

Expert on the Cruelty of Bits

From HorseracingWrongs.org

August 2022

“Its self-evident purpose to cause pain is bad enough, but its unintended consequence of asphyxiation brings to mind the method’s similarity to that of waterboarding.”



The following photos were taken by a photographer friend of HW at Saratoga Race Course July 16. I shared them with Emeritus Professor Robert Cook from Tuft University’s Cummings School of

Veterinary Medicine and asked for his comments on the bridle equipment. Dr. Cook's field of research is diseases of the horse's ear, nose, and throat. On retirement in 1994, he continued his research by exploring what a bit does to a horse, concluding that it is harmful, unnecessary, and insupportable (see [this recent article](#)).

Dr. Cook's statement on the Saratoga photos (all emphases mine):

"All of these racehorses will run their forthcoming race in pain from the bit. A recognized principle of saddle-fitting is that the saddle should not apply direct pressure on the bone of the spine. The same principle is overlooked in relation to bit use, the declared purpose of which is to apply pressure on the bars of the mouth, the jawbone. Imagine how we would feel if we were 'trained' by the repeated pressure of one or more metal rods against both our shins? A horse's mouth is much more sensitive.

"The horse is a nose-breathing animal and cannot mouth-breathe. In the wild it runs with a closed mouth, sealed lips, and a negative atmospheric pressure in the oral cavity. Suction pressure locks the soft palate onto the root of an immobile tongue to maintain an open airway. **A bit** breaks the lip seal, admits air into the mouth, and unlocks the soft palate, which now **obstructs the airway**. Consequently, none of these horses will be able to demonstrate their full potential for speed, but this is not all.

"A law of physics governing airflow in tubes (Poiseuille's Law, 1846) **explains why airway obstruction at the level of the throat will cause pressure damage (barotrauma) to the lungs and why all these horses will 'bleed.'** As their lungs are repeatedly bruised and quickly waterlogged, at a rate of twice a second or more at each obstructed breath, **some horses may experience severe chest pain and a frightening sensation of drowning.** Any one of them could die from so-called 'exercise-induced pulmonary hemorrhage.' A better name for this universal problem of the bitted-and-bleeding racehorse is 'negative-pressure pulmonary edema'; a life-threatening emergency in human medicine. (An internet search reveals the similarity.)

"In a word, **all of these horses will experience varying degrees of suffocation**, aggravated by the extent to which each horse is rated by bit-induced poll flexion. I see that at least six of them are harnessed with two bits, a snaffle and a ring bit. A ring bit is especially severe and one horse is encumbered with this and a tongue-tie. The physical and emotional enormity of bit usage would be difficult to overstate. **Its self-evident purpose to cause pain is bad enough, but its unintended consequence of asphyxiation brings to mind the method's similarity to that of waterboarding.**

"A galloping horse takes one breath for every stride. In the wild, it takes two strides every second; a respiratory rate of 120/minute. A galloping racehorse (bitted and throttled) breathes at a faster rate (c.130-140/min). In a five-furlong race, both lungs of a bitted horse could, at a conservative estimate, be bruised c.50 times. In mile races, the number of bruising breaths could be over 100 and in the four-mile Grand National, several multiples of this. **In my opinion, a bitted rein is a whip by another name; an unrecognized lung-damaging device that, during extreme physical exercise, inevitably causes pain, suffocation and premature exhaustion;** forecasting a high risk of poor performance and a low but ever-present risk of catastrophic accidents and sudden death.

"The necessary conditions for breathing by the ridden horse can be achieved by a bit-free method of rider-horse communication. I recommend that, to improve the welfare and safety of horse and rider/driver, racing jurisdictions, sport-horse administrations and pony clubs worldwide conduct bit-free trials; repeal mandated-bit rules; and retire Bronze-age bit usage."





















