

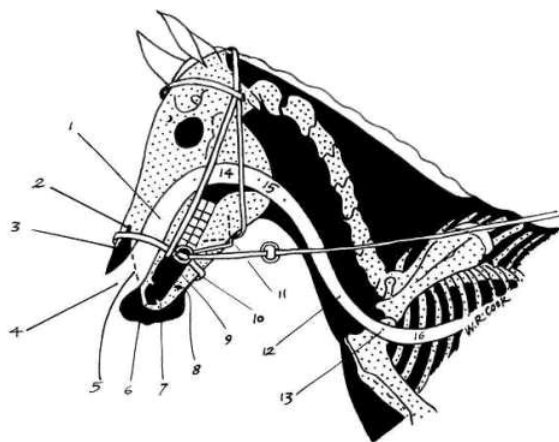


Bitless Bridle – Problem Solving

Occasionally, riders report that the bridle does not seem to work for their particular horse. Problems include inability to steer, inability to stop, a horse that starts headshaking that has never shaken before, or a horse that simply fusses when the bridle is placed on its head.

There can be several explanations for these adverse reactions *apparently* to the Bitless Bridle. One, or several in combination, in the following list may be responsible:

1. The noseband is not **low enough**. The correct level for the noseband of The Bitless Bridle is much lower than riders have been accustomed to place the noseband of a bitted bridle. This correct lower level can be used without fear of obstructing the nostrils. If the noseband is placed too high, riders will find that they lose leverage and have to work too hard to communicate.
 - the best method to find the correct position for the noseband is to feel down the horse's face for the *pre-maxillary notches* - [No 2 on the diagram] - the softer places on either side of the main nasal bone where the bone changes to cartilage. [See diagram] The noseband should fit just **below** these (this is the definitive method - measuring 1½" to 2" above the corner of the mouth is a guide and will vary depending upon the size of horse and his head). Individual horses may show a preference for having the noseband half an inch or more higher than this, so it is sometimes necessary to find the sweet spot by trial and error.
2. The noseband is too low - This is generally the explanation for a horse that begins to shake its head. Experiment a little with the noseband position and see if the problem disappears when you raise the noseband.
3. The noseband is not fitted snugly
 - you should be able to fit one flat finger between the chinstrap and the horse's jawbone
 - if the noseband moves up and down on the horse's face when pressure is applied via the reins, then it is too loose (a *slight* bowing of the cheekpieces is normal)
4. One or both of the crossover straps are trapped under the chinstrap: The solution to this problem is self-evident but until it is corrected there will a lack of communication.
5. One or both crossover straps are twisted: Such twisting arises at the level of the rider's hands and can be avoided once this is recognized.
6. The browband may be too small and your horse is experiencing pain at the base of the ear - check that the browband fits comfortably. If it is too tight on your particular horse, we can easily swap it for a larger size browband.
7. Your horse may have sharp edges to one or more cheek teeth in the upper jaw - because the noseband of the Bitless bridle is snuggier than a bitted bridle, it may be pressing the horse's cheeks against sharp enamel edges and causing pain. The problem will disappear after the teeth have been floated.
8. Your horse may be merely reacting to the unfamiliar feel of this new bridle. If you purchased a leather bridle, new leather is stiff and only softens up and becomes as comfortable like an old shoe after it has been treated and worn in. In case this might



be the problem, place a Cashel foam rubber pad under the noseband and see if the fussiness / head tossing disappear. Passage of time will cure the leather stiffness problem. If your horse was fussing with a synthetic bridle (*most unusual*), do some groundwork (*without* saddle, roller, draw reins etc), with the training rope or lunge line attached to the two O rings of the BB - try and keep the exercises short & fun! Then graduate to ridden work.

9. Your horse may be reacting to pain or discomfort somewhere else in the body:
 - having eliminated discomfort in the mouth by removing the bit your horse may now be feeling discomfort elsewhere which was previously masked by the overriding pain in the mouth. The two most common sites are back and feet:
 1. You can check if the back or saddle is the problem (even though you may have recently had your horse's back and/or saddle checked) by riding bareback or lungeing without a saddle.
 2. If you suspect that your horse's feet may be causing him some discomfort and he is shod, it might be worth looking into having him barefoot - there are many web sites listed on [Bitless Bridle UK](#) links' page - [Barefoot section](#) which you can use as a basis for research into barefoot trimming. Removal of metal from the horse's feet can be as beneficial as removing metal from your horse's mouth. So-called 'pasture-trim', carried out by a farrier, although a step in the right direction, is not the complete answer - although some horses will successfully negotiate hard ground with a pasture trim, most horses will benefit from the attentions of a qualified 'barefoot trimmer' to enable them to be ridden barefoot on all surfaces.
10. Your horse may be showing frustration and having a 'temper tantrum' - especially if he is used to avoiding your hand aids by any of the methods horses devise to evade the action of the bit. When your horse discovers that he is unable to evade the gentle head-hug action of the BB he may react in a manner indicating his frustration. Patience and groundwork are the answer to re-acustom him to accepting rein aids.
11. Your horse may exhibit high spirits when first introduced to the Bitless Bridle: This *joie de vivre* and a feeling of joy at apparently being 'free at last', is seen occasionally but is not something that recurs after the first trial. Even at the first trial, such horses generally remain under control and their feeling of freedom is only the joy of freedom from pain rather than freedom to do whatever they please.
12. **You may be using too much 'Contact'** - this is something that is taught widely - to maintain 'contact' with the horse's mouth; however with the Bitless Bridle the issue of contact is not so important and often 'less is more' - ie less contact = more communication. If you are having problems with the BB it can help to ride with a much looser rein than you have been used to.
13. Some riders complain that they can no longer "get their horse into a frame". The phrase itself - 'getting a horse into a frame' - provides the clue to this problem. True collection depends on years of proper training of both horse and rider. Collection is another word for balance. Unless both horse and rider are fit, the horse cannot achieve true collection. Collection should also be dependent on 'seat and legs' rather than 'hands'. If a rider has been using rein pressure on a bitted bridle to achieve what they think of as collection, they will initially be disappointed with the Bitless Bridle and may even decide that 'it doesn't work'. Bit-induced poll flexion, however, is not the same as true collection... it is false collection. With patience and proper training, the Bitless bridle will provide all the collection that a rider desires.
14. 'My horse runs away with me and I cannot stop him'. True bolting is extremely rare with the Bitless Bridle. A rider is far less likely to be run away with if they use the Bitless Bridle than if they use a bitted bridle. Horses run from pain and the most common source of pain is the bit. However, some riders mistake acceptable eagerness on the part of a horse with bolting. Horses are herd animals. When in company, many a horse will exhibit a dislike of being left behind and will be eager to

catch up with a horse in front. This is not the same as bolting and an absence of brakes.

15. In the Bitless Bridle I cannot prevent my horse from grazing at exercise. Inability to prevent a horse from dropping its head at exercise is really something that needs to be tackled with further training. Take a look at Dr. Jessica Jahiel's website (www.horse-sense.org) and do a search in the invaluable archives of her Newsletter for advice on this problem. A shortcut approach is to use a grazing rein (sidecheck).
16. A misunderstanding about the question of 'Release'. Some riders (especially those who have never used the Bitless Bridle) seem to think that the BB does not provide release, perhaps because they see no movement in the crossover straps at the level of the 'O' ring on the noseband. But a lack of movement (there is little in the first place... the "O" ring does not function like a pulley system) does not mean that there is no release of pressure. This is very easy to test. Simply stand by your horse's head and place the fingers of your left hand under the crossover strap as it passes up the side of the cheek on the left side of your horse. Now, with your right hand, apply tension and release to the reins. You will find that the bridle produces a convincing squeeze and release. The same 'release' can be detected at the poll, across the nose, and under the chin. In fact, though release is imperative with the bitted bridle, because pain has been caused in the first instance, there is not the same need to be concerned about release with the Bitless Bridle as no pain is caused. Nevertheless, be assured that 'release' does occur.

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