

MAINTENANCE

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

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

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

YOU CAN HELP

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

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

We also welcome your feedback, both positive and negative, since we use this information to improve our product and literature. Feel free to contact us at the address on the cover of this manual or at Info@bitlessbridle.com.

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

United States Equine Federation
www.usef.org

Fédération Equestre Internationale
www.horsesport.org

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

The Bitless Bridle™ "No-Risk" Satisfaction Guarantee

- If, within thirty days of receipt, you decide you don't like The Bitless Bridle, return it and we will refund the price of the bridle. No questions will be asked, though if you care to tell us why you were unable to get on with it, we are always interested. Bridles must be clean and in good condition for full refund.
- If, on the other hand, you would now like to upgrade your synthetic bridle to a leather version, return the synthetic bridle to us within thirty days and we will give you full credit for the synthetic bridle against the price of a leather one.

USER'S MANUAL

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The BITLESS BRIDLE™

www.bitlessbridle.com

US Patent No. 6,591,589

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

Robert Cook

AVOIDANCE OF ACCIDENTS

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

CAUTION

Observe the following during first time use:

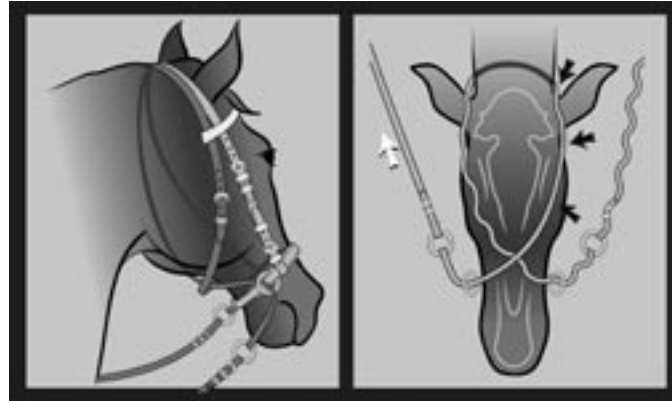
When first introduced to the Bitless Bridle™, it sometimes revives a horse's spirits with a feeling of "free at last". Such a display of exuberance will eventually pass, but be prepared for the possibility even though it occurs in less than 1% of horses. Begin in a covered school or a small paddock rather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

APPLICATION

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

Steering:

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



view from side

view from below

Braking:

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

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

If a rider wishes to introduce a horse in stages to the feel of the Bitless Bridle™, the horse could first be longed in the bridle before being mounted. Most riders do not feel it necessary to do this but it is, nevertheless, of interest that a horse can be longed in the bridle and this facility has, in any case, some advantages for training purposes. For those who do not care to take on trust the effectiveness of communication and who might wish to come to the bitless state cautiously, a snaffle bridle can be placed on top of the Bitless Bridle™. In this way, with what is essentially a double bridle, a rider can gain confidence in use of the Bitless Bridle™, knowing that a bitted bridle is readily available. Under these conditions, the snaffle rein would be kept slack during normal usage, just as the curb rein is kept slack with the more traditional double bridle.

INDICATIONS FOR USE

The Bitless Bridle™ is indicated for all horses, not just for those with problems that are traditionally recognized to be caused by the bit. There are no known contraindications for use of the Bitless Bridle™ in any field of equine activity. The Bitless Bridle™ is likely to benefit performance in all disciplines, from racing, through dressage, to gymkhana for children's ponies.

The Bitless Bridle™ is indicated in any horse that exhibits one or more of those problems that are well-known to be caused by the bit. These include such problems as cut lips, sore mouths, tongue-over-the bit, open mouth, yawing, tongue-lolling, laceration of the tongue, excessive poll flexion, lugging to one side, bucking, rearing, and many other phenomena. Horses can also benefit from the Bitless Bridle™ if they have problems that render the bit temporarily or permanently unusable. Such problems include lip injuries, dental items (wolf teeth, sharp molars, sore gums from erupting dentition, etc.), fractures of the jaw, sarcoids, neoplasms or warts on the lips, tongue injuries, or some deformity of the jaw.

Currently, there are regulations imposed by organizations for racing and certain other competitions, stipulating that horses must be ridden in a bit. It can be hoped that, as these organizations come to recognize the penalties of the bit and the benefits of bitlessness, these counter-productive restrictions will be lifted.

The Bitless Bridle™ is also indicated in a number of other problems that have not previously been recognized as being caused by the bit, such as headshaking, dorsal displacement of the soft palate and bleeding from the lungs (for further details on these matters, readers are referred to five articles written by Robert Cook:

1. *On the Penalties of Bits and the Benefits of Bitlessness*
2. *Asphyxia as the Cause of Bleeding and the Bit as the Cause of Soft Palate Displacement*
3. *Fear of the Bit: A Welfare Problem for Horse and Rider*
4. *Pathophysiology of Bit Control in the Horse*
5. *Equine Anatomy and the Crossover Bitless Bridle: The 'Why,' 'What' and 'How' of Correct Fitting*

These articles are available on our web site at www.bitlessbridle.com. The questionnaire in Part III of the third article lists over 100 problems that have been solved by removing the bit.

The Bitless Bridle™ has an important role to play in teaching the novice rider. In the normal course of events, with a bitted bridle, instructors are often loathe to put a novice on a fully-trained horse (perhaps their own personal property) for fear that the horse's mouth might be damaged by the heavy hands of an inexperienced rider. This is not a problem with the Bitless Bridle™, as without a bit the novice cannot do any harm to the horse. This means that an instructor can put a novice on a fully trained horse and allow the horse to do a great deal of the instructing.

CONVERTING TO A HALTER

LEADING:

You can lead your horse by taking the reins over the horse's head and using the reins themselves as a lead shank. Use a scissors snap to unite the two O-rings of the crossover straps to make the halter even more secure. Alternatively, remove the reins from the Bitless Bridle, bring the two O-rings at the end of the crossover straps together and hook your lead to **both** of the rings. **DO NOT TIE YOUR HORSE USING THE CROSS-OVER STRAPS.**

TYING (Reins removed):

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

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

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

TYING (Reins attached):

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

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

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

LONGEING (Reins removed):

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

FOR LONGEING (Reins attached):

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

THE AIDS

As the bridle pushes rather than pulls, the aids are the same as with the bit method of control. The Bitless Bridle can be thought of as steering the horse by means of the head equivalent of neck reining, with the advantage that head pressure is more direct and requires no special training.

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

To raise the horse's head to the correct level riders need only raise their hands vertically (NOT with a backward motion), then release.

To school for proper head carriage, use a medium to small circle, with the inside hand low and away from the horse. Strive to have the poll as the highest point along the neckline.

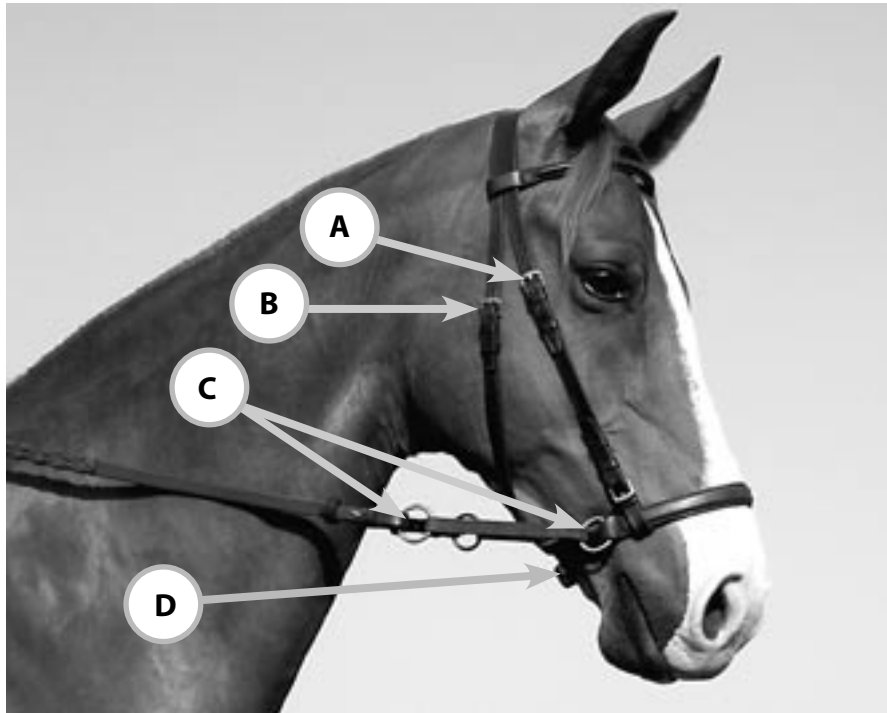
The Bitless Bridle™ provides 'brakes' that are better than a bit. Unlike the bit method of control, the pain of which causes the horse to defend itself by placing the bit between its teeth, at no time can the rider be left without any brakes at all.

Horses bolt because of fear or pain. By removing the bit, the rider has eliminated one of the most common sources of fear and pain. Pain in regions other than the mouth can still be responsible for bolting. For example, pain in the back or feet (from saddle or shoes) should be considered.

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

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

HARNESSING AND FITTING



The cavesson noseband should be adjusted so that the lower edge of the noseband lies 1.5 to 2 inches above the corners of the mouth. At this level, the noseband is still supported by bone at the bridge of the nose. Occasionally, a horse made sensitive by previous bit use (i.e. facial neuralgia) will show discomfort with the Bitless Bridle when the noseband is placed at the recommended low position. If this occurs, first try using less rein pressure. Secondly, try moving the noseband up a little. The strength of the signal wanes as the noseband is raised, but this may be just what the horse needs. If placed too low, the noseband will obstruct the nostrils and could cause head shaking or even rearing.

The noseband should fit more snugly than with a bitted bridle. Buckle-up the chin strap so that only one finger (placed flat, not sideways) can be inserted between the underside of the jaw and the chin strap. The chin strap should be sufficiently snug so that the headstall does not slide way up the head when rein traction is applied. If this happens, leverage will be lost and, in the long run, hair will get rubbed off and a skin abrasion could develop. Another sign of the noseband being too loose is that the cheek straps of the headstall bow-out prominently when traction on the reins is applied. Some bowing is inevitable and is of no consequence. With the noseband adjusted in this manner horses can still graze and drink comfortably. If hay is to be fed, the chin strap can be slackened off a notch or two. More information on the bridle's compatibility with the anatomy and physiology of the horse is available in article #5 listed on page seven of this manual.

HARNESSING AND FITTING

The only buckle that you need to release to bridle your horse is the chinstrap buckle.. The riding bridle has no throat latch, unlike the driving bridle.

Adjust the left and right cavesson buckles (*see item A at left*) so that the lower edge of the noseband sits at the correct level above the corners of the mouth.

Adjust the left and right crossover strap buckles (*see item B at left*) such that there are 3 or more inches of crossover strap between the ring on the noseband and the attachment ring for the reins (*see item C at left*).

Tighten the chinstrap buckle (*see item D at left*) until you can just get one flat finger under the chinstrap. Make sure you have not trapped either of the crossover straps under the chinstrap.

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

Using synthetic reins with a synthetic bridle: synthetic reins do not break under stress, which can cause a horse to injure himself in a panic situation. Our synthetic reins include a short rawhide tie to allow for breakage, and we urge riders using other synthetic reins to take similar precautions.

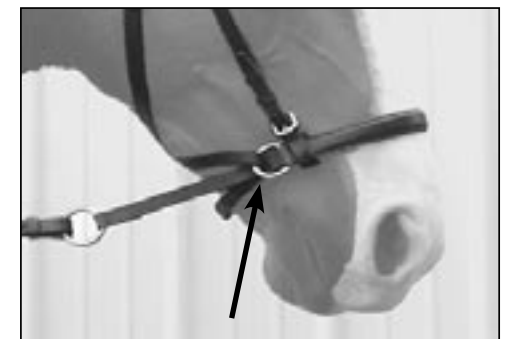
CORRECT PLACEMENT OF THE CROSSOVER STRAPS

Although the Bitless Bridle™ comes fully assembled, if the crossover straps are removed, follow the steps below to ensure proper reattachment:

1. With the crossover straps removed, put the bridle on your horse and buckle the chinstrap.
2. Make sure the O-rings on the noseband are pushed down and lying flat against the chinstrap.
3. Take the buckle end of the crossover strap and feed it *from the outside* through the O-ring on the noseband, under the chin, up the opposite side of the face to the crown piece and fasten. (*See photos below*)
4. Repeat the process on the other side with the second crossover strap.
5. Attach your reins (or lines, if you are a driver) to the O-rings on the ends of the crossover straps.



Crossover strap through O-ring correctly



Crossover strap through O-ring incorrectly