

Snaffle Optional

Although a double bridle is now mandatory in international-level classes, wouldn't it be nice to have the option of using a snaffle bridle instead.

By Charlotte Bredahl-Baker

David Stoecklin



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I have always felt that it would be great if snaffle bridles were optional at FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale)-level, but after judging many FEI Prix St. Georges (PSG) and Young Rider tests in the past few weeks, I felt compelled to write about this.

After training dressage horses for many years, I have learned that every horse is different. A few are born with hard mouths, and they usually do better in a double bridle. But most horses start out very sensitive and light in the mouth. I have had and seen horses that did great at the lower levels and were perfectly quiet and happy in the mouth in a snaffle bridle, but when the double—with two bits—was introduced, problems started. Sometimes horses open their mouths to avoid all the metal they don't need. Some stick their tongues out or pull them up. You rarely see this with a snaffle. Over the years, I have judged many amateur PSG classes, and the comment I write most often is: "Please let go of the curb."

Riding correctly with a double bridle is not easy. It really is an art. Some riders don't even realize their curb rein is pointed straight back and the horse's nose is on his chest, trying to avoid pressure from the curb. Once a horse becomes defensive about the double, it is hard to fix mouth/connection problems. Even at the Open PSG level with very experienced and sensitive riders, I see many mouth problems. I know you are not supposed to ride with the curb rein loose, but I think having it too tight is a more common problem.

I have nothing against the double bridle as long as it works best for the horse, but we need to be sensitive to each horse's individual needs. If you can ride a Grand Prix test in a snaffle, more power to you. We talk so much about making horses happier athletes and, if we could make double bridles optional at FEI levels, we could make a lot of horses happier and more comfortable. 🐾

Charlotte Bredahl-Baker is a U.S. Equestrian Federation (USEF) "S" judge. As a rider, she represented the United States in many international competitions. In 1992, she and her horse Monsieur won a team bronze medal at the Olympic Games in Barcelona. In 1997, she and her horse Lugano were part of the silver medal winning team at the N.A. Championships in Maryland. In 2006, she competed successfully on the Florida circuit, qualifying both Komo and Eskada for the national championships at Intermediaire I and Grand Prix, respectively.

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