

International Society for Equitation Science

24th August 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

Position Statement on Restrictive Nosebands

Equitation Science, although considered a relatively new field, is providing a much needed objective lens through which to review horse training practices. Safe, effective and humane training practices should protect the horse's welfare and take into account its behaviour, mental abilities and learning processes. Some riders, and organisations responsible for the training of riders and instructors, consider restrictive/tight nosebands to be useful when dealing with horses that are resistant in the mouth, and they are commonly used to prevent horses from opening their mouths or crossing their jaws in order to 'evade' the action of the bit. However, restrictive nosebands may be used by riders to mask the performance of behaviours that indicate pain, discomfort and conflict in the horse, and highlight deficits in training.

Preliminary evidence suggests that restrictive nosebands may influence the horse's sensitivity to the bit. This increase in sensitivity is thought to occur as a consequence of the mucous membranes lining the mouth being pressed against the molars, which may cause discomfort and even pain if the horse's teeth have sharp edges. As a result, the rider may need to apply less pressure on the reins to produce the desired response from the horse, giving the impression of lightness. Restrictive nosebands may prevent the horse from performing normal behaviours, such as opening the mouth for licking/chewing, re-salivation of the tongue and yawning. There is also some evidence to suggest that restrictive nosebands, when used with a double bridle, may affect blood flow to the area and reduce skin temperature. The results of the research conducted to-date suggest that the use of restrictive nosebands may compromise horse welfare. The Horse Trust supports the International Society for Equitation Science's recommendation that the tightness of nosebands should be checked by stewards at competitions using a fair and objective measurement, such as a taper gauge.

The issue of restrictive nosebands goes far beyond competition as professional riders are role models to many, and the use of equipment that has the potential to compromise horse welfare is likely to be replicated at the lower levels of competition and by leisure riders. Further research is needed to determine

the true effects of different types of nosebands and bits, as well as other equipment and training practices. The combination of more research and an education programme for riders and instructors that is based on empirical, rather than anecdotal, evidence may bring about significant improvements in horse welfare in the future. The results of this research should make us all objectively re-evaluate the equipment and practices we employ so that we can be sure that we are doing the right thing for the welfare of our horses.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LP' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Liane Preshaw
Welfare Development Manager

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