

FAX
02476-840501

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FAO

Sarah Phillips

Senior Executive British Riding Clubs

From

Norfolk Horse Training & Equitation Club

Norfolk Horse Training & Equitation Club



Sarah Phillips
Senior Executive British Riding Clubs & Competitions
British Riding Clubs
Abbey Park
Stareton
Kenilworth
Warwickshire
CV8 2xz

Running Free Farm
Church Road
Aylmerton
North Norfolk
NR11 8PU
johanna@colin-richardson.co.uk

13th October 2013

Dear Sarah

Please find enclosed/attached our proposals for rule changes. Our principal aim is for BHS members to be offered a choice of tack in all competitions, at all levels and at all ages. In particular our belief is that judges should be assessing performance only. In support of these proposals, we further enclose/attach statements and references from veterinary and equine specialists."

The BHS have made the current and historic statement regarding this matter as follows:-

"1)A fundamental requirement in the education of the horse is the concept of submission and this includes the willing acceptance of the indications of the rider. 2)This also means the acceptance by the horse of the bit in its mouth, just as much as the acceptance of the riders weight on its back. 3)Dressage training is all about producing the equine athlete, which means developing balance and suppleness. A major 'key' in this development is creating suppleness at the poll, both laterally and vertically, and this helps the musculature of the neck to help development of the paces. 4)The most important muscles being the splenius and brachiocephalic and this allows the power to come through from behind. 5) By a mellow acceptance of the bit in the horse's mouth the rider is able to induce a relaxation of the lower jaw and from this to develop a more supple poll. 6)The bitless bridle acts by leverage on the neck of the horse, but not the jaw, 7)so is not really regarded as the best way to produce submission that is the 'hallmark' of a dressage horse. 8) With regard to juniors, who are under 18, BRC do not allow bitless bridles in junior competitions. This is primarily due to safety but also training as a bitless bridle can be very severe and not always appropriate to be used by a younger rider."

NHTEC considers these statements to be out of date, incorrect, ill advised and without scientific support. It is time to review the 'bit rule' based on scientific evidence. The above statement can be refuted point by point.

1) Submission = Surrender or giving in. Submission does not equate to willingness. 'Submission' is not an appropriate term for use today where welfare in riding should be of paramount concern, not the idea of 'dominance'.

1 & 2) We suggest it is better to speak of acceptance of the HAND matching the use of terms like SEAT and LEG.

3) This is dealt with later in the evidence submitted below. The equine athlete is created through better understanding of correct biomechanical training. It is not obtained by bit pressure (pain) on the sensitive tissues of the mouth.

4) Spelling error – the muscle is the SPENIUS. We refer to the better understanding of biomechanical riding.

5) This is a statement also dealt with in the evidence below. At exercise, a horse's mouth should be closed. The term 'relaxation' suggests that you are seeking an open mouth, which is pathophysiological. The presence of a bit leads to an open mouth and tension in jaw and neck. Allowing the use of a flash noseband to try and prevent the gaping of the mouth caused by the bit in the first instance is illogical. Where is the BHS evidence to counteract the science and common sense that says an unfettered mouth is less 'relaxed' than a mouth with a bit in it?

6) It does not. This is factually incorrect. A crossunder bitless bridle hugs the whole of the head. Any leverage that it applies is far less than that applied by a bit. It is in no way an advantage to try to communicate with a horse by placing selective pressure on the jaw. Where is the scientific evidence from the BHS for this statement?

7) We cannot understand this statement.

8) Not true. Where is the BHS evidence that counteracts the science that says riders are safer and less likely to have an accident if their rein-cue is not causing pain? Bitless bridles are safer for children and adults alike

As we see it, all that is required is that the phrase 'dans le main,' so poorly translated in 1920 from the original French FEI rules, as 'on the bit,' should be replaced by 'on the bridle, or 'in the hand' . The correct use of negative reinforcement applies whether the bridle has or doesn't have a bit – it's not about the 'gadget' but about appropriate and correct training.

In the past it has been the perception of the equestrian federations that there will be a need for the re-training of judges. The Royal Dutch Equestrian Federation also anticipated this need when they introduced bitless dressage in 2008. In the event, they have found – as we anticipated on welfare and safety grounds – that the principles guiding evaluation of a bitless performance are no different from those for a bitted performance. The criteria of excellence are the same and judges need no special training.

The BHS, BEF and BD have had ample time to elicit the science-based evidence its members have to offer. Throughout the process of consideration for inclusion of bitless bridles, the emphasis should be on evidence relating to the science i.e. the welfare and safety of horse and rider. Personal expressions of belief about how it is thought 'easier' for a rider to 'get their horse into a frame' with a bit, than without one, or an opinion (unsupported by evidence) that the crossunder bitless bridle, or the side pull, does not provide 'release' are irrelevant. Equestrian federation committee members do not need us to tell them that self-carriage, balance and collection is achieved through training, not force. Nothing should be allowed in a dressage performance that is incompatible with the physiological requirements of a horse at exercise or its humanitarian needs. Any 'opinion' from equestrian federation membership that is not science-based is irrelevant. Standards of welfare and safety are matters to be determined by science, not by tradition or the status quo. Unless these standards are maintained and updated when the science advances, neither the BHS, BEF nor the BD can claim to be honouring their stated objective that the welfare of the horse is paramount.

We would also draw your attention, once more to the endorsement of the USEF rule change proposal by Professor Dwight Bennett DVM, PhD. Dr. Bennett is one of the very few veterinarians who have published articles and books about the bit. His endorsement is the more remarkable (and greatly to his credit) in that his book 'Bits and Bridles: Power tools for thinking riders,' published in 2000 in co-authorship with Betsy Lynch, contains no reference to the crossunder bitless bridle. At the time of the book's publication, he was of the opinion that the bit was a fundamental means of communication between horse and rider.

RULE CHANGE PROPOSAL TO PERMIT THE CROSSUNDER BITLESS BRIDLE FOR DRESSAGE

I am a veterinarian who has been studying horses' mouths and biting and bridling systems for more than 50 years. I have approximately 350 bits in my personal collection; have lectured internationally to horsemen, veterinarians and veterinary students on the use of bits and bridles; have published a

Book, "Bridles and Bits, Power Tools for Thinking Horsemen," 2000; have published two book chapters on biting; and have published numerous articles on the subject in professional journals.

I believe strongly that with biting systems, "less is more." In my opinion, rules in nearly all disciplines requiring particular bits and biting systems, such as the double bridle, are archaic and outmoded. If a horse can perform optimally in a milder bit than the current rules require, in a bitless bridle, or with no headgear at all, why require a more severe biting system? The horse and rider that can perform without any bit at all receive my highest accolades.

*Dwight G. Bennett, DVM, PhD
Professor Emeritus of Equine Medicine
Colorado State University*

22 November 2009

May we also remind the committee that the rule change proposal under consideration was endorsed by the Presidential Council of the International Society of Equitation Science (ISES). Their letter to the USEF Dressage Committee in 2009 is copied below:

"As the Presidential Council of the International Society for Equitation Science (ISES), we are writing in support of the proposal to allow bitless bridles in the sport of dressage. Given that it could so promptly follow the acceptance of bitless bridles by the Dutch Federation in 2008, an affirmative decision by the USEF would enhance the profile of the USA as a leader in equine welfare.

The horse's mouth is highly sensitive and vulnerable to the development of behavioural conflicts arising from incorrect bit use. In some horses, such conflicts can escalate to active coping mechanisms, such as hyper-reactive behaviours. In others, we see habituation to bit pressure to the extent that they become unresponsive and capable of bolting. Allowing bitless bridles will widen and sustain the spectrum of horses fit to work, and will have a positive effect on public perceptions of good welfare allowing the sport to move in a more enlightened direction. These are important considerations at a time when there are public concerns about various training regimes in dressage.

*As the only scientific organization in the world in the sphere of equitation, the International Society for Equitation Science exercises great caution in voicing its collective opinion regarding matters of equine welfare. Our aim is to hold the scientific process at the highest level, so that only robust and evidence-based information is supported. **There is adequate science now to support the use of bitless bridles in horse sports.***

We warmly encourage the USEF Dressage Committee to embrace this opportunity to advance horse welfare and rider safety.

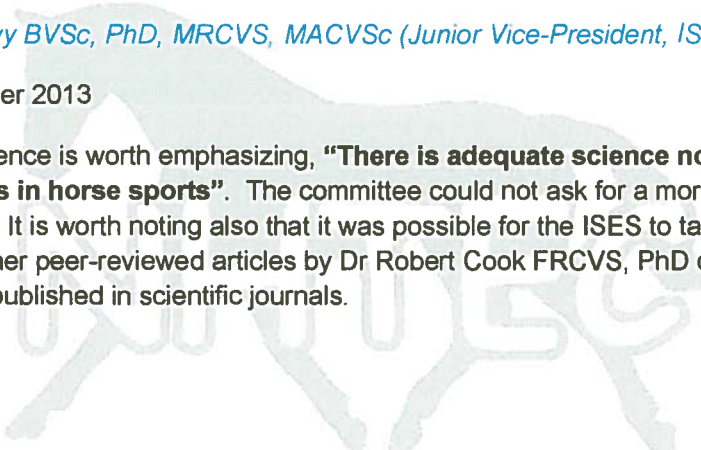
Dr Andrew McLean BSc, PhD (President, ISES)

Prof. Natalie Waran BSc, (Hons) PhD (Acting Senior Vice-president, ISES)

A/Prof. Paul McGreevy BVSc, PhD, MRCVS, MACVSc (Junior Vice-President, ISES)

Verified 30th September 2013

The penultimate sentence is worth emphasizing, **"There is adequate science now to support the use of bitless bridles in horse sports"**. The committee could not ask for a more authoritative and independent opinion. It is worth noting also that it was possible for the ISES to take this position in 2009, before two further peer-reviewed articles by Dr Robert Cook FRCVS, PhD on the bit's disadvantages were published in scientific journals.



4-

Dr Andrew McLean (Senior Vice President of the International Society for Equitation Science, Ethologist and Trainer) commenting on the discipline of Dressage ;

And the FEI Code of Conduct (at Haras de la Cense, France in September 2006) said: *"Modern dressage is actually not much training, it's mostly forcing the horse to stay in his speed, his outline, with pressure on the reins rather than training him to do it on his own."*

And in May 2011 he spoke to BHS instructors at their convention at Stoneleigh and remarked: *"Bit contact and/or acceptance of the bit are secondary issues."*

And again seven years later Andrew McLean said

"I do think there is a lot of training in modern dressage horses, undoubtedly so, however the loss of self-carriage is the most salient thing that I have reservations about - the horse isn't trained to remain in his rhythm straightness and outline, but is held there and that isn't correct training but a recipe for conflict behaviours and stress".

30th September 2013

NHTEC will continue to lobby support for the amendment to the rule with other equestrian organisations and individuals- we believe passionately that it is time for change, we believe the evidence stands as we have stated above - Less is more.

Yours sincerely



Johanna Macarthur

For and on behalf of the Norfolk Horse Training and Equitation Club
www.horsetrainingclub.org

Please find attached the Appendix comment slips 21: relating to rule amendment 5

Rule Number :

- Appendix 5 Page no 91: Dressage & Riding Test
- Appendix 5 Page no 92: Horse Trials & Combined Training Dressage
- Appendix 5 Page no 93: Show & Style Jumping
- Appendix 5 Page no 93: Show & Style Jumping (juniors)
- Appendix 5 Page no 94: Horse Trials & Combined Training Show Jumping
- Appendix 5 Page no 95: Cross Country including Festival Challenge
- Appendix 5 Page no 96: Showing

BHS Q' what is wrong with the rule? NHTEC A' Tack rules too restrictive (including junior).

BHS Q' what is your suggested change? NHTEC A' permit the use of bitless bridles (including all junior competitions).

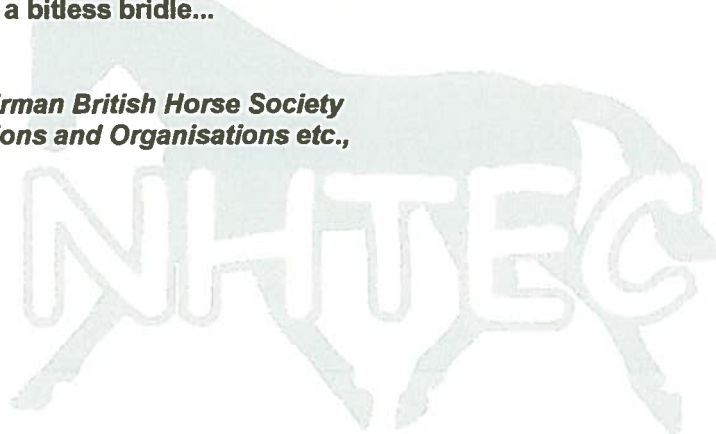
BHS members can

RIDE TOGETHER . TRAIN TOGETHER . COMPETE TOGETHER . HAVE FUN TOGETHER

But NOT if they use a bitless bridle...

cc

**Lynn Petersen Chairman British Horse Society
Equestrian Federations and Organisations etc.,**



Appendix 21: Comment Slip

If you have any comments to make that could improve our Rules or Rule Book in future years can you please complete this Comments Slip, or photocopy it, and send it to:

**The Competitions Department, British Riding Clubs, The British Horse Society,
Abbey Park, Stoneleigh, Warwickshire CV8 2XZ.**

Name: Johanna Macarthur
Address Running Free Farm
Church Road
Aylmerton
NR11 8PU
Telephone: 01263 838052
E-Mail at johanna@colin-richardson.co.uk

Club: Norfolk Horse Training & Equitation Club

Rule Number: Appendix 5

Page Number: 91: Dressage & Riding Test

What is wrong with the rule? Tack rules are too restrictive.

What is your suggested change? Permit the use of bitless bridles.

For official use only

Date Received:

Suggestion Number:

Outcome:

Replied to:

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Rule Number: Appendix 5

Page Number: 92: Horse Trials & Combined Training Dressage

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Rule Number: Appendix 5

Page Number: 93: Show & Style Jumping

What is wrong with the rule? Tack rules are too restrictive in junior competitions.

What is your suggested change? Permit the use of bitless bridles in junior competitions.

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Rule Number: Appendix 5

Page Number: 94: Horse Trials & Combined Training Show Jumping

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Rule Number: Appendix 5

Page Number: 95: Cross Country including Festival Challenge

What is wrong with the rule? Tack rules are too restrictive in junior competitions.

What is your suggested change? Permit the use of bitless bridles in junior competitions.

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Rule Number: Appendix 5

Page Number: 96: Showing

What is wrong with the rule? Tack rules are too restrictive.

What is your suggested change? Permit the use of bitless bridles.

For official use only

Date Received:

Suggestion Number:

Outcome:

Replied to: