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On Bits and Biting

Richard D. Alexander

Why, when persons of Jack Brainard's experience keep telling us otherwise, do the vast majority of horse people continue to believe that the way to control an incompletely trained horse is to go to a more severe bit? Perhaps because most people must *consciously teach themselves* to (1) use the least pressure necessary to yield a desired action and (2) reward the horse when it responds *even slightly* by releasing pressure on the bit *instantly*. Lucky indeed is the horse whose rider trains this way. Such a horse will learn to expect that, in Brainard's words, no cue will "last longer than a second" and each new move will be introduced "as with an eyedropper." Such a horse will become exquisitely maneuverable with cues that, in Henry Wynmalen's words, are "slight, unobtrusive, and graceful." The function of a bit is not to "control," but to allow cues to become more "slight, unobtrusive, and graceful" than with bitless head gear. As Charles O. Williamson said 53 years ago, "Anyone capable of properly using a severe bit of any type needs no such instrument for riding a horse." He added, "Others, in my opinion, should not be allowed to use one."

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