

About Bits and Reins

ABOUT BITS: Bit comfort is always a major factor in a horses' temperament. In winter-time the factors affecting this comfort requirement are even more important. **Bit temperature** is very important to the horses' comfort and subsequent attitude. Extra care should be taken in this regard during cold months. It is a simple matter to warm the bit in your hands or if you are thinking well ahead leaving it in a warm room (or automobile) for a half hour before using it. There are many other ways of course it just takes being aware on behalf of the horse. Additionally, **bit positioning** is a large factor in horses' comfort and mental state at all times of the year. Therefore, the bit should never be positioned too high or low in the mouth. By positioning the bit sides in the bar area of the mouth, you can avoid it clanging against the teeth when they relax their tongue. ***There is not any fixed reason to generate wrinkles in the edges of the mouth*** - simply use the bar area as the guide. In this way the horse can carry the bit in the folds of the tongue and so long as you don't hold too much pressure on the reins when riding they would need to put their tongue over the bit. Equally important to the discomfort of clanging against the teeth - simply "touching" the teeth can be very uncomfortable if the bit is made with chrome on it. **Chrome generates electrolysis and irritates their tongue.** *Think of times you may have touched your teeth with tin foil, the same discomfort will have occurred.* Therefore positioning is especially important when the part of the bit running between the rings is made with chrome covering. The best materials for this part of the bit would be **sweet-iron, copper or brass** and there are also some other newer products that do not contain nickel in them. **Main point is to avoid chrome, which I see far too often in horse's mouths causing excess salivation from discomfort.**

ABOUT REINS: As I continue to find and correct riders in their rein uses, I find the following worth repeating. Therefore I repeat the following research data which supports my ongoing articles /advice on how to make efficient use of reins and in doing so gaining a "**co-operative response**" from horses as opposed to "**opposition reflex responses**". *Permission is granted for me & Essex Rider to reprint this information titled "**Study: Horses Prefer Less Rein Tension**" by Christa Lesté-Lasserre from a USA report run in The Horse.com, which is an imminent guide to Equine Health Care.*

Study: Horses Prefer Less Rein Tension

According to a study by European equitation scientists, horses prefer to avoid rein tension rather than just get used to it. And beyond a certain force threshold, rein tension can cause [conflict behavior](#). [**Aka "opposition reflex responses" LpB**]. To make the most of training and to keep the

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horse's mouth sensitive, riders need to know when to apply less rein tension, generally when the horse displays conflict behavior.

"This motivation to avoid tension is, of course, what we make use of during training," said Janne Winther Christensen, PhD, a research scientist at the faculty of agricultural sciences at Aarhus University in Tjele, Denmark, and primary author of the study. "Increased focus on timing of pressure release is likely to benefit both learning and welfare," she said.

Christensen and her French and Ukrainian colleagues tested 15 two-year-old Warmblood fillies that had never before had bits in their mouths. By using young horses, the researchers were able to see how the horse reacts naturally to rein pressure before having the effects of multiple riders and trainers. By fitting them with snaffle bits with reins attached to a surcingle (a strap that fastens around a horse's girth area) at various set lengths, they were able to test the horses' willingness to stretch their heads beyond a gate to reach a bucket of oats and molasses. While they expected the fillies to refuse the rein tension the first day of the study and then gradually increase their tolerance over the following days, they were surprised to find that the opposite was true.

"The horses applied a surprisingly high level of tension on the first day and apparently learned how to avoid the tension, rather than habituate to it," Christensen said, adding that they accepted tension as high as 10 N (Newtons) the first day but only up to around 6 N on the subsequent days. "This clearly demonstrates that horses do find tension aversive." Conflict behavior--mouth gaping, head lifting and tilting, and backing away--was associated with high rein tension in the study, said Christensen, who first presented her findings at the sixth International Equitation Science Conference in Uppsala last August prior to the study's upcoming publication in *Equine Veterinary Journal*. Earlier studies, performed by different research teams, on rein tension in more experienced horses have shown pressure tolerance up to 40 N, and the horses did not always display conflict behavior, she said. However, these more experienced horses might have become less sensitive to the tension because of extended training without proper pressure release, and they might have been disciplined for displaying conflict behavior. Ideally, riders should be able to benefit in their training from horses' natural sensitivity to the bit. "One would expect that the higher the level of training, the less tension is necessary to get the horse to respond," she said. "So the aids should become lighter and lighter in advanced dressage." The basic data provided in this study will be used in future studies of how different training techniques affect horse welfare and stress levels, according to Christensen. "Training horses by the use of

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negative reinforcement, such as bit pressure and release, requires responsibility from the rider in noting when the training becomes aversive and stressful for the horse," she said. "Thus, both amateurs and professional riders must be willing to adjust their training techniques if their horse is showing conflict behavior."

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

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