

Riding Perspectives: An important reminder, when mounting up, is to make sure your horses are trained in lateral neck movements/bending (from the ground as well as from the saddle). This has been especially important over the last two months due to the weather and its effect on grasses. The short grasses got more rain and sun than expected and did it's best to take advantage and "leap up" thus generating a huge amount of sugar content and the horses responded in typical manner. I have seen and had to mount, multiple horses these last two months that were ready to "go / jump" the instant a rider mounted. They were all so wound up! All that is needed is to turn the horse's head to the side you are mounting from (either side as there is no reason to only mount from one side) and hold the rein at the pommel until mounted and secure. I recommend at that point executing the "mounted leadership" exercise, which consumes little time and assures a much safer ride. This advice applies equally to horses that are prone to bucking, of which I have had more than my fair share, this last month and at my age that ain't comfortable.

About Rein Uses: For competent, comfortable and safe riding it pays to always consider the point of view of the horse that you are riding when using the reins. Whenever you ask for a movement, be aware of whether or not you already have a light contact from your hands down the reins to the bit so that you don't startle the horse when you wish a directional change. This applies whether you are using slobber straps on draped reins or simple direct reins (single or double). It pays to allow the horse an instant to recognize your cue before becoming impatient with them. If you have a light contact held - you and the horse will both be aware of your intent to ask for something or other much more quickly and without surprise. Of course if you do not have contact (albeit light) between your fingers and the bit, whether it is held comfortably on the horses tongue folds or by the teeth - which is usually due to having the bit held too high via the cheek straps (as I see all too often), then you need to allow more time for the horse to recognize / process your cue for a response.

Regarding chin straps versus curb straps, again consider the point of view of the horse. Unfortunately in many forms of conventional, regimented training, riders are taught to pull back on the reins and bit to cue and execute turns. This pulling back prior to turning the horse's head slightly is not comfortable and can be downright painful to the horse's mouth edges. Unfortunately curb straps, being attached above the point of attachment of the reins, can also be very uncomfortable and claustrophobic to horses. Whereas, chin straps are attached below the point of attachment of the reins to the bit ring and as such are not pressed up against the bottom of the jaw - even if the reins are unfortunately pulled directly back for turns prior to turning the horses head slightly to the side. Chin straps, when adjusted

correctly, are protective of the side of the horse's mouth and inside of the cheeks when a rein is moved to the side in order to turn the horse's head prior to pulling back as much as required for whatever size turn is required. A chin strap affords this protection even in emergencies where a rider may pull very hard to turn a horse. Curb straps provide no protection.

Training Perspectives: I had a request to further explain what I meant in last month's article regarding licking and chewing. The request was specifically "why is it that a horse goes better in a bitless bridle?" once the comfortable (non chrome) and chewable bit is removed. The answer to this is interesting in that the research showed that without the natural distraction of an "eating reflex" generated by chewing, the horse was more focused in the escape instinct which drives the racing industry and a bitless bridle gave an unfair advantage to riders that understood how to use one correctly. A strange decision to say the least, as anyone can learn to use one and any horse can learn to respond correctly. So it is very likely the decision was influenced by race horse breeders/providers who did not feel a need to foundation train their, too young with unset bone structures, horses sufficiently prior to race training and action. One other factor I found in speaking with jockeys is that they all know that, toward the end of a race, fatigue is a big problem. They solve this problem in most cases, over the last one or two furlongs, by slowly pulling back on the bit whilst simultaneously *shaking their whips next to the horse's eye in order to pump up adrenaline whilst generating "instinctive opposition reflex" for a last minute burst of speed. (* they are limited in how many times they can strike their horses).

One other question put to me, about bitless bridles, was that there might be effectively a brake failure. My response is that brakes are not a matter of pulling on a bit but by redirecting energy. Turning and only then asking with pressure /releases to generate a cue for stopping and not by brute force. I feel that surely most riders have seen or indeed experienced the frightening feeling of a runaway horse whilst they try to stop the horse by pulling on the reins/bit, which is seldom effective. We should all be thankful that horses have never realized they could stop us from redirecting them.

Closing reminders: Be aware that bit materials are a big factor in horses' comfort and mental relaxation. Of course when held on the folds of their tongue it is less problematic as opposed to when touching the teeth, as electrolysis is caused by material in chrome bits, just as touching tin foil effects our human teeth.

Ya'll ride safely and I hope this has been a helpful article.

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