) and you will see why. I hope you will keep in touch and let me have a further follow-up report in due course.

Thank you for taking the trouble to write."

... another e-mail the following day:

"Thank you Dr Cook for sending your article to me. I have read it through once and plan to reread it this morning.

I must admit as happy as I am with the bridle and pleased to read the findings of your research, it does put most of us in a predicament! My 4 y.o, JULIAN, goes "quite nicely" in a bit. However, after reading your article, I question if this summary of his behavior is accurate. I am very involved and attached to my horses but this selfish voice keeps screaming, "Do not try that bridle on JULIAN because he will be a (show) HUNTER and must accept a bit!" It is quite the dilemma.

I have posted my experience with your bridle on two Bulletin Boards and have had all sorts of questions and comments. It has become quite an attention getting thread.

Many questions seem to center on the traditional concepts of riding on contact and effective communication. Most traditionalists are afraid this would be lost without a bit.

There have also been many questions on how to get a horse in a proper "frame" and "using his back" and "through" without contact into a bit.

I just thought you might be interested in knowing your little piece of leather is getting quite a bit of attention at the moment!

Oh-one person did ask if you have any pictures of a dressage horse, for example, riding in your bridle-I suppose she wants to see the horse's carriage without a bit. Is any information like that available?

I am sorry if I am a bother. During our conversation you did mention the best thing that could happen is to put the word out there so there could be more thought and discussion---simply trying to oblige!!! (*wink*)

I was wondering as well, have you ever had articles published in magazines such as Practical Horseman, the Horse or Equus? I was also wondering if you have ever shared your findings with members or heads of AHSA (Now USAE). I would be curious, if you have, what their reactions were.

Well thanks again-you have opened up a world of information. Perhaps I could become a voice in this as well!"

- Leah Hinnefeld, Canton, GA, 4/28/02

... and another two days later:

"I have found a copy of the tack regulations for hunters. "Unconventional tack" is at the discretion of the judge. Considering the tradition of the hunters, I think at this point you would be taking a chance. I did write a letter to USAE (formerly AHSA) and hope to get a response."

- Leah Hinnefeld, Canton, GA, 4/30/02

From: [Leah Hinnefeld](#)

Sent: Tuesday, April 30, 2002 1:10 PM

Subject: "Summary of LOGAN and your 50 points (from Table I in your article on "The Effect of the Bit on the Behavior of the horse."). For clarity sake, I have broken down his "symptoms" with a brief explanation of each:

1. **FEAR: Anxious, Nervous, Frightened, Spooky, Panicky, And Tense.** This describes Logan to a "T." He displayed ALL of these behavior problems to an extreme degree. I always described him as a loaded cannon ready to blow me across the ring.

Immediately after using the BB all of these problems were resolved. They remained resolved during our second ride as well.

2. **FIGHT:** Of these **Cranky** would be the way to describe him. Often after riding he seemed **irritable** and would **nip at me and pin his ears**. Again GONE with the BB.

3. **FLIGHT: Difficult to stop, Bolting.** LOGAN again. He would often go around the ring 2-3 times then **bolt** at some unknown place for no apparent reason. He was MUCH more responsive to "whoa" after the BB and was relaxed in the transition.

4. **FACIAL NEURALGIA: Head flipping ALL the time**-particularly when rein contact-even very slight-was made. He would **flip more than shake**. It was

almost constant to the point of no control. In both rides his head was quiet and still the entire ride.

5. **Hates the bit, chomping and fussing.** Again, 100% of the time while bitted. 100% gone in the BB.

6. **Difficult to steer**--he had a **difficult time traveling straight**. He is not a lugger however. The steering improved by over 50% with the BB--and was even better from ride 1 to ride 2.

7. **Difficult to bridle.** He would "**hide**" **his face** when the bridle came out. He would look to his butt or try to put his face under my arm rather than take the bit. Gone with BB.

8. **Above the bit**--this was very infrequent when bitted. LOGAN is more of a **ducker and curler**. Although it would happen on occasion. Gone with BB.

9. **Lack of finesse in control "Unhappy"**--LOGAN was **very unhappy** being ridden in the bit. But during his 2 rides he appeared pleasant and relaxed in the BB. **Control was nearly impossible** with a bit--I am very pleased with his control in your BB. He has become a "simple" horse to ride.

10. **Heavy on the forehand, low headed**--this was definitely LOGAN. Within minutes of using the BB he felt lighter on his front end. He still has room for improvement here which I feel will come with strength and understanding of what is being asked of him.

11. **Lack of self-carriage, absence of collection--impossible to achieve in a bit.** Since he is still so new to the BB I have not yet asked for this sort of carriage.

12. **Stiff necked and lock jawed.** He was **NEVER relaxed in a bit**--appears and feels very relaxed in the BB.

13. **Uncoordinated, stiff, choppy**--this was apparent both while being longed and ridden with a bit. Went away immediately with your bridle.

16 **Gaping open mouth.** He would keep his mouth open about **90% of the time** while ridden in a bit. He has never offered to open his mouth in the BB

17. **Lacking in courage, not forward**...this is the ONLY way Logan traveled with a bit. I have not tried jumping him in the BB; however his gait is much more forward on the flat.

18. **Pulling**--he didn't "pull" in a forceful sense but would lightly **root** to dislodge the reins from my hands. Again--gone with the BB

20. **Behind the bit, overbent.** This also describes Logan's "normal" way of going in a bit. But his head travels in a normal "hunter" type position in the BB--head level and nose poked slightly out

21. **Refusal or difficult to back.** He was **reluctant to back** in a bit--but would do it. He backed in a relaxed fashion in the BB.

22. **Tilts head.** When his head was still, which was not often, it was **not facing where we went.** This greatly improved with your BB, although he still tries to counter bend some. I feel this is also a muscle issue that will improve very quickly
23. **Salivating excessively**-Logan did this **some**-although not as big a problem-his **mouth was never closed!** There is no froth with the BB
24. **Jigging and prancing.** He did this, although it improved with a proper saddle fit. He had stopped "race walking" before the BB but his walk did improve to a more relaxed cadence after the BB
25. **Unfocused, fussy fidgety-to the point of being dangerous.** He never seemed to pay attention to ANYTHING and **would often run into jumps, fences,** etc. On our first ride, he was so cute-he looked around the ring like he had never seen it before!
26. **Sweating, hot, restless.** Only **restless** would apply to Logan in this group--
27. **Stumbling. ALWAYS**-to the point where I considered testing him for EPM or some hind end or back injury. He would trip every few steps. With the BB he only tripped twice the first ride and once the second ride.
30. **Inverted frame**-he was certainly **hollow in his back** but head not SO high, as I mentioned above
31. **Stagnation in training, slow or no process. Big one for Logan.** I felt as if we would reach the same place and backslide. Of course I can't comment on training progress just yet. However, curing all the above problems has in one sense been progress in and of itself
32. **Difficult to mount.** He would only take **a step or two** with a bit, nothing serious. But did stand perfectly still with the BB
33. **Trigger responses to aids, hypersensitivity to bit. Big one for Logan** again. One time he was reaching down to rub his face and I lightly added leg to get his head up. He **shot-off like he had been WHACKED.** No oversensitivity with BB
34. **Coughing.** Not bad on this one. He has coughed but this one does not stand out a lot
35. **Muzzle rubbing. Often during work.** He did not try with the BB
- 37.. **Pig rooting and yawing. Slightly with a bit.** None with BB
40. **Sneezing and snorting. OFTEN with a bit.** Very infrequently with the BB
42. **Tail swishing. Particularly when asked to canter..** He would also **swap leads behind when longed** with a bit. Did not do this once when longed without a bit
43. **Tongue lolling. His tongue was a NIGHTMARE**-you name it he did it. **Over the bit, under the bit, outside his mouth.** Never saw his tongue with the BB.

44. **Yawning. OFTEN before being bridled.** He would also **curl his lip** in the washrack before and after rides. He did not do this once with the BB, neither before nor after either ride.

47. **Ear pinning. Before and during exercise.** With the BB his ears would be forward or one up and one tilted (not pinned) towards me

48. **Interference with hind foot. Yes when lunged with a bit,** especially at the canter. Gone without a bit.

There you have it! I recounted only 37 instead of 41. But it is still an impressive list I must say.

I do hope this is what you are looking for and will be helpful. Please let me know if you would like more details on any particular point. I will tell you what I can.

Since posting about your BB I now have 3 friends planning to order one. Lynne Brooks just emailed me that she has placed her order!!!"

-Leah Hinnefeld, Canton, GA, 4/30/02

ED: Thank you (again) for taking so much trouble to give me such comprehensive feedback. I will answer your current question by an insert below.

... another letter from the same owner, two weeks later:

"I wanted to touch base since I have now had the bridle for a couple of weeks. I also have a perplexing question for you.

LOGAN, (if you recall, the amazing 37 of 50 points), is doing SUPER in his bitless bridle. He also allows me to hose his face AND clip his ears since making the change.

THIS is another first in my feedback

His trot work continues to improve daily and all spooking and evasion has virtually disappeared at the walk and trot.

EXCELLENT

During our last two rides, I felt he was ready to give the canter a go. He was more relaxed than with a bit. However, some of the old behavior returned, in particular the **head flipping**. Now he is weak muscled and not very balanced at the canter. Perhaps I am holding him in a bit too much and the pressure is irritating him. Perhaps he remembers the bit and since it is a new gait he needs to be sure the evil bit did not somehow get back in his mouth?

YES, you may be remembering his past behavior too and using too much rein pressure. I suggest that you try a more relaxed contact and see if this helps. Also check that the bridle is not pinching him behind the ear. A larger size browband can help in such cases. LOGAN's anxiety may be part of the explanation. If this is so, I would expect that in time he will relax and forget.

I guess I am wondering if some setbacks are common with a horse this green and that had such a horrible bit experience??

I have heard of a few horses that revert to leaning on the bridle after a while but these are very much the exception to the rule.

We will continue to press on and try to build muscle. Just checking-in to see if you had any advice or words of wisdom! Again thank you, and most certainly LOGAN thanks you."

- Leah Hinnefeld, Canton, GA, 5/14/02

"For two plus years I have owned my Arabian horse and lived with **head shaking, biting the bit** and **general crankiness**.

We used your bridle on Saturday. He acclimated to it immediately (not that this would be any new news to you) and the improvement was drastic for the better. I am so glad we found your bridle. Thanks to you, this is the first time I actually was able to feel his head submitting to my hands. No more head tossing, a true delight to ride. Now I need to adjust myself to having the feel of his head there!

We also have a beta driving harness (black) and I wish that there was a way to adapt this for it. Let me know if you have anything I can try.

[Ed; Spring 2004. A black Beta driving bridle, with blinders, is now available for all sizes from draft to miniature]

Attached is a photo for you BEFORE the bitless bridle. We are much happier as a pair now."

- Linda Roth, Brookline, NH, 3/11/02

"First of all, I can hardly express my gratitude and excitement over having found your bridle. Let me explain briefly.

In February 2000, I purchased an 8-year-old Thoroughbred mare who appeared to be free of vices and was a pleasure to ride. However, in the spring of that year, she began **shaking her head** terribly during workouts, particularly at the trot and canter. Fly spray made no difference, and my trainer originally thought she was having an allergic rhinitis problem. We tried steroids, antihistamines with no success. I began researching her problem and discovered a fair amount of literature on equine headshaking syndrome, which I'm sure you're familiar with. In my quest to obtain relief from this wretched problem, I tried working her at different times of the day, different weather/sunlight conditions, kept a log of allergy reports and even tried the Guardian facemask to block UV light. The only thing which kept her rideable was the use of pantyhose over her muzzle.

I stumbled upon your website earlier this year, read the testimonials and the money-back trial offer, and decided to give it a shot. I am SO happy to report that her headshaking has all but disappeared...it's like a miracle!

I ordered a beta headstall from your company at the end of January. The main reason I'm contacting you now is to see if I am still able to upgrade to a leather bridle. I reread the warranty and realize that it says 30 days, so I'll understand if I

can't. I kept waiting to be sure that the decrease in headshaking wasn't just a fluke, and some inclement weather during February kept me from riding her much.

Anyway, whatever your response, I am SO thrilled that your bridle has apparently relieved most of my horse's discomfort and headshaking problem. THANK YOU for a wonderful product!"

- Sandy Westra and "Ariel", Kinnelon, NJ, 4/9/02

"I'm not sure if you can help me but I'll give it a shot. My name is Jessica and I am 15 years old, from Australia. I have had my Arab QH mare for about two years now. She is 14.2 h.h, either 16 or 6 years old (we are not sure). The first couple of times I saw her, she was perfect. That was 2 years ago. Ever since then she has grown quite **evil**. She has her **ears back** every time I'm near her. She used to **bite**, but now just tries. She is very **difficult and sour to catch** and always **tries to resist when I put her bridle on** (I have her just in a plain bridle with noseband and eggbutt snaffle) and very **difficult to ride** as she **pulls** constantly (and she is damn strong! Especially for me), **bucks** occasionally, has a **choppy stride, pig-roots** and doesn't do what I ask her to do. She also is **always scratching her nose and head against her leg while we are out riding**, and most of the time she can rub the bridle off too. I have been reading about the "**Headshaking**" problem with horses and wondered if a bitless bridle could help her become normal again.

Where I keep her, at my uncle's farm, two hours away from where I live, I only see her about once every three weeks on weekends. My uncle is pretty strict with horses and he just tells me to give her a good smack and push her on. I've tried that but it doesn't make things any better.

I can't even just go off and ride her by myself because it isn't safe to trust what she might do. And when I try to ride her by herself, she is impossible with her constant pulling and bucking. I can't relax on rides anymore!

I was wondering if you could give me any info on a bitless bridle, if you think it might suit my mare and how I might be able to get one here in Australia. Thank you very much for your time."

- Jessica, Australia, 1/24/02

"Take courage ... help is at hand! I would be astonished if our bitless bridle did not turn your horse completely around. Your description of her behavior allows me to say with some confidence that she is suffering from a bit-induced trigeminal neuralgia and that this is responsible for her unhappy frame of mind, her muzzle-rubbing, and all the other signs.

I am attaching an unpublished manuscript that will give you further information.

We ship our bridles all over the world and the warranty provides you with a full refund after 30 days if you are not happy. So you have little to lose. Have a look at our website if you haven't already seen it. You can order online or by telephone etc.,

Please keep in touch and tell me what you decide. If you get a bridle I want to hear that my diagnosis was correct!"

"Thank you very much for getting back to me. I really appreciate an expert's help on this matter. I have been to your wonderful website, and I have decided to buy a bridle! I have a feeling it will turn her around, just as you said. I would so love to have a loving, trustworthy horse I can have a good relationship with, even though I don't see her that often. I would also love to start riding on my own with her, safely and confidently!

I have decided on a dark brown Beta headstall only, in a medium size. I can't afford the leather, as the exchange is almost double Australian dollars! I have my own reins. Do you think the beta is a good material? I read something on your site about a purchaser of a bridle having problem with the bridle rubbing either her horse or the straps of the bridle that come through the 'O' rings, causing wear. Is there anything I can do to fix this so that no wear occurs?

One last question, how long do you think it might take (approximately) for this wonder bridle to reach me here in Sydney, Australia? I will co-ordinate the arrival date and when I go down to see my mare so that if there are any problems (fingers crossed that there aren't!) I can have it back to you within the 30 days. If I have to return it, it might take awhile to ship it back. Will you allow for this to get a refund or exchange?

Thank you so much once again. As soon as I get my bridle, I will let you know everything!"

- Jessica, Australia, 1/25/02

"Congratulations on taking the plunge. I feel confident that you will not regret it. The Beta is my favorite of all the synthetic materials; you have made an excellent choice. Don't worry about "There's the rub." That comment was probably made by someone who had not cinched up the chinstrap sufficiently, with the result that the noseband was moving up the head every time pressure on the reins was applied.

My guess is that it could take three weeks to get through customs and reach you but you may be pleasantly surprised to see it much earlier. Don't worry about the 30-day limit. We do not count the days. Give it a fair trial but you will probably know that you will be keeping it on the first day."

Sadly, the bridle was not successful in solving this particular problem and was returned with the following note

"She didn't respond well at all. I tried it a couple of times and it was getting too dangerous as she didn't at all like the poll pressure. She was starting to rear. I returned it about 4-5 months ago approximately.

I think in the case of my mare, our problem is the lack of time we can spend with each other. It's such a shame because my riding is suffering as I can't concentrate on improving and trying new things because I am concentrating so hard on controlling her and staying on, and our relationship is suffering.

Anyway, maybe when I get a bit older and can drive we will see each other more often. Thank you very much for your help and your concern."

- Jessica, Australia, 8/10/02

[Ed: A horse with a severe trigeminal neuralgia may need more than two trials with the bridle before the hypersensitivity and nerve pain resolves. It was probably a mistake on my part to lead Jessica to expect a marked improvement on day one]

"I am writing to tell you after reading your articles regarding the bitless bridle I placed my order today. I am very excited to try it out. I recently bought a 12-year-old Appaloosa mare who seems so sweet and **gentle except when it comes time for the bit.**

I use a TomThumb now. She **resists it, foams, shakes her head** while riding and **tosses her head when I want her to stand still.** I'm so in hopes that this is the answer. She seems very well trained; Western ... does it all for me but **hates that bit.** I am afraid of hurting her mouth. Not knowing any of her history it's trial and error and I've suspected all along she's never had a bit in her mouth. I can't wait to get my new bridle. Thank you very much."

- Linda Cotton, Corning, NY, 3/1/02

"I received my new bridle yesterday. My first shot at it was under the outside lights of the barn as it was late ... bareback and grain time. SHE DID WONDERFUL!! I can't wait for the weekend to give it some real riding time. She responded immediately, (no little snits with her head as with a bit) she seemed very relaxed. However, it will take some getting used to on my part...the neck reining affect is a little confusing to me. Once I ride for an extended period I'm sure it will be easy for me to see. I will let you know how we make out! Thanks for such a wonderful product."

- Linda Cotton, Corning, NY, 3/7/02

"We tried our beta bridle on our two Paso Fino mares this weekend. Despite the horses being very different in size, the medium size bridle fit both very well. The range of adjustment is great. Once I had it adjusted for my mare, I could slip it on and off without unbuckling anything. A big plus and a time saver.

Riding impressions –

Before mounting my mare, I tested each rein to make sure she would give her head. Pressure on both reins caused her to tuck her nose in. Satisfied that the mechanics were there, I mounted.

I rode for about 45 minutes at all gaits - walk, corto and largo. My mare ends to be heavy on the hands and somewhat headstrong. When I ride – with a bit or with the jaquima alone, I use 2 reins. With the bitless bridle the amount of pressure I needed with a single rein to maintain communication was comfortable - somewhere between the heavy pressure I need with the jaquima alone and the medium-light pressure when I use a bit with a second rein on the nose piece. The nice thing was that she responded to the rein very well - much better than with the jaquima. If she started to get heavy or increase her speed, a firm squeeze and release usually brought her back. Sometimes I needed 2 or 3 squeezes. But even then, I knew I was not causing any pain to the horse, just a diffused pressure across the poll, cheeks and nose.

Two problems I typically have with my mare I did not experience at all on her first

outing with the bitless bridle. First, she did not **run-away** as she tends to do when ridden bitless on the jaquima alone. This is very uncomfortable as she mixes her gaits and pushes hard against the reins. Second, she did not **shake or throw her head** as she sometimes does with the bit. I changed her to a Myler bit earlier this year, which reduced a lot of the bit problems and lightened her up on the front end, but the bitless bridle gives her no reason to throw her head.

The second trial was with my wife's Paso mare. This mare has not been ridden much this year and is out of shape. She has always been a very light touch with or without a bit. The bitless bridle again was instantly accepted and responded to. As my wife's ride progressed, I noticed that the mare was starting to flex at the poll - something she had not done since she was last in show trim. This was evidently a response to the poll pressure of the bitless bridle. I also noted that the mare was better engaged along her back as evidenced by her slightly elevated tail position. Normally, she keeps her tail flat.

Another small test of the bridle happened when my wife rode the mare towards the barn then turned away to come back to the riding area. Normally, this is when the mare resists and can become quite a handful. This time, after one moment of resistance where my wife applied both reins firmly to check the mare's jumpiness, the mare relented and calmly walked back down the hill. Typically, the mare wins that contest.

Overall, our first rides with the bitless bridle were successful. I was quite pleased with the way the horses accepted it instantly and rode quite happily. I am looking forward to many more rides.

The only problem is that we bought only one bridle."

- Adam Carr, Olive Branch, MS, 12/3/01

"I got my new bitless bridle today and wanted to thank you. No, I won't be sending it back, and in fact will be buying another next month for my other horse.

My Peruvian Paso hates bits and it's been a constant fight to get him to open his mouth to take one (who can blame him) and then **tosses his head** and **yawns** and carries on once it's in his mouth. I've always hated putting a bit in any horse's mouth, but there've never been any other decent alternatives. And my poor Paso Fino has been crazy in a bit since I've had her. She's very sweet tempered, beautifully mannered, very kind hearted, but I've always known that the bit makes her **feel trapped and uncomfortable and bullied**, no matter how light the hand and she **overreacts to any contact**, always has. I can't abide the thought that I've had these damned bits in her mouth for the past 5 years. Poor baby girl. And so I bought the bitless bridle hoping, hoping, hoping, that this would be the answer, and oh yes! It is. In our first session with the bridle, SMOKEY **didn't once toss his head or mouth or pull or yawn**, and his collection was better than ever.

And SOLANDA, oh what a happy girl she was without the bit. They both took to it immediately and knew exactly what was expected. And even though it was a windy day and I was a little nervous because windy days also make Solanda crazy, and even though we didn't warm up, Solanda was just calmer in a way can't really explain. She was paying more attention to *me* rather than to the bit. That

hyper-nervous-jitteriness was gone, she'd **stopped flapping her lower lip**, and she seemed a whole lot more flexible, and she's always been super flexible. When something spooked her, she didn't **overreact** in the way I'm used to, just startled slightly and then got right back on task. And *all* of my cues were met with far less **trigger response**. I think the bit really has contributed to her goosey, nervous behavior all around. I'm so happy to have this and I'm so glad I don't have to torture my poor horses' mouths anymore.

Thank you Dr. Cook! What a beautiful thing."

- Colleen Devlin, 11/2/01

"Dear Dr. Cook,

Bless you! I'm not given to using exclamation points, but your bridle has made me feel particularly exclamatory. I'd be more than happy for you to use my comments on your website. I've been emailing my closest friends with horses about your bridle outlining my experience (together with a link to your site) and so far have been met with much return interest. I feel like a born-again tack person.

And I want to relay what happened next:

The next day, even better with SMOKEY (my Peruvian). I decided to ride both horses bareback. The fear of riding SOLANDA (my Paso Fino) without a bit was completely gone, and I was ready to try her bareback without a bit, something I'd never have considered without this bridle. So we did it. Even better, SOLANDA started to drop her head instead of bracing up into that stiff-necked thing she's always done with a bit (the forced, false collection prompted by her early training with her first trainer), she backed more readily and easily, and then lo and behold rounded her back underneath me and gaited more easily and more happily than I can remember.

SMOKEY and I cantered *bareback* all over the place and he was very wonderful. They both seem delighted to be moving without a bit in their mouths. I'm buying one for SOLANDA next month and I'm never going to put a bit in their mouths again. And this surprised me more than anything, with a bit in their mouths I wouldn't feel nearly as safe.

The next day, SOLANDA did in fact become a bit friskier than usual as you note in your literature might happen with the sense of liberation from the bit, but I didn't mind. I still felt as if she was finally focused in a way she has never been focused before, as if she could finally focus on her movement and on my aids and on me rather than focusing on this thing in her mouth, which has been the bane of her riding experience from the time she was a baby.

A side note: the same day I listened to Sabine Kells on Rick Lamb's Horse Show discussing Dr. Strasser's approach to barefooting, and I feel as if for the first time, with your bridle and with the possibilities of natural horse hoof care, that I'm finally approaching what's best for my horses and for our relationship together. I'm truly grateful to you for your work and your generosity of spirit in your approach to our relationship to our horses. I've told my horse friends that you deserve a special place in heaven for this, and I mean it. Thank you."

- Colleen Devlin, 11/6/01

Several letters from the owner of a headshaking horse, together with my replies

"I received the 'beta' Bitless Bridle & reins a couple of weeks ago but didn't get a chance to use them until last week. My horse (a large Belgian/Hackney cross - about 16 1/2 hands and 1800 or so lbs.) had been rather uninterested in being ridden the last few months. He was **continually trying to eat** grass, leaves, apples or whatever came within reach (since all of my riding is outdoors, that provided him with ample opportunities). He was also prone to a lot of **head shaking** and tended to **grab the bit** in a head-down fashion when being cantered or galloped. I wasn't sure how he'd respond without a bit but boy, was I impressed!

His attitude made a 180 degree correction and I had one of the best rides ever. The **headshaking totally disappeared** and he cantered and galloped with his head up and nicely collected. He was snorting and blowing like a youngster (although he's 20 now) and his ears were straight up. The most amazing thing I noticed was that **he hardly ever stopped to grab a mouthful** of grass or leaves on the trail - only when we stopped for a short rest did his head go down for a quick bite. Even at a full gallop he responded well (although the first time I had to use a couple of 'half-halts' to get his attention - after that he was fine) and seemed to be enjoying himself as much as I was. Even the gentleman I was riding with commented on how well he was behaving and expressed an interest in trying one on his own horse (a Belgian/Thoroughbred cross).

Anyway, I just wanted to let you know how well the bridle worked and I'm looking forward to riding again this weekend. The only criticism (if you can call it that) I have to offer is this ... "Where were you 20 years ago when I started riding?"

Best Regards & thanks for a wonderful product,"

- Bill Gowans, Komoka, Ontario, Canada, 10/4/01

[Ed: Below is my reply]

I am most grateful to you for telling us about your first experience with The Bitless Bridle. Thank you for taking the trouble to do this and for your encouraging remarks. I loved, in particular, your tailpiece 'criticism'. And I cannot resist giving you a literal answer by way of explanation. Twenty years ago I was in Massachusetts. I was also up to my ears in academic administration, serving as the Acting Dean for what at the time was a fragile, and rather 'embryonic' veterinary school at Tufts University. It had been born 'prematurely' into a somewhat unfriendly and even hostile environment, and was in need of 'intensive care.' Thankfully, the school survived and it is now a robust young adult with an assured and promising future.

But to return to your interesting comments, you will be pleased to hear that your description has triggered in my mind a new explanation for a phenomenon that has been puzzling me for some time, to wit the habit that some horses exhibit, like yours, of **'eating on the run'**. Snatching at food in passing or suddenly stopping in the middle of a trot is not the sort of behavior that one would expect to see in the wild. A feral horse grazes at a very slow walk but not in the middle of a trot!

Domestic horses that do this are not, I think, indulging in the habit because they are being starved in the stable, so what is the explanation? There seems to be an almost compulsive aspect to the habit ... a frantic need to put something in their mouths. Before receiving your letter it had not occurred to me to view this as being possibly part of the headshaking syndrome; as a previously unrecognized but additional symptom of the syndrome.

Let me explain. In the last few years, I have collected evidence that has led me to advance the hypothesis that bit-induced trigeminal neuralgia ('tic douloureux' as it is called in human medicine) is the most common cause of the headshaking syndrome (so it was satisfying for me to read that this problem ceased in your horse immediately you removed the bit). One of the symptoms often exhibited by 'headshakers' is a frantic need to rub their faces and muzzles on any standing object that is handy. Usually this is the person who is leading them from the ground, after a period of exercise. But some affected horses, because of their (presumed) neuralgia, try to rub their muzzles on their own forelegs during periods of ridden exercise. I believe they do this in an attempt to relieve 'pins and needles' or frank pain in their muzzle. In articles that are available on our website you can find a full explanation as to why I believe the bit causes these referred pains in the skin of the face and muzzle. The stimulation of touch or pressure to the tingling area will sometimes temporarily relieve or block the pain sensations.

It now occurs to me that this curious habit of snatching at vegetation during exercise may be another manifestation of this same strategy. If a horse has a tingling sensation or pain in its lips, tongue or mouth, it may be that it seeks to relieve this by pressing food against these areas? An alternative though I think less convincing explanation would be to suggest that the horse is seeking the direct relief of pain by cushioning the bit with a 'padding' of vegetation.

This 'eating on the run' behavior is not something that I hear about very often but, in the past, I do not recall having heard of it occurring in conjunction with headshaking. In future, I shall obviously be on the alert for this possible connection. Nevertheless, even if it occurs in isolation it does not invalidate my explanation. A syndrome that has, say, six possible symptoms (as does the headshaking syndrome) will not manifest itself with all six symptoms in every affected animal. Many will only show one or two of the symptoms.

Well, this is a rather long reply to your letter but it has helped me to sort out my ideas on paper. I should very much like to talk to you about your horse and get your response to my suggestions. My telephone number is 410 778 9005 if you felt like giving me a call.

Again, many thanks for your most useful feedback."

And excerpts from a subsequent e-mail, in which the writer replies to the above thoughts

' ... Your comment about **face rubbing** was right on the mark - I had forgotten to mention that when I had been using his regular bit, besides his continual 'grazing on the fly', he would often stop and rub both sides of his nose on his forelegs - at the time I had attributed this primarily to fly irritation, but your explanation makes more sense since this behavior has virtually stopped. He still likes to rub his nose on my

arms & back after a ride. [Ed: I think this is probably an indication of some degree of persistent neuralgia, but even this may still subside with time]

... Getting your bridle was the second best thing that's happened to make my riding more enjoyable - the first was getting my right knee replaced three years ago. I'd had to stop riding because of the pain ..."

- Bill Gowans, Komoka, Ontario, Canada, 10/13/01

And a follow-up two months later

"Just wanted to let you know that my horse is adjusting nicely to the bridle - every ride seems a bit smoother and I have **better control (with less pressure)**. As I mentioned before, the biggest change I noticed was in his **attitude** towards being ridden - he now seems to **enjoy** it as much as I do and is considerably **more 'peppy' and responsive**.

- Bill Gowans, Komoka, Ontario, Canada. 12/21/01

"My horse still occasionally rubs me with his nose but it's only when I turn my back to him after dismounting, so I think it's more of a playful thing as it doesn't happen when I'm facing him or after I've removed the bridle. He's always been a bit playful and will follow me around the paddock while I'm fixing fences and do the same thing."

Bill Gowans, Komoka, Ontario, 12/27/01

"Well I have to admit that the first few times I tried the bitless bridle I wasn't impressed. My horse was very resistant in it and it was very difficult to stop her on a trail ride a few days later when she took off at a full gallop.

However, I tried it in conjunction with a loose ring snaffle for a few weeks because I found the lower noseband helped reduce her habit of chomping on the bit when asked to come round. At first I used it like a double bridle, then with the reins looped inside the bit rings.

The last three rides I've used it alone and she is much more accepting. We've been having a problem with this mare for the last 2 years since she started to develop **stiffness**, especially to the left, and a nasty habit of **chomping** and **pulling on the bit**. We tried numerous bits and gadgets and nothing helped.

She was diagnosed with EPSM and just recently severe cataracts (possibly from moon blindness, we're looking into it). Her mouth was examined by two vets and her teeth are floated every 6 months, there was nothing wrong. Her mandibular joints were clean and functioning as well. In the last 3 months she has developed **sneezing** and **headshaking syndrome** from, I suspect, an airborne allergy and also frustration. I think that besides being an ex-hunter who was allowed to go around the ring with a **high headset**, she has been so **unaccepting of the bit** because she has a low palate and is very soft-mouthed. I am convinced that someone at some time abused her mouth. She has been very **stiff laterally** so the last few rides I've been working on giving to the lateral aids. She has always been very forward and light, just that she gets **uptight** and will not give her head. And

when using the bit and cueing say, a shoulder-in, she would back or rush forward to avoid it.

HOWEVER tonight I was amazed. She came "on the bit" and STAYED on the bit with only a touch of leftover resistance. She did chomp at the bit (with no bit in her mouth) for a short period but then she was quite willing to relax and lift her forehead up. By the way, my vet (who has gone to one of your lectures years ago) and his assistant were quite fascinated with my bridle and may buy one. Hopefully things will continue to improve between using this bridle, a UV-reducing mask to help her eyes, and using wood pellets instead of shavings and soaking her food to reduce dust.

So far so good :)”

- Shannon Kathleen, 10/29/01

[Ed: It seems possible that the above horse has a bit-induced trigeminal neuralgia, as most of her symptoms are consistent with headshaking syndrome]

“This past summer, my daughter and I purchased two Bitless Bridles for our two 5-year-old QH mares. We bought just one at first to try it out, but then, after just one weekend's experience, couldn't get the second one ordered quickly enough (your customer service was exemplary for both orders!).

I found you on the 'Net when I was looking for an easier bridle to use with our red roan, MAGGIE. She'd had some minor ear surgery earlier this summer to remove a **sarcoid tumor**, and was tender about having the headstall pulled over that ear. Searching the web turned up the "usual stuff", traditional headstalls, etc., *and* The Bitless Bridle. After reading your numerous, and usually glowing, customer testimonials, I thought "what the heck, give it a try."

The bridle's configuration is such that it is easy to get it over MAGGIE'S still-sore ear (she's healing nicely and is allowing more ear-fussing as we work gently with it)... no fighting or trauma, since we don't have to fight the bit while bending ears under the poll-straps, and there's enough slack to get the sore one under the strap first, then the other one. This works fine, and she's re-learning that bridling-up is no big deal. Trust is everything, of course, but having head-gear that's easy to handle really helps.

But that's not the real story... The big success is in just how well this Bridle works with both of these mares. MAGGIE'S been by far the more "rock-solid" ride of my two horses, having been trained well and intelligently on trails. However, she's always been somewhat of a **head-shaker** (perhaps due to that tumor), and tho' well schooled on neck-reining, she'd sometimes be a bit **head-strong**. With The Bitless Bridle, nearly all of these problems have simply evaporated. She's easily controlled, her head is down and bobbing freely under saddle, and she's much more alert and **focused on "the ride" rather than "the bit/mouth."** The bridle seems to work just as well, if not better, than Dr. Cook's studies and observations said it would.

Our second mare, QUICKIE, came to us considerably less schooled and experienced under saddle; certainly gentle and willing, just not very experienced yet. Last winter I had her under some solid remedial training by an experienced handler using traditional snaffle and reining techniques, with emphasis on leg-pressure during turns. She'd not yet graduated to neck-reining when I brought her home for use,

and my first rides with snaffle were still using a two-handed (and rather tight) direct-reining, with leg cues. Yet QUICKIE was still prone to "**pull through**" the bit, not yet really "soft in the mouth" as I'd hoped.

If anything, QUICKIE took to The Bitless Bridle even faster than MAGGIE. I was some-nervous about that first mount-up, so we did as recommended, starting first in a corral. Her first response was a somewhat quizzical and comical: "Hey, wait! You forgot something!", which quickly gave way to "Hey, cool!... why didn't we do this before?!!" After just a few turns around the corral, we moved right out into open fields --- I found that stops are quicker and cleaner, head's down and ears forward, and she's just plain comfortable with the control we've got, and so am I. Neck-reining (or head-reining, as Dr. Cook calls it) is coming along nicely... no arguments, we just keep focusing on getting the cues right and consistent.

The two Bitless Bridles we purchased are both Betas, one dark brown and one chestnut. Quality, materials and workmanship are superb. Only minor suggestions: I'd advocate for more, and closer-spaced, holes punched into the nose-piece, since that would give better/finer adjustability for snugness. And my daughter would like to have even longer reins, since she'd like to occasionally "flick'em"... I guess I'll graft some leather scrap-ends to hers.

I'll say, in conclusion, and as bluntly as possible: For us, The Bitless Bridle has simply become the most single important advance in our horse gear that I've ever experienced in over 40-years of riding. I'm not an "expert" horseman, nor a "whisperer", but I've always tried to respect and appreciate my mounts, and to try to tune in on what would make riding as enjoyable for them as for me. "The girls" are always ready and happy to go for a ride, and I swear now that they'd put their Bridles on themselves if they could. The Bitless Bridle is remarkable, and I'll never put iron in my horses' mouths again... it's simply unnecessary.

Best regards and continued product success!

- Lorin Ricker, Franktown, CO. 9/26/01

"Thanks for the bridle. I got it this week, and I tried it on PEGGY this morning. I was impressed. No major differences overall, but when I pushed her into trot, **she shook her head far less**. She also steered much better. Sadly, no difference in her stumbling, but since that's usually from too much looking at everything but where she should be going, it's not really a huge surprise.

The real difference is psychological. I'm no longer worried about putting too much pressure on the bit. And now I don't have to worry about it, I noticed that I used much less pressure - and no neck reining at all! - to get her to go where I wanted her to (PEGGY is rather strong-minded and, being part Shire, also rather strong!).

When we were coming back to the stables, a couple of young gits on a motorbike were coming down the ride. This was strictly against the rules of the forest I ride in. Their engine was hugely noisy, and even though PEGGY is a horse who doesn't turn an ear at the heaviest traffic, it scared her. It also scared the horse in the paddock next to her, so I found myself calming two horses at once!

She skittered all the way up the path, understandably, and I kept her on a very short rein all the way. She didn't calm down until we reached her bit of the yard. But I felt very in control all the way and could put my full attention on soothing her instead of worrying about her getting out of control and hurting both of us.

When we got back, Tom, who runs the yard, and is 78, took a look at the bridle. He said he'd tried one years ago that he built himself of a similar construction, using a drop noseband, and he seemed a lot less dismissive than he had been at first of the idea. I mentioned that one of my reasons for being interested in the bridle was that I was worried about being too heavy on the bit, and he agreed that as a young horse (she's six, with not a lot of schooling), it might be much more comfortable for her than an ordinary bit. He also pointed out that the crossed over cheekstraps effectively act as a higher-up double curb, which might be why I felt she wasn't as forward going as normal. I'll wait and see how that develops. The first ride isn't enough to decide about that...

Oh, and when I first rode her out, her lower lip was in "ashtray" mode. This is her relaxed posture, which really impressed me. She's never done *that* in a bit.

So, thank you for the bridle (lovely construction as well - the beta looks just like leather, but with the mud around here I don't have to spend hours cleaning it!) and I'll let you know how I get on with it."

- Jenny Delaney, 10/10/01

[Ed: 10/10/01; I am pleased to hear that the first trial went so well ... less headshaking, good control with less rein pressure, and improved relaxation. You might find that, in time, the **stumbling** will also diminish, so persevere in hope.

You have probably already given our office associates some idea of the problems that you were particularly concerned about but if you cared to add anything for my benefit, please feel free to do so. With your permission, I would like to add your comments to our website collection?

I was delighted with your graphic description of PEGGY'S 'ashtray mode' with regard to her lower lip. This is something I have observed many times in horses ridden in the bitless bridle (and I love to see it) but have never described half so well. From now on, that will be my name for it too! I wonder at what times you see your horse exhibit her 'ashtray mode' other than when she is wearing the bridle?

Most horses are more willing and forward in this bridle rather than less, so I would expect you to see some greater freedom developing as your horse becomes more accustomed to the new bridle. Please let me know, in due course.]

"I recently purchased one of your bitless bridles for my three year old Arabian gelding. I am very impressed with how effectively it works, and I haven't put a bit in his mouth since. I had encountered some resistance while training with a standard snaffle bit, which included him **running through the bit, tossing his head**, and being extremely **hard to bridle**. We had come to **a standstill in his training**, almost like he had shut down on me.

However, the first time I used the bitless bridle on him, not only did I have more control, but he became instantly more cooperative. His training has progressed rapidly since, and now we can safely enjoy trail rides.

I have convinced a few of my friends, who were skeptical about how much control it could offer, to let me try it on their horses. In every case it was as effective if not more than a standard bridle would have been.

- Tiffani Bowles, Oxford, GA, 6/20/01

Part of a correspondence with a competitive endurance rider, Sharon Becker, from North Carolina

Letter #1, 4/10/01: Her first letter carried the subject heading "Simply amazing, absolutely fabulous."

"Well, its been 6 weeks and I've given it every challenge I can dream up. Taking off in a pack of 50 endurance horses beginning a race at full speed, slowing down from a group of horses moving along the trail too fast for me, spooky places, leaving trail buddies, English or Western, you name it. I just can't lose control. **No fuss, no fighting, no yelling and cursing.** FATE, my beautiful Arab does exactly what he's told, willingly.

Using a bit I could never slow him down or stop him if he wanted to move on. I often felt **out of control** and just hung on for dear life. He just **clamped down on the bit**, stuck out his nose and took off. He wasn't a bad horse but when the herd was leaving he was going with them. Using the Bitless Bridle my problem is solved. I have total control of his head and he does not take off or fight me.

With the bit he spent a great deal of energy dipping and bobbing his head in aggravation. Usually the first 5-6 miles of a race/ride where spent getting him to stop that behavior. Changing bits didn't help. **From the first ride with the Bitless he stopped the behavior.** He is more collected and rounded holding his head naturally collected but not overly so as he sometimes did with the bit.

The proof however is in the pudding as they say and we've had lots of good pudding. On our first trail ride I took my GPS as usual so I could keep track of our speed and distance. I asked for the canter which was consistently 15.3mph for the last year. I looked down at my GPS because I felt like we were going faster (and much lighter) than ever before. I was amazed to find that we were cantering nicely along at 16.3mph!! This is a full mile an hour faster without any extra effort on his part or asking on my part. Amazing. His working trot went from 8-9mph with encouragement, to 10-11mph, also with no extra effort on his part or mine. He just settles into that faster pace on his own and stays there. Of course not fighting the bit and keeping his mind on the trail improves things immensely.

The best and most tasty pudding however, is the actual endurance rides themselves. I used to start every ride with, shall we say, GI distress. The thought of the start with all those horses taking off and me out of control got me in a nervous jumble. No longer a problem, now we go the speed I want to go, period.

This season we advanced to 50 mile rides and have been finishing in the top 10. I won the last ride (25 miles in extremely rough mountains) and won the best conditioned award.

Now, a lot of this is having a truly wonderful horse, but using the Bitless Bridle has freed both me and my horse from anxiety and needless worrying to concentrate on our training and endurance rides.

I have promised FATE that I will never put another bit in his mouth again. There is really no reason for it. I have been telling everyone I know about the Bitless Bridle and many are skeptical, feel it wouldn't work with their horse, or just don't want to change. There is that initial fear of not having the bit. We are so indoctrinated to believe that the bit is control. A greater untruth has never been told.

Thank you so much for the bridle. It has changed my life and certainly improved my horse's life and well being. I will soon be trying it with my Walking Horses! I can't wait!

(Ed: To read the remaining three letters of this correspondence, together with my replies, click on the User's Comments menu option for "Pleasure, Trail and Endurance" on www.bitlessbridle.com)

Report on a headshaker

Brief case history.

CHRISTIAN is a Rocky Mt. Horse I purchased as a 4 year old. He was trained with a standard) walking horse bit with, I think, an 8" shank (could have been a 6"). He traveled on a very loose rein and could be ridden at the gait without using the reins at all. By surprise we discovered he had quite some talent as a show horse. After his first show we started working him towards a couple more shows. When we asked him to come up on the bit and collect he started **opening his mouth and moving his head around**. Not badly but it progressed to the point where he would do it all the time with the bit in his mouth. Also I lost his easy way of going to some extent when not showing. We tried a hackamore and it reduced it to some degree. When a friend mentioned this bitless bridle I first thought it was nuts. Changing habits of thought and all. But she got it out with all the information and it made a great deal of sense. We tried it on him and he **now holds his head still** and keeps his mouth shut and just is generally better. I'm going to have to work on the habit part of this since it's now a learned thing with him. But for the most part he's great and when he sees the bridle he puts his head into it instead of **getting very, very tall**. I couldn't be more pleased.

I was looking to buy a spotted saddle horse filly, 3 years old and trained for trail, but she has a real head tossing thing - not just moving her head around. I spoke with the owner/trainer and she said the filly stops with a martingale so I mentioned your bridle and she said she had never heard of it and would love to know more. I bought a bridle from you but don't have the horse yet. Seems a shame to have her bridle and not herself. I'll let you know how she comes along. I read an article in the Rocky Mt. Horse news magazine by Pat Pirelli downplaying the use of bits, especially "big" bits. It just seems to make sense to do it better.

I'll send some feed back from this event thing on April 28th.
Thanks again."

Laurel Sutton, Danville, New Hampshire, 4/1/01

And another e-mail from the same person

My 11 year old gelding is doing very well with the bridle. His **mouthing** and **flipping his nose**, etc., have ceased and I'm now working on lowering his nose back to his proper headset. Is the martingale helpful for this? [Ed: NO! Without the bit you don't need a martingale as the headshaking was probably caused by the bit in the first instance] We're going slowly and he just loves it.

The three year old has not materialized on the farm yet but I tried the bridle on another gelding (spotted saddle horse) who I have not had any real complaints about but I am convinced every horse should have one. He carries his **head high** naturally but when asked for speed at the gait really lifts his nose with the bit. He also **backs up to get off the bit instead of going forward**. So on with the bridle. His head went up as usual when asked for speed but after a couple of times around the ring began to drop down. As soon as he was asked for a transition up it came but dropped more quickly. It really seemed that after a few minutes at a different speed he couldn't remember why his head was up in the air. It was only slight but pretty amazing. He also stopped backing up in avoidance. The great part came when I went to take the bridle off. You know how a horse **mouths the bit and spits at it to get it out of their mouth**? He started to do that with the usual head fidgeting and then just stopped with the most surprised look on his face. Being fussy with the bit was such a habit he couldn't stop. He's gets a tiny bit better each time. And the control and response from him to the bridle is just as good, if not better than with the bit.

One friend tried the bridle on his 4 year-old filly and she loved it, held her gait better and went smoother. His order should be on its way.

I don't mean to sound like "a miracle cure - works wonders in seconds" but it is a great idea and I'm using the bridle on all my horses and they seem happier for it and less fretful. Thanks again from all of us. I'll send feed back as it comes this way.

- Laurel (Sutton) & crew, Danville, New Hampshire, 5/12/01

Four letters about a headshaking Haflinger

Letter #1: Recently ordered and received my bitless bridle for use on a very **headstrong** Haflinger mare. I have owned her nearly two years and have had extensive work done with her with two very good non-resistance trainers. However, she still has a long, long way to go as I continue work with her (we've completed our Level I Parelli work) to help her overcome her **fears** and initial response to any new situation ... **bolting**.

Because she is so strong and determined and often **panicky** in new situations, I've hated using any bit on her as it is easy to quickly develop "heavy hands" just trying to maintain control. So, with this history, I was truly anxious as we began work with the bitless bridle.

I've been riding her in it almost daily for the past couple of weeks, including lots of ring work and two trail rides. I wish I could say that all problems are solved and that her responses are much improved, but I don't think we're there yet. The **headshaking** and **muzzle/leg rubbing** that always marked the end of a long ride seem to have **disappeared**, which is a blessing, but control is still an issue. In the

ring, she is very light and responsive, so I feel the bridle is doing just what you advertise. However, in scary situations, I think that new "feeling of freedom" makes her even less confident and her attention disappears. She ignores all aids and her panic escalates to spinning/running/bolting. She will respond to very strong pressure, and I can circle her to get her attention. However, this is a temporary solution, and off we go again. The "sawing" procedure does give some control and gets her down from a trot to a walk eventually. Perhaps this will improve as we use the bridle and she gains more confidence.

However, after reading your comments section, I think I need to look at the noseband placement. I may have it placed too high. I will try that today.
(Ed: This proved to be the case; the noseband had not been fitted low enough on the head) Any suggestions that you may have will be greatly appreciated! I know I've made her sound like a hopeless case, but, she's a lovely little animal with a great temperament and personality--think, with work, she'll overcome these fearful responses.

Now, I have two suggestions for your bridle and it's use. First, please warn folks that, at least in the biothane construction, that the buckle tongues are very thin and sharp and will hold their bent-back positions if not "buckled down" (does that description make sense?) I got a nasty scrape/cut when she rubbed her face against my hand as I reached up to remove the bridle. I'm careful now to check the buckles to make sure that the tongues are laying flat. Perhaps, they spring back into the proper position on the leather or nylon, but the stiffness of the biothane locks them in that open position.

[Ed: 2004. The version of the BB in the synthetic material Biothane has now been discontinued, as the Beta is so much to be preferred]

Also, I thought it was a wonderful convenience to be able to use the bridle to tie during a trail break, so I tried it. However, just as soon as I turned my back, she rubbed it off over her head! That's a caution that folks should know too, I think.

[Ed: Again, thank you for drawing this to my attention. I was aware that this was theoretically possible but you are the first to report that the theory works out in practice. We shall have to insert a comment in the manual. Perhaps a temporary throatlatch is the answer for the present?

Addendum: Since writing the above we have developed a throatlatch that can be added to all existing bridles]

Anyway, I think this is a marvelous invention, and I'm inspired by all those who have written who have had such success with it. I'm hoping for the same! Any suggestions you may have will be greatly appreciated--now I'm off to readjust the noseband and work on better responses.

- Cada McCoy, Summerville, South Carolina

Letter #2: Yes, that seems to have been the problem. I adjusted the noseband down and now have much more control. Seems to rest lower than I thought it should, but she's still breathing--guess that's a good sign!!

I did want to add one very positive comment about its use: We were working on staying in a walk yesterday, so needed to do a lot of stopping and backing from a

trot. I would have never, never been able to do that much backing work with a bit in her mouth. With your bridle, I had no fear of hurting her, so could continue the lesson until we accomplished the task. **She exhibited absolutely no headshaking** and cued backwards much more easily than in the past. WOW!! It's getting better and better!

In addition to the throat latch problem and the sharp buckle thing, I've discovered even another mistake folks can make when using the bridle. (You're really lucky that the biggest klutz and the strongest horse are trying out your product!!) **It's pretty easy to accidentally get one of the crossover pieces (the one on the off-side especially), as it crosses under the muzzle, caught UNDER the chin strap as it is buckled.** If that happens, of course, you have greatly diminished your control. It would probably be really helpful to folks first putting this on, to advise them to do a final "flight check" to make sure that these straps are free before attaching their reins. I know, I know--I'm probably the only dope who could have that happen. But, think I've found all the "bugs" in case you'd like to add a "caution" list to your manual.

All that said, I really believe this is a truly remarkable product, and, because it's so very difficult to convince the "bits-have-been-used-for-thousands-of-years,-therefore-they-are-correct" school of folks, have you explored endorsement by one of the non-resistance folks? Seems a natural for Parelli or Tellington-Jones. Think that sort of sponsorship would get this in the hands (and on the heads) of a lot more horses and their owners. A good thing!

Anyway, our problems are resolving themselves. Thank you for your suggestions and your wonderful product!

Cada McCoy, Summerville, South Carolina, 3/4/01

Letter #3: "Had the opportunity to use my new bitless bridle on a three-day ride last weekend and think this really gave us a good chance to find any remaining bugs. Was delighted to discover there are only a couple!!

After solving the noseband position problem and making sure the crossover straps under the chin were free of the chin strap, control was no longer an issue (yeah!!).

However, one of this horse's earlier "problems" quickly reappeared. Originally, she had been trained to drive, so in her early riding training, she **"laid on the bit."** We had pretty much eliminated that behavior, but, with the bitless bridle, she immediately reverted to this head position. She is excessively strong, so I was unable to get or keep her head in a proper position. In fact, at one point, trotting across a newly green field, she **dropped her head so rapidly to grab a bite** that I was pulled over her head and landed on that tempting blade of grass--no one was hurt :-).

Also, because I'm forced to keep a constant contact (that she continues to lean against), the bridle has rubbed two quarter-size spots right where the cross-over straps pass through the 'O' rings on the cavesson.

I have the biothane bridle, and, since the material is thin and fairly "sharp", I'm wondering if a different material would make a difference in the rubbing. I was able to examine the Beta one that Kay Withrock ordered, and see how much softer it is.

So, my two questions are:

1. Any suggestions for correcting the head position?
2. Would a Beta bridle improve the rubbing situation? If so, would it be possible to upgrade to a Beta (as your warranty states for upgrading to a leather one)?

Again, thanks in advance for your advice and help. I really want this bridle to work and not be just one more "gadget" to hang in the tackroom!!"

- Cada McCoy, Summerville, South Carolina,

(ED: A horse that has recently had a headshaking problem, such as this Haflinger, may still have some lingering neuralgia in the trigeminal nerve. Such horses show an inclination to 'graze on the fly' as this one did [see also the editorial comments in the correspondence above with Bill Gowans in this same 'Headshaking' section for October 2001]. It seems that this activity helps them to relieve or temporarily overcome the pain or tingling sensations that they might be experiencing. Having removed the cause (the bit), it can be hoped that this neuralgia will regress and the grazing-on-the-fly habit disappear).

Letter #4: "Thanks once again for advice (about getting the teeth checked) and suggestions! My suspicions (and your diagnosis) again proved to be correct this weekend.

Last week, we had a team from the National Academy of Equine Dentists pay a call on our barn. Their work on WILLOUGHBY, my Haflinger, showed ramps, hooks, etc. that could have been causing bit pain, as well as evidence that the bit was never correctly seated. **Her teeth were worn where she had held it instead.** [Ed: Erosion of the first cheek teeth in the lower jaw is a frequent complication of bit usage. The horse gets the bit between its teeth much more commonly than has been recognized in the past. In some cases, the first cheek teeth in the lower jaw are rubbed down to their roots and lost completely and serious erosion is also present in the first upper cheek teeth] Anyway, they advised me to try once again with a bit. Since I wanted the rubbed places from the bitless bridle to "rest" also, I did as they suggested. **We weren't 15 minutes into our ride when the headshaking started**--and it grew worse as we rode. So much for testing theories!

Anyway, I believe we absolutely need to continue with the bitless bridle, and I definitely want to upgrade for the Beta for the benefit of the softness of the material and the better operation of the buckles (yes, still finding those annoying!)

- Cada McCoy, Summerville, South Carolina, 3/19/01

"I have only one thing to say to you people: I will NEVER use a bit on my horse AGAIN. EVER. Have to run and do Christmas cleaning. Details to follow! Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you!!!!!!!!!!"

Zoe English, Montclair, NJ 12/16/00

As promised above:-

"The full details of our first experience with the bitless bridle. My Connemara mare Molly was acting like a lunatic in her paddock this morning. All the other horses were

in high spirits, galloping up and down their fields, and she was going nuts in her small paddock separated from her buddies, careening up to the gate and slipping in the mud, screaming out for company when everyone else got out of sight. So I knew I wasn't in for the calmest ride of my life! When I went and got her out, she behaved well enough. I took her in and tacked her up and she only tried to thumb her nose at me a few times and stood patiently while I read the instructions for the bitless bridle and adjusted it on her ad infinitum.

She was loopy the last time I rode her in the indoor ring, **claustrophobic and hyper**, so even though the footing in the outdoor ring was frozen and hard as a rock, I took her out there, intending just to walk anyway as we got the feel of the bridle. I got on her and spent a few minutes doing turns. She was confused at first and wanted to go right when I gave the left rein aid, responding to the pressure on her right cheek. But she cottoned on pretty quickly and soon our turns were nice and smooth.

Then, five minutes into our ride, the three geldings in the upper field, led by my daughter's horse of course, came galloping down at full speed towards the ring, bucking and cavorting. At the same time the two warhorses in the near paddock set to jumping and spinning. I felt Molly go electric under me. She started snorting and piaffing. I took back on the reins. She backed up into a jump, overturning the standard and the rails went clattering down. I could feel her starting to **explode**. This is her normal response to excitement and the only part of owning her that I hate--it happens rarely enough but it's a real issue for us.

I took again, released and asked her to go forward a step. She obeyed, but she felt like a volcano ready to explode. I thought I'd better get off, seeing as I had no idea how much control I had with no bit, but I wanted to get away from the fallen jump so I asked her to go forward a bit more. She actually put her head down and moved out. So I decided to stay on for the time being. Then the other horses started their act again. Molly lit up underneath me, started to go into a spin, but this time when I took with the reins, told her to stand, and then go forward, she did so more quickly, with less of an explosive feeling. This cycle repeated itself a few more times, and as it did I felt a very unusual calmness come over her.

I also felt, from the very beginning, an entirely different kind of connection with her. Molly deplores a tightly held bit. She tries to evade strong pressure every which way, **tossing her head, opening her mouth, going "rubber" in your hands**. As a result I always try to keep an extremely light contact, which can translate into nothing very easily. I'm always uneasy when she starts "acting up," because a "death grip" on the reins is the worst response I can have and giving her her head leaves me with no control whatsoever. But with the bitless bridle, I felt as if I had a strong, but comforting connection to her, and she responded in kind. Your description of a "benevolent headlock" is EXACTLY how it feels. Within ten minutes she was working away with a more relaxed attention than I have ever felt from her. She stopped effortlessly, backed easily, stretched down willingly, and the **fight** was completely gone. Her anxiety changed to calm alertness. It was amazing. I tried a trot, and she worked beautifully.

I decided to go into the indoor after all, as by now I really wanted to try cantering her. We've always had trouble keeping our balance together at the canter, especially in circles. She tends to break into the trot, and I end up bouncing all over the place. She'll also **toss her head on the canter departs**, especially to the left. Well, not

in the bitless bridle. She moved into the canter smoothly, and within about ten minutes of working, I had her going in circles evenly and without breaking, I was able to gently use my leg on her to keep her going, and worked practically with a loose rein! She remained calm and connected to me to an unprecedented degree.

I didn't want to get off her!!! Working Molly on her "up" days has always been fraught with a certain degree of anxiety for me, and I often end up somewhat frustrated and a little frightened. I never want to do anything to traumatize her, both out of concern for her but also because a firm hand on my part can so easily deteriorate into a fight. But today we moved into a solid partnership where I felt I could do just about anything with her. So I decided to take her for a short hack down the road. We rarely go out alone, as I am nervous about her reaction to cars, goats, miniature ponies etc. I worry my own nervousness will translate to her, and it does. But today I felt like the mother of a mildly nervous but very compliant child. The competent mother! Off we went a quarter of a mile or so down the road. She did everything I asked. I could feel her trust for me like a palpable object. It was remarkable.

I drove home singing in the car. I will never put a bit in her mouth again. I feel as though we've been transported into another dimension.

I cannot thank you enough, Dr. Cook & Paul. It's hard to believe that after three years of ownership, my relationship with Molly could change so radically in a single afternoon. I'm curious now about the success that the lady I read about on your website has had trying to change the USDF regulations re. showing in dressage without a bit. We are eventers, so I am sure I will encounter the same regulations in the dressage component of our shows. I haven't begun to show yet--am intending to do so next summer--but I will NOT put a bit back in this horse's mouth--not even a dummy. You should have seen the happy expression on her face and the relaxed line of her lips when I was working her today (actually, it was hilarious to see the confused wrinkling of her lips when we started off today doing some groundwork as she clued in to the new pressure on her nose and poll). I feel that any return to a bit at this point would be a huge step backwards.

Well, enough rambling. Please accept my deepest gratitude for the best Christmas present (next to Molly herself of course) I have ever had!"

- Zoe English, Montclair, NJ. 12/16/00

"Happy Thanksgiving: Love the bridle. We have a **head bobber** that my 8 year old rides ... she put the bridle on and had a great time. I asked her how it worked and she gave me a strange look saying, 'Mom, it works like a bridle should work!' and reported that JILL (the horse) **only bobbed her head once! ! !** Thank you very much!

Signed,
Happy Customer"

- Cathy Thomas, Pittstown, ME 11/22/00

"I'm sending the photos you requested of my Welsh pony JELLY wearing the leather bitless bridle. She's 13 years old and hasn't been trained, I believe, because of the scar on her tongue. The vet discovered it while floating her teeth. JELLY used

to **toss her head** constantly while being ridden, making it impossible to teach her anything, due to her being so unbalanced. With the Bitless Bridle she has improved 75%. Now when she tosses her head, I feel it is in anticipation of what used to be painful for her. Slowly but surely she's improving. Thank you so much for your wonderful bridle."

- Karen Goekler, Fort Bragg, CA, 10/16/00

"I just wanted to write and tell you that I received the bitless bridle that I ordered and we just love it. We've had a quarter horse for 2 years and haven't been able to ride her until now. This is great! She **tosses her head** a bit when we first start out, but settles down nicely. In time I think she'll quit completely. I've also been using it on my Standardbred. He's a wonderful horse to ride in any bit, but seems so much happier using the bitless bridle - he responds instantly. So I want to thank you for your product and wanted to let you know how much we're enjoying it."

- Jeanne Polden, Eau Claire, WI 10/5/00

Postscript: As to why our QH mare was unrideable - well, I guess I shouldn't say unrideable. We could ride her with a hackamore, but it was very dangerous because she **severely threw her head**, almost hitting the rider. She hates a hackamore. We were afraid to ride with a tiedown because of her tendency to panic - thought she might go right over backwards. So we just never rode her. It was always a battle, and a dangerous one.

It's extremely difficult to get a bit in her mouth, and again, once we did, the **head throwing was violent**. She had been abused by a previous owner -hit in the head and a chain used in her mouth. The very sound of the bit would send her into a **panic**, and it's been **very difficult to even just touch her around her mouth area**. She isn't head shy - you can pet her and touch her ears and such. It's just her mouth. And she isn't being nasty - she's scared. Very tense and very reactive.

As I mentioned in my last message, when we first put the bitless bridle on her, we did have a bit of head tossing and carrying on, but to a much less degree. After getting on her to ride, she quit in just a few minutes. You could see her visibly relax. It was actually a pleasure to ride her.

So, again I thank you. For us, this is like a miracle. And for CHESKA, she can now be ridden without fear and actually begin to enjoy herself.

- Jeanne Polden, Eau Claire, WI 10/6/00

"My horse, once a bit gnashing, **head flinging horse**, now goes with a flopping lower lip for most of his ride. His **roaring** is much less when he gallops. Although he still startles easily and often, he is able to regain his composure much more quickly. I believe this is because he is able to recapture his breath more easily'

- Margaret Huskey, Huntington Station, NY 7/28/00

"I just ordered one of the Bitless Bridles online (Biothane). My 9 yr. old mare has had a **headshaking problem** for more than a year now. It started out as

- **just being fussy with the bit**
- **then trying to get her tongue over the bit**
- **then pulling on the bit**
- then trying to put her **muzzle down to her leg to rub it** or down to the ground.

I was taking weekly lessons on her at the time and my instructor insisted that she was just trying to get out of work. A trainer did some work with her and she ended up just **running through the bit**. I was also told that she was not respecting the snaffle I was using and she needed a stronger bit. I instinctively disagreed with this advice even though I am a novice rider and this was coming from an experienced trainer. I thought that the problem was that she was in pain and no one was listening. The problem escalated to **headshaking at work, and even in the pasture without any bit in her mouth**.

At first she was diagnosed with **photic headshaking** and we put her on cyproheptadine and used a fly mask. However after a three month cessation of the headshaking, it was back. The cyproheptadine was no longer effective. The mask that was supposed to block 90% light made no difference and she would headshake most days, even in the pasture. After several attempts at alternative therapies, (chiropractic, acupuncture) she was taken to an equine dentist who did major work to adjust her overbite. At that point she was diagnosed with TMJ on the left side. She then underwent physiotherapy which significantly reduced her pain and eliminated the crepitating sound in her TMJ. She is now on a glucosamine supplement. But **once a bit (snaffle) was put back in her mouth, the headshaking returned**.

I have been working with her in a bosal, but that is also irritating to her on her "bad" days. I am hoping that the bitless bridle will be the answer for her. She is just used for recreational riding and I am not expecting anything more out of her than being able to get out and both enjoy our ride. My question for you is: Once a horse has developed trigeminal nerve neuralgia, does it ever go away? If the main source of the pain is caused by a TMJ problem, which the bit aggravated, is there hope that in time it will heal if it is not further aggravated. She is on a six month recall for teeth work and she is given no hard crunchies or even oats. I would appreciate any suggestions you could give me."

- Laura MacDonald, (recreational rider), Calgary, Alberta. 5/5/2000

WRC to Laura MacDonald 5/5/2000

Your e-mail provides a sad but most interesting description of the progression of the headshaking problem. It is only within the last three years that it has occurred to me that bit-induced trigeminal neuralgia is the logical explanation for this distressing problem and I do not, at this stage, have any hard figures on the percentage of horses that recover following removal of the bit. Undoubtedly, however, many do recover immediately and I would expect others to respond in the passage of time, even though there may be a hard core of horses that are not so lucky.

I am presently of the opinion that TMJ sensitivity is secondary to the bit and is not simply a primary problem that is now aggravated by the bit. If I am right, then the TMJ pain may well regress, once the trigger stimulus of the bit is removed. I would

very much appreciate it if you would give me a report, after one month, on how your horse responds to the bitless bridle. In view of your horse's pain, I will give you priority when it comes to allocating the next shipment of Biothane bridles.

For your information, I am attaching an unpublished article that I have just submitted to the program committee of the American Association of Equine Practitioners for their next conference in December. It contains some comments on head shaking. Please keep in touch.

- Robert Cook



AAEP abstract 2000
5.doc

Laura MacDonald to WRC, 5/18/2000

"My horse is responding wonderfully to the bitless bridle!! It does not seem to aggravate her trigeminal nerve problem like the bit and even the bosal did. She seems comfortable in it and I am much more comfortable with it than with the bosal. At first turning was a bit confusing for her, but that resolved very quickly and by the second ride with it she was responding with very light reins. She stops and backs with a very light rein which is a complete switch for her (before she tended to run through the bit). **Most days now she does not headshake** at all, although she still has the odd "bad day" when she will headshake in the pasture. We are both very pleased with the progress we have made with the bitless bridle."

- Laura MacDonald, Calgary, Alberta, 5/18/00

"You are onto something wonderful.

My 7 year old Thoroughbred mare was always rather 'mouthy' but then, in June 1998, she developed EPM. Most of the symptoms disappeared after six weeks of treatment but she was left with a **facial neuralgia**. Subsequently, when a bit was put in her mouth, she would **constantly move her jaw back and forth** and tip her poll in the opposite direction. The result was a side to side wagging of her head. At the same time, she would squint with both eyes (**flutter her eyelids, noisily**). The **head wagging** would be triggered as soon as the slightest pressure was placed on the mouth by anything one did with the reins. She **could not walk in a straight line** with a bit in her mouth. With the lightest contact she would get **panicky**, duck from the bridle, and focus entirely on her head. During these moments, **she would walk into a wall**.

I have had to ride her without a bit, in a cavesson set high on her head, with a dropped noseband, and with reins attached to the "O" rings of the cavesson. Even so she was miserable and if she got tough and needed rein pressure, her head wagging would commence. I was desperate. A horse dentist told me that he didn't see how I could ever do dressage with this horse.

But now she is as happy as a clam in the Bitless Bridle and I am really delighted. It was like slipping a switch. She is still sensitive around her poll and, at rest, and I can still illicit the head wagging response by placing my hands on her poll, her cheek or around her TMJ. But at work in the Bitless Bridle she is as happy as can be.

I have videotape film of her before and after the Bitless Bridle, and will get these copied for you."

- Elizabeth Kreider (Dressage instructor) Sykesville, MD 3/25/00

"My daughter has a horse that we are training for Show Hunter classes that used to be an **inveterate head shaker**. He also used to **lean heavily on the bit**. Since using the Bitless Bridle he has abandoned both habits and can be ridden on a loose rein, almost on the buckle. For show classes that require the use of a bit, we hang a snaffle in his mouth like a pacifier and he plays with it happily without returning to his old ways"

- Robert Jackson, Newark, Delaware 3/15/00

"The horse that I purchased a Bitless Bridle for earlier this month has been doing so much better. He (a 7 year old Thoroughbred) **no longer tosses his head** and the **bridle seems to have helped him to concentrate**. It has worked brilliantly. The horse has won a blue ribbon and was **Grand Champion** recently. I have a professional rider and she is very pleased with the control that the bridle provides. I am talking it up all round the Florida show circuit. Please send a second bridle."

- Corinne J. Walker (Owner) Plantation, FL 1/25/00

"Please send another bridle. (My husband) is very pleased with the first one. He was so excited to receive it that he didn't stop to read the manual and the first two horses he tried it on, a 2 year old and a 3 year old, did great. He now doesn't want to use anything else. **The horses no longer toss their heads** or fight the bit and their whole attitude is much better."

- Charity Watson for Bob Watson, (Thoroughbred Trainer) Texas, 1/17/00

As we have had a lot of rain, I have only been able to use the (bitless) bridle one time (yet) with BLACKJACK. This is a Quarter horse with a **bulldog jaw** that cannot be ridden at all with a bit in his mouth, as he suffers excruciating pain. ... BLACKJACK took readily to the bridle. He automatically held his head in proper position and was more collected. I felt that I had equal control as I would have with a bit. If anything I was more comfortable, because I had no fear he would rear or buck because of pain caused by the bit. He did some **head shaking** when I was turning him in small circles but once I loosened up on the reins that behavior diminished.

Kimbra Kern (Director of a Therapeutic Riding Program for children suffering from psychosocial stress), Poulsbo, CA. 1/4/2000

By way of completing this collection of letters about headshaking, I am appending the following published correspondence

***Correspondence from The Veterinary Record,
Journal of the British Veterinary Association***

USE OF THE BIT IN HORSES

W. Robert Cook
Veterinary Record, Volume 142, Number 8, p 200
February 21, 1998

SIR, - I wish to applaud the initiative of Daniel Mills and Richard Geering at the behaviour clinic of De Montfort University, Lincoln, in launching a survey on headshaking in horses (VR, November 8, 1997, p 504). One of the aetiological factors they might consider, I suggest, is the part played in this frustrating problem by the bit. The survey provides an opportunity for testing a relatively unexplored hypothesis, that headshaking may often be caused by the bit.

Three horses I have observed recently that were headshakers when ridden in a traditional (bitted) bridle, behaved normally when ridden in a newly-developed bitless bridle.¹ In addition, improvements in performance were observed when this bridle was used on 'difficult' horses that were not headshakers. Even apparently trouble free horses that were not recognized as having any aversion to the bit showed an improvement in balance and gait. This experience has stimulated me to review what a bit really does. My conclusion is that use of a bit to control a horse is archaic and unkind. Fortunately, as the new bridle demonstrates, an effective and more humane method is available.

Since sometime before 1600 BC, horses have been controlled by means of a rod of metal in their mouths. In more recent times, two rods have been used. By attaching a long strap to this rod or rods, a rider sitting on the thorax can steer, slow down and stop a horse. Steering is achieved, in part, by lateral traction on the mouth, which inevitably results in an unnatural bending of the neck. Slowing and stopping is achieved by caudal traction on the lips and jaw which, apart from opening the mouth (something which in itself can be a source of trouble at speed), causes poll flexion, obstructs the nasopharyngeal airway and reduces the supply of oxygen.

Collectively, the lips, mouth and tongue are some of the most neurologically sensitive regions of the body. No human athlete would appreciate being controlled orally or by any method that interfered with their ability to breathe. Neither would human athletes be able to develop the freedom of movement so critical for top performance if their neck muscles were locked-up in the sort of brace that results when a horse resists traction on a bit. Imagine running with a plaster cast on your neck.

Apart from the direct and purely mechanical effects of this method of control, there are many more indirect effects. For example, placement of a foreign body (the bit) in the mouth of a horse sets up a train of sensory responses that signal the brain to think 'Eat'. Accordingly, motor responses initiate lip movement, salivation and chewing. In addition, many different movements are stimulated in the tongue. As the tongue is anatomically linked to the larynx, a complex train of responses will also be initiated in the rima glottidis. Movement of the tongue causes movement of the soft palate. These reflexes and responses persist in various permutations for as long as the foreign body is present.

Having put a foreign body in its mouth, man now requires physical activity of the horse. Accordingly, responses from legs and lungs signal the horse to think 'Exercise'. Physiologically, what man is demanding is that the horse should eat and

¹ The Bitless Bridle. The Bitless Bridle Inc., 2020, South Queen Street, York, PA 17401-4829

exercise simultaneously, something nature never intended. The two functions are mutually exclusive and incompatible. Understandably, the horse becomes confused. One of the body languages for confusion and frustration is headshaking (Cook 1992). Another effect might be the all too familiar dorsal displacement of the soft palate in racehorses. Readers should ask themselves how they might feel if they were required to run round the garden with a bunch of keys in their mouth.

From the above, one can understand why, when a horse is ridden in the bitless bridle described above, its performance improves. Unlike a bitted bridle, the bitless bridle enables a rider to control a horse without excess poll flexion. It works by the application of poll pressure (but also by pressure on the whole of the head). From the rider's left hand, the rein passes lateromedially through a 'D' ring on the side of the noseband, crosses over, under the chin, and becomes what looks like a throat latch on the right side, joining the poll piece at the level of the browband, just behind the right ear. The rein on the right side runs in the opposite direction, joining the left rein at the poll. Traction on the left rein transmits a firm but painless pressure to the soft tissues behind the right ear, and the horse turns left in a natural motion, away from the pressure. The bridle pushes, whereas the bit pulls.

If when owners of headshaking horses contact the animal behaviour clinic at De Montfort University, they could be encouraged to try this kind of bridle, the survey questionnaire could be used to test my bit hypothesis. I believe that in this way, much valuable information on the cause, treatment and prevention of headshaking could be gained and many horses helped.

W. Robert Cook, 7, Millbury Street, Grafton, MA 01519, USA

Reference

COOK, W.R. (1992) *Compendium on Continuing Education for the Practicing Veterinarian* 14, 1369

The above letter was responded to as follows:

USE OF THE BIT IN HORSES

Graham Dowley

Veterinary Record, March 14, 1998, p 288

SIR, - Professor Cook (VR, February 21, p 200) is probably correct when he states that use of the bit to control a horse is 'archaic and unkind'. It is just as well then that a properly ridden horse can be made to go, slow down, stop and steer without 'lateral traction on the mouth' or 'caudal traction on the lips and jaw'. Using leg pressure, body position and, most importantly, balance it is possible to control a horse without pulling on its mouth. Any rider whose principal means of controlling a horse is through the reins, dare I suggest, is simply not riding correctly. It follows that a horse that improves with the application of a bitless bridle is showing up a deficiency in its rider's technique and skill, and not a deficiency in the style of bit.

On a related subject, the assertion that 'the horse turns ... in a natural motion, away from the pressure', when describing the action of the bitless bridle, is also surely incorrect. A simple test of pushing into a horse's flank will show that the animal will

push back towards the pressure and not move away from it. Using such a system to control the head will have a similar action to 'neck-reining', and create more rather than less confusion and frustration.

Graham Dowley, 98, Western Road, Tring, Hertfordshire HP23 4BJ UK

The above letter was answered as follows:

USE OF THE BIT IN HORSES

W. Robert Cook, *Veterinary Record*, June 13, 1998

SIR, - Graham Dowley (VR, March 14, p288) resists the advantages of the bitless bridle described in my letter in VR, February 21, p 200, on the grounds that, when a bit is used properly, it is a satisfactory method of control. The logic of his argument is similar to the reason why, in times past, people resisted alternatives to the axe as a method of execution. In the hands of a master, the axe was 'satisfactory' but skilled axemen were rare and the job was often bungled. Similarly, skilled horsemen are rare and even these have had to learn at the expense of the horse. One advantage of the bridle I described is that it may be used successfully by a complete novice without harm to the horse.

I concur, of course, with Mr. Dowley's observation that the reins, no matter to what or to whom they are attached, constitute only one part of control, and that the legs, body position and balance of the rider are also an important component. Nevertheless, my letter was about bits not bodies. The point is that, depending on the skill of the rider and compliance of the horse, a bit exerts its component of control by light, moderate, or severe pressure from one or more pieces of metal on a part of the anatomy that is acutely sensitive to pain. Due to the exigencies of the moment, pressure may vary from one to several pounds per square inch and it may be distributed or focal. The pressure is applied to bone, lips and tongue in varying proportions, and it changes from minute to minute. Let us imagine how a human athlete would respond to instructions by means of a thin metal rod applied, say, to the shin.

In contrast, the new bitless bridle controls by painless pressure from a length of strap (leather or nylon) on the skin and underlying muscle mass in the region of the poll.² A demonstration with this bridle would convince Mr. Dowley that, contrary to his belief, the horse does indeed move away from poll pressure, as it does, for that matter, from flank pressure exerted by the rider's legs.

Even when in 'good' hands, the bit cannot be exonerated from the charge that it is a foreign body in the horse's mouth. For the reasons laid out in my original letter, use of a bit is contraindicated on physiological grounds.

W. Robert Cook, 206, Birch Run Road, Chestertown, MD 21620, USA

... and a letter to the Editor of the Thoroughbred Times that Dr. Cook wrote on 12/20/98 in response to some advice that had been offered a reader on the topic of headshaking

² Errata 8/30/01: It should be added, by way of correction, that the pressure is distributed to the whole of the head, not just the poll. In fact, the poll probably receives less pressure than other parts of the head. None of these pressures have yet been measured

Dear Sir,

In her letter to the Veterinary Topics column (Thoroughbred Times, December 19, 1998) Lafreda Williams describes a pattern of abnormal behavioral signs at exercise that has been exhibited by her 11 year old Thoroughbred gelding, especially during the warmer months of the year. These include violent head tossing, striking with the front feet, and constant nose-blowing. The advice given was that the horse was malingering and should be put into the hands of a stern disciplinarian who will not tolerate this behavior.

The owner describes a syndrome that is typical of a well-recognized problem, generally referred to as headshaking. She has already gone to some trouble to find a solution to the problem but as yet has found none. This too is typical of the headshaking problem. I have written four articles for scientific journals on headshaking and in each one I made it clear that, though I could describe the problem only too easily, I had consistently failed to find the cause or the cure. But recent experience has taught me that a simple cure for at least some instances of this recalcitrant problem is available and I would like to suggest that this should be given a trial before resorting to "a stern disciplinarian".

Headshaking, along with a number of other problems such as roaring, dorsal displacement of the soft palate, and bleeding from the lung, can be caused by the bit. The mechanism for the headshaking may be a combination of facial neuralgia and shortage of oxygen. Constant pressure of the bit on the sensitive tissues of the mouth and the bone of the jaw may, I suspect, set up a trigeminal neuralgia (tic douloureux). This could account for the temperature sensitivity and other signs that are a feature of this syndrome. The owner could test this possibility by riding the horse in a bitless bridle that does not control through poll flexion. Avoidance of extreme poll flexion would also improve the horse's supply of oxygen during exercise, reduce the horse's feeling of frustration (another source of headshaking) and greatly increase its comfort.

If riding is fun for the rider but not for the horse we should ask ourselves what we are doing wrong, rather than opting for coercion. We are likely to obtain better cooperation and better performance if the horse is also happy. When a horse is headshaking, however, neither rider nor horse is happy.

Sincerely
Robert Cook

More detailed information as to why Dr. Cook is of the opinion that the bit is the most common cause of the headshaking syndrome can be obtained from his published articles, many of which are available by clicking on 'Articles' from the menu options on the Home page of this website. In particular, read the article with the title "The effect of the bit on the behavior of the horse." or an updated version of the same material with the heading "Bit-Induced Pain: A Cause of Fear, Flight, Fight and Facial Neuralgia."

To listen to Dr. Robert Cook giving a radio interview about the headshaking syndrome on The Rick Lamb Show visit www.thehorseshow.com and click on the program for 04/21/01; "Why horses shake their heads and how to stop it."