



BRIDLING and GIVE TO THE BIT

How to teach your horse to be light in the bridle and work in frame. The beginning of self carriage and shoulder elevation.

WHAT YOU NEED

Snaffle bit (full cheek preferred)

Dressage whip

PREREQUISITES FOR THE HORSE

This lesson can be done from the ground on an unbroken horse or you can start it on the ground on a horse that is already under saddle and then move straight on to the ridden work as demonstrated on the video.

WHAT– nose

WHERE – down and in towards chest

WHY – rein pressure

HOW – release of pressure and praise

BRIDLING:

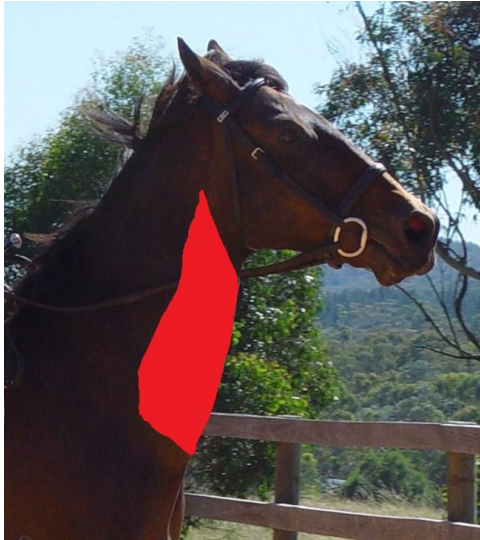
Follow the steps on the DVD to improve your horse's bridling. If your horse has not had a bridle on before start by using the lead rope and teach him to open his mouth and lower his head. Make sure the horse is comfortable with things around his ears.

If you have trouble with this have a look at the "Sacking Out" DVD which will make your horse comfortable with all sorts of different and 'scary' things around his head and body.

GIVE TO THE BIT:

STEP 1

Have your horse in a snaffle bridle in a safe working area. Put the reins over the horse's neck and stand next to his left shoulder.



While your horse's head may not be this high he is probably using these muscles under his neck rather than the ones in green on the top of his neck. When the horse gives to the bit and comes in to frame he is then able to round his back, get his hind quarters underneath him and elevate his shoulder – improving performance, in any discipline, making it easier for him to carry a rider and building his top line.

Note – Look out for this muscle marked in green throughout this lesson as an indicator that your horse is starting to work correctly.

STEP 2

Hold the left rein in your left hand and the dressage whip in your right hand. You do not want the horse to move his feet yet but if he decides to then that is alright but he must walk forward, not back up. Use the dressage whip lightly on his hip to encourage forward movement.

STEP 3

Put some pressure on the left rein. This should be a constant gentle pressure, *not a yank or a jerk*.

Watch the horse's nose. When the nose moves down and towards you (the horse gives to the pressure) release the rein and praise the horse.

Note - How much pressure you need to apply will vary from horse to horse. If the horse has not moved at all after a few seconds you will need to increase the pressure. Remember that the pressure is your motivator – if the horse is not moving at all he needs more motivation to find the answer.

Remember – As the lesson progresses you will need less and less pressure to get the horse to give to the bit. The DVD shows horses actually learning the lesson and Harry at the very end demonstrates giving to the bit without any pressure on the reins at all.

Release the moment that the horse 'gives' to the pressure and moves his head into frame as shown on the video. Remember that the horse learns from the release so the better your release the quicker the horse will learn.

If this is the first time that your horse has had a bit in his mouth then you will probably need very little pressure to get him to give to the bit. If, on the other hand, your horse is used to being ridden with a good deal of pressure in his mouth all the time and not really felt a release before then you will need to increase the pressure to MOTIVATE the horse to find an answer. When the horse understands that if he holds his head in the position you want that all the pressure is released he will learn quickly and you will begin to use less and less pressure to get the result you want.

STEP 4

Practice this several times on each side of the horse before asking the horse to walk forward. Try to keep the rein high so that it is at a similar angle to where it will be when you are riding. Be careful not to 'pull' the nose down – the horse must find a release of the pressure.



In the photo you can see the large muscle on the top of the neck working in a relaxed manner. Also look out for the creases of skin behind the cheek bone. These two things together will tell you that the horse is working in the correct frame.

STEP 5

Now you want the horse to walk around you in a small circle and give to the bit at the same time. By asking the horse to walk you are raising the emotional level so expect the horse have to 're-learn' giving to the bit to a certain extent. Note that this will also happen if you ask the horse to trot around you and again when you mount and ask from the saddle.

STEP 6

With the horse walking around you and staying in frame, you will notice that he starts to hold himself in frame for more and more strides.

Remember – don't pick up pressure on the rein until the horse takes his head out of frame and release as soon as he has corrected himself.

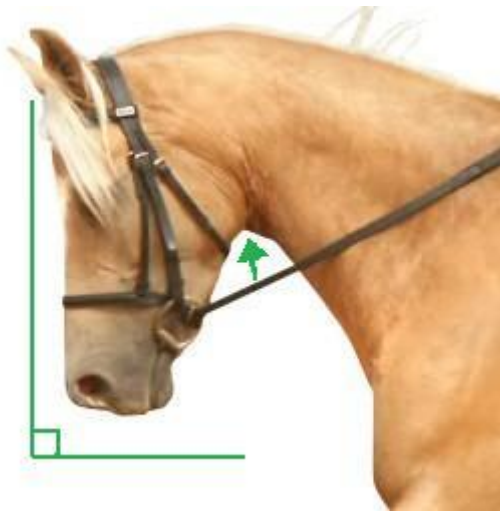
STEP 7

Be sure to do this exercise on both sides of the horse. Notice when you go to the other side of the horse that it is 'all new' to him. Remember you really have 2 horses and the exercise must be started from the beginning without skipping any steps when you go to the right.

It is a good idea to swap sides regularly as the horse can get a sore neck, especially if he is not accustomed to giving to the bit. With this in mind, let him rest from time to time and ask him to lower his head to stretch out his neck.

STEP 8

If you feel that you have the control it is a good idea to get the horse to do this exercise at trot around you at this stage.



The exact angle and elevation of your horse's head that you desire will depend on what you are wanting to do with your horse. For example, a western pleasure horse will have a much lower head carriage than a dressage horse.

Remember – Give to the Bit is the first step towards this goal. Try not to demand that your horse go perfectly in frame and light in the bridle straight away. First he must learn that the pressure on the bit will go away and from then he will learn to carry himself for longer and longer periods.

STEP 9

It would be a good time now to practice this on the long lines. If you do not long line your horse you might like to look at my "Long Lining" DVD that takes you step by step through teaching your horse to long line.

STEP 10

You are now ready to teach this lesson from the saddle, assuming you are working with a horse that is already going under saddle.

Remember – The horse will have to ‘re-learn’ to a certain extent when you get into the saddle. Go through the same process as you did on the ground. First ask the horse to give to the bit without moving his feet and then go in to walk and later trot with the exercise.

STEP 11

Ride small circles or half circles with your horse and concentrate on your release. If you can pat the horse on the neck when he gives to the bit this will release the pressure and praise the horse at the same time.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- 1) Have a constant pressure on the rein, not a jerk or pull.
- 2) The amount of pressure required to get the horse to find and answer will depend on the horse’s past experience and does not affect the end result of this lesson.
- 3) The horse can move 6 directions and may well try the other 5 before he gives to the bit. Allow the horse to experiment and release and praise him when he gets the answer you were looking for.
- 4) High hands do not make a high head! When you are doing this lesson, both on the ground and under saddle, do not be tempted to keep your hands low to encourage the horse to lower his head. The horse just wants the pressure out of his mouth and the height of your hands does not matter.
- 5) The horse learns from the release. Each time the horse gives to the bit and you don’t release you are un-training him. The more ‘good’ releases you have the quicker the horse will learn the lesson.
- 6) Remember to praise the horse. This is a great lesson for involving the horse in the learning process and building his confidence. With this lesson you can praise the horse several times in a minute and you will be surprised how his attitude changes and he begins to think: “I am clever”, “I can do this”, “Is this all you want, this is easy”.
- 7) When you praise the horse, even under saddle, scratching him on the neck or withers releases the rein and tells the horse that he has done the right thing at the same time.
- 8) Remember there will be some ‘re-training’ to do when you get on the horse and when you move from walk to trot.

OTHER VIDEOS TO HELP YOU HAVE YOUR HORSE WORK IN FRAME:

- 1) Give to the Bit (part 2) and Shoulder Control
- 2) Long lining
- 3) Engaging the Hindquarters

And for the bridling work:

- 4) Sacking out, and Spook Control

