

Rule Change Type	Effective Date	Draft Received	Board Action
Standard	12/1/2023	9/1/2022	

Rule Change Intent

The intent of the proposal is to improve equine welfare along with equity, inclusion, fairness and common sense. Shows are struggling and it's crazy to exclude riders and horses training bitless for whatever reasons. Allowing for a bitless option will however, uphold, The Federation Equestre Internationale's (FEI) mission is to provide the "guarantee of athlete welfare, equal opportunity and ethical partnership with the horse." It would be the TD's job to call out competitors misusing the equipment.

I propose that dressage riders be allowed to show in bitless bridles, specifically, a side pull or even a cavemore (hackamore) noseband, which can act similar to a traditional double bridle. The reins are attached to the nose piece for lateral flexion like a snaffle. The second set of reins are attached to a side piece, sometimes called a flower, wheel, or shank, in place of the curb bit. Changing the words from "on the bit" to "on the contact," would make the bit unnecessary as well.

In 2019 Wendee Walker's 3rd level horse started to have dental problems. The painful disease is called EORTH. They worked hard to achieve a qualifying score for freestyle at 3rd level. She was excluded from showing or moving up the levels because as of summer 2020, wearing a bit causes him oral pain. The horse and rider team is now retired from showing

In 2020, Hannah Finder wrote: My 19 year old gray horse developed melanomas inside his mouth, interfering with his ability to comfortably wear a bit. We have worked hard to climb the levels in dressage competing all the way up to Intermediate 1. I'm Hannah Finder, and I'd like to not be excluded from showing or moving up the levels because as of January 2020, wearing a bit causes him oral pain and creates undo tension when being ridden. He is comfortable, relaxed, controllable and moves more freely bitless.

On Facebook Wendee Walker made an album called, "Bitless Bridles I'm Trying." which has generated a great deal of interest. The Netherlands has allowed bitless in lower levels since 2014.

Proponent Details Contact Information

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Linked Rules Comments

Committee Actions

Dressage

DR101 Object and General Principles of Dressage

1. 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 rider.
2. These qualities are demonstrated by:
 - a. The freedom and regularity of the gaits;
 - b. The harmony, lightness, and ease of the movements;
 - c. The lightness of the forehand and the engagement of the hindquarters, originating from a lively impulsion;
 - d. The acceptance of the bit **contact**, with submissiveness/throughness (Durchlässigkeit) without any tension or resistance.

[...]

6. In all the work, even at the halt, the horse must be **“on the contact” or “on the bit.” For purposes of these rules, references to “on the bit” will include horses being ridden in a bitless bridle and will be synonymous with a horse being ridden “on the contact.”** A horse is said to be “on the bit” when the neck is more or less raised and arched according to the stage of training and the extension or collection of the gait, accepting the bridle with a light and consistent soft submissive contact. The head should remain in a steady position, as a rule slightly in front of the vertical, with a supple poll as the highest point of the neck, and no resistance should be offered to the rider.

DR121 Saddlery and Equipment

3. Bridle.

Permitted bridles and bits must be used in a conventional manner.

[...]

e. Bitless bridles are permitted. Bitless bridles may include a sidepull or side cue, and a cavemore or hackamore with flower, wheel, or shanks.

[...]

j. Bridles allowed in Federation (national) competitions:

1. For Tests at Second Level and below, FEI Tests for Children, and FEI Pony tests, a plain snaffle bridle **or bitless bridle** is required in warm up and in competition.
2. For Third and Fourth Level tests a snaffle bridle, ~~or~~ double bridle, **or bitless bridle** are permitted in the warm up and in competition.
3. For FEI tests ridden at national competitions, a snaffle bridle, ~~or~~ double bridle, **or bitless bridle** may be used in competition and in the warm up, as described above in DR121.2.
4. Qualifying and championship classes. A double bridle **or bitless bridle** is required for USEF High Performance qualifying and championship classes and USEF Young Adult qualifying and championship classes. Snaffle bridles **or bitless bridles** are permitted for NAYC qualifying and championship classes, USEF Young Rider qualifying and championship classes, and USEF Junior qualifying and championship classes.
5. Young horse classes. For the FEI Dressage Tests for 4, 5, and 6-year-old horses and the USEF Dressage Test for 4-year old horses, a snaffle bridle **or bitless bridle** is required, as above (DR121.2.a). Either a snaffle, ~~or~~ double bridle, **or bitless bridle** may be used in the FEI test for 7-year old horses. Snaffle bits used in FEI tests must conform to Figure 121.1 and Annex A. The crossed (figure-8, Mexican) noseband is prohibited for the FEI Dressage Tests for 4, 5, 6, and 7-year-old horses and the USEF test for 4-year old horses.
6. Para Dressage athletes. Riders competing only in FEI Para Dressage tests may use either a snaffle bridle, ~~or~~ double bridle, **or bitless bridle**. Riders competing in both FEI Para Dressage

tests and USDF or USEF tests at the same competition at second level and below, must use a plain snaffle bridle **or bitless bridle** in all tests and warmup for those tests. When competing only at third level or above, a snaffle bridle, ~~or~~ double bridle, **or bitless bridle** may be used in warm-up and in competition.