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DR101 Object and General Principles of Dressage

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The things mentioned in the rule book can be achieved in a bitless bridle.

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Article 417:

The aim of the collection of the Horse is: a) To further develop and improve the balance and equilibrium of the Horse, which has been more or less displaced by the additional weight of the Athlete. b) To develop and increase the Horse's ability to lower and engage its hindquarters for the benefit of the lightness and mobility of its forehand. c) To add to the "ease and carriage" of the Horse and to make it more pleasurable to ride.

From FEI rule book. In Article 401 we learn that: The object of Dressage is the development of the Horse into a happy Athlete through harmonious education. As a result, it makes the Horse calm, supple, loose and flexible, but also confident, attentive and keen, thus achieving perfect understanding with the Athlete.

Notice there is no mention of bits. Article 401 then goes on to say that: The above qualities are demonstrated by 4 things, one of which is: The
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It's the horse that is supposed to take the contact. If a horse is balanced through movement, then his top line can relax and be used for locomotion and not support. When this happens the neck will reach out of the withers and if he both trusts and respects the length of the reins, he will meet the rider's waiting hands. The 'round' posture is something that arrives when the balance and trust is there. If a rider takes backwards it acts on the horse's jaw, causing contraction of the neck, opening of the jaw, tensing of the jaw or protecting the jaw by going either too curled or too high.

All those issues will show up if you are bit-less too. The only one that won't show up is the gapping of the jaw since there is no bit (although under negative tension on the reins, many horses will open their mouths even without a bit).

Some horses hate the feeling of a bit on their tongue or have medical issues inside their mouths. With these horses, just wearing the bit causes tension, and that tension becomes the dominant distraction from doing dressage. I have horses that would have a completely different set of issues if the only context I knew them in was with a bit. Without a bit, their training progressed faster. With a bit their training got distracted. Believe me, I continually question: if I only found the right bit, or if only I could prepare and educate them better, perhaps it would work better, but I do that with every aspect of my training... And meanwhile I want them to progress.

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Author and classical trainer Jenny Rolfe, of Naturally classical, adds some facts about anatomy that may be helpful when considering this proposal. Pressure on the bit will impact the movement of the hindlimbs. The horses tongue attaches to the Hyoid bone which is closely connected to the airways which directly affect the horse's breathing and the motion of the hind limb. Sternohyoideus connects the hyoid to the sternum. Omohyoideus connects the hyoid to the inside of the shoulder -Direct connection from the tongue to the sternum and shoulder along the bottom of the horse's neck. If there is tension in the tongue this impacts on the sternum hence the horse can't lift through his back to allow for collection. This tightness hinders the freedom of motion through the hind quarters. Small muscles also connect the hyoid bones to the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) and the poll. The TMJ is an important center for nerves that control the horse's balance and proprioception. And the poll—is its ability to bend and flex—is of central concern to the dressage rider. Because of the small muscles connecting them, there is a very close relationship (which few riders know about) between the horse's tongue, hyoid bones, TMJ, poll, head, and neck. When the horse's tongue is free and soft, all of this translates into a horse who is better able to move well, with coordination, improved balance, and a significantly lengthened stride.
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Committee Actions
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