

A Bitless Wonder

Sidepull bridles help relax horses who are defensive about their mouths and supple horses who are difficult to turn.

BY DIANA THOMPSON

Do you have a horse who constantly chews on his bit? How about one who stiffens his neck and jaw to brace against the bit when you pick up the rein to ask him to turn or stop? And then there is the horse who puts her head up in the air or firmly closes her mouth when you try to put a bridle on her.

I'll admit that, from our point of view, these horse behaviors are annoying, even dangerous. From the horse's point of view, however, these evasions may be warranted by the pain, or even permanent damage, that bits and uneducated hands inflict on their mouths.

Once you've studied (or better yet, touched and massaged) the tissues within a horse's mouth, you'll understand that from their tongues to their gums, horses' mouths are incredibly soft and sensitive, not unlike the anatomy within our mouths. Most bits are hard, unyielding pieces of metal which do not interact in a kind way with the structure of the horse's tongue, bars, and teeth. Then comes the influence of our hands. Most riders are not aware of just how often their unbalanced hands cause the bit to bump into their horses' mouths as they ask for stops and turns. But even riders with balanced, "independent" hands intentionally use well-timed yanks or checks to the mouth in the name of training. Once you really take a look at this issue, perhaps you will wonder, as I do, how horses allow bits to be put in their mouths at all.

Bitless can be better

Fortunately, innovative bits that better suit the anatomy of a horse's mouth and better methods of teaching balanced riding are starting to make it to the equestrian marketplace. But when I work with a horse who objects to his bit in one of the ways described above, my favorite solution is to remove the bit from the horse's mouth completely.

Most horses enjoy being ridden without a bit in their mouths. They relax their necks and mouths, and stretch their necks out and down toward the ground. Even horses who are seemingly *without* opposition to their bits move much more freely once the metal is removed from their mouths.

Obviously, to ride a horse safely without a bit, you need some other piece of headgear that can clearly communicate your requests and directions to your horse without any loss of control. Tack manufacturers have developed a number of bitless bridles to meet this need, including bosals, mechanical hackamores, and scissors hackamores (also known as *vosels*). However, in my experience, most of these bitless bridles are good at only one thing – exerting enough pain on the horse's nose and/or jawbones to provide good "brakes." While these devices, as well

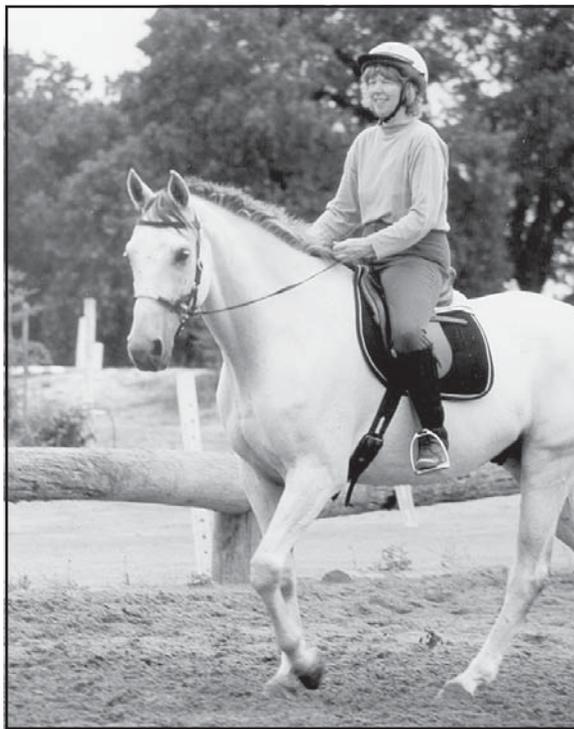
as the rope halters that many people are riding their horses in these days, are good for taking the bit out of the horse's mouth and teaching the rider not to lean on the reins for balance, I have found them to be ineffective (and in some cases, counterproductive) for getting a horse to perform a proper, balanced turn, or to move in the light, graceful frame known as "self carriage." This is largely because of the way the reins fasten to most of these devices, and the way they apply pressure to the horse's face (see "Not All Bitless Bridles Are The Same," page 9).

Fortunately, there is another, not as widely known bitless bridle that provides both adequate brakes and superior "steering" on most horses. In addition, the *sidepull*, as this bridle is called, offers the added benefit of helping horses who are "locked up" and stiff in the poll to relax this important part of their anatomy, which results in lighter, more balanced gaits, turns, and stops.

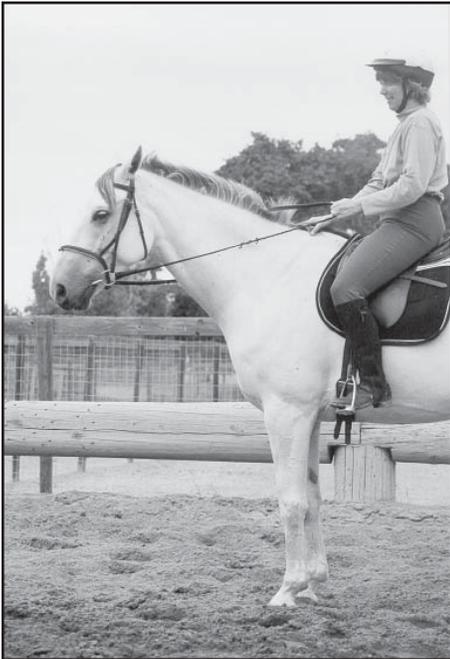
How a sidepull differs

A sidepull is any bitless bridle that has the reins attached directly to the headstall on either side of the horse's head. With a basic sidepull bridle, when you take the slack out of the left rein, the horse feels a pull on the left side of his face. This cue tells him very clearly to turn his head to the left. When the rider asks for a halt, exerting rein pressure on both reins equally, pressure is applied evenly across the horse's nose.

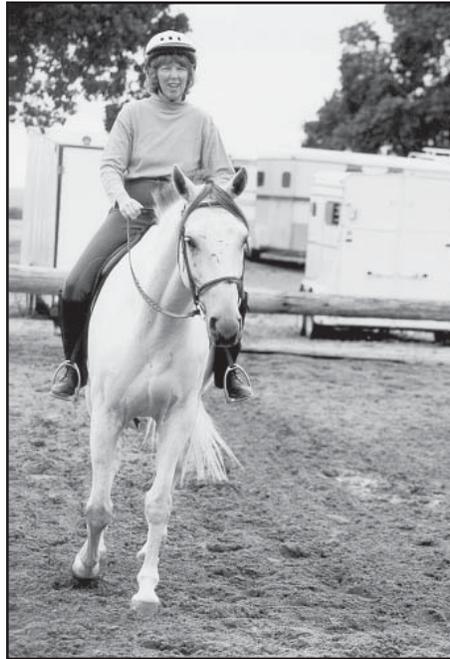
The direct, clear action of the sidepull is very different from that of other types of bitless bridles, most of which are designed with a slightly different focus and action. Most bosals, vosels, and mechanical hackamores have the reins attached underneath the horse's chin, and utilize leverage to control the pace of the horse. But none of these designs enable the rider to directly pull the horse's head to the side.



Author and TWHJ Editor-at-Large Diana Thompson rides Meritaj, an often hard-to-turn school horse, in a sidepull bridle. He relaxes within minutes, turning nicely and using himself well in a balanced manner.



Rather than yielding to the bit and turning his head as Diana takes the slack out of the rein and applies rein pressure, Meritaj leans on the bit and tightens the muscles at the top of his neck and poll. If he is this stiff and unyielding to the rein at a standstill, he is certain to be difficult to turn while being ridden.



As Diana applies pressure on the left rein, trying to guide Meritaj around the circle to the left, Meritaj yields with his neck only. His body and his head keep traveling straight forward instead of bending around the circle to the left. These responses to a bit indicate that he is a perfect candidate for a sidepull.

In fact, unless the horse knows how to respond properly to a neck rein, the cue for a turn can confuse some horses.

In rope halters, bosals, and vosels, it's difficult for horses to distinguish left-handed rein tension from right-handed rein tension, since both result in a similar action on the horse's nose. Mechanical hackamores, which are generally comprised of a noseband/curbstrap combination that is leveraged by long shanks on either side of the horse's face, are even more difficult for most horses to interpret. Taking the slack out of one rein tightens the chinstrap and noseband some; taking the slack out of both reins tightens the chinstrap and noseband a lot.

Also, with any type of mechanical hackamore or vose, you can't really use a wide, low "leading rein" out to one side, which usually helps even the most inexperienced horse understand where you want him to turn. If you use this wide, low rein with most hackamores, the shank on that side of the hackamore actually pushes the horse's nose away from the turn, while tightening the curbstrap and noseband.

Unlike the strongly leveraged shanked hackamores, sidepulls may not afford an inexperienced rider enough control over the pace of an exceptionally strong horse, or one who runs away, but those horses are not the

ones they are designed for! The sidepull is most useful for the following horses:

- Young horses who are just learning the basics of turning and stopping in response to headgear.
- Any horse who doesn't turn well.
- Horses who chew incessantly on the bit.
- Those who chew on the bit or try to clamp it in their teeth to prevent it from hitting their gums and those who do not want the bit to enter their mouth at all.
- Horses who have been frightened by use of harsh bits or over-bridled in a biting rig. These horses tuck their noses toward their chests, moving in an over-arched "behind the bit" position.
- Those who are fussy in a bit and unable to relax and lengthen their necks.
- Horses with a history of dental problems or mouth injuries including those with broken jaws or injured tongues.
- Well-trained horses on recreational trail rides.
- School horses being ridden by novice riders with unbalanced hands.

Helping horses turn better

If you watch a loose horse trotting around an arena or pasture (or even being ridden in a halter), you'll see that most of them naturally carry their heads high (relative to how we like them to carry themselves when we are riding them properly). This high-headed posture hollows their backs and leaves their hindquarters out behind their body – what we would call disengaged.

Around turns, a loose horse most often bends his neck and body *to the outside of the turn*, leaning into the turn by putting weight on the inside shoulder. A horse who moves in this way is typically heavy on the forehand. This makes him stiff to turn and puts extra weight and strain on his front legs and feet. This horse is also not able to gather his hindquarters underneath him for powerful starts and stops or collected turns or other moves.

This relaxed but high-headed and strung-out posture is exactly opposite of how we want a horse to travel when he carries a rider. A well-balanced horse (one who carries himself and us in a coordinated, light manner) relaxes and lowers his neck, rounds his back and moves his hindquarters up underneath him. This moves his weight off of his forehand, leaving him light and responsive to the rider's requests (this posture is also kind to the horse's back and front legs and feet over the long haul). When this balanced horse turns or moves around a corner, he travels with his head and body turned *to the inside of the turn* (facing the direction he is traveling, not away from it).

Poll transformation

If the muscles surrounding the poll joint (the junction of the skull and first cervical vertebrae) are relaxed and the joint is operating properly, one of the moves a horse can make is a sideways turn of the head right at the top of his neck. When the horse's pivots his head to face left or right, his ears and eyes stay level and his cheek (the round area of the jaw) tucks under his neck.

Once this turn takes place, an amazing chain of events takes place all the way down the spine. When the poll joint relaxes and the horse turns his head, the joints of the neck, back and hindquarter sequentially relax as if the vertebrae were a precisely stacked row of dominoes. A wave of lengthening flows down the spine. This allows the entire horse to relax, lengthen his neck and gracefully arc his body around a turn or round up his back and hindquarters into self-carriage and collection.

Release of muscular tension in the poll

joint is vital to all equine athletic pursuits, whether it is the full collection of an upper level dressage horse or full extension of a race horse. And here's the best part: With a rein fastened on each side of the horse's face, proper use of the sidepull bridle actually assists riders in turning the horse, so his head first turns at the poll, helping to release tension in the poll and all the way down the spine. (*For step-by-step instructions on how to introduce your horse to a sidepull, as well as its use on stiff, hard to turn horses, see "Introducing the Sidepull," page 10.*)

Cautions and considerations

Like all bitless bridles, the sidepull invites most horses to lengthen their necks and toplines (all but the most persistently high-headed horses relax and stretch down). Because of its relatively benign action on the horse's face (unlike the mechanical hackamores, in particular), riders have to take care not to let the horse lean on the noseband and travel heavily on the forehead.

I also caution riders against using a sidepull on one type of horse: those who carry their necks and heads up high and who have learned how to flip their noses up in the air to evade their riders' requests. An unskilled rider would find themselves without enough steering or brakes with a sidepull on this type of horse.

Sidepull manufacturer Dennis Moreland, former owner of Cowboy Tack in Weatherford, Texas, recommends using a running martingale with a sidepull bridle to curb high-headed behavior. But even if the rider is skilled enough to maneuver a habitually high-headed horse in a sidepull, I don't find the sidepull to be at its most helpful in retraining this type of horses. I prefer to use a bit with a snaffle and curb rein (such as a TTEAM roller bit or Pelham) to address the upside-down posture.

I use sidepulls on young horses and those who need retraining. In cases where a horse needs to compete in a certain bit, I may ride him in the sidepull several days a week and use his regular bit on the other days. Other horses may benefit from its use in the arena or around home on trails, but require a regular bridle for group trail rides or other situations that may provide more stimulus to the horse. However, there are a few well-trained and balanced horses who do so well in the sidepull that their owners make the change permanent.

Sidepull maker Mooreland sees the sidepull bridle as a foundation training tool, somewhat like a ring snaffle bit. "As far as a cutting horse or a finished ranch

horse goes, the sidepull is good for a basic period of training, but not something to ride in forever," he says. "If the horse has been pushed too hard, however, and the trainer needs to back up a bit and go back to a solid foundation, the sidepull can help you get there.

"When you ride a colt in a hackamore (with the reins attached to a single point under the chin) he has a tendency to have his head up and his nose out a little bit," he says. "This is fine when you first ride him because all you want is the colt moving somewhere freely, walking, trotting and loping. But there comes a time when you want to start the colt on cattle where you want to be able to collect him a bit and tip his nose in.

"The sidepull has no stop to it, but it has direction. When you pull left, the sidepull pulls the whole right side of the bridle up against the horse's face and moves his whole face to the left," he describes. "This is what you need when you are starting a horse on cattle."

Which sidepull?

There are a number of sidepull bridles to choose from, and you may have to try several on your horse to find the one that works best for him and for you. Be aware that not all sidepulls are created equal; as with many things, grace is in the details. "Everybody gets most of the big things right," agrees Moreland. "But it is the little things which really make the difference in how these bridles work." The veteran tack maker, says that if a sidepull bridle is constructed properly, it will last virtually forever. "I still have the first one I made," Moreland says.

In my experience, sidepull bridles that have nylon headstalls, rather than leather or quality Biothane, work very poorly. They tend to bend and twist at the junction of the headstall and the noseband, resulting in a floppy fit that is distracting and uncomfortable for the horse.

I also feel that if it lacks a jowl strap, the sidepull should not be used on any horse. Moreland agrees. "The jaw or jowl strap – the strap that goes right below the big curve of the horse's jaw – keeps the bridle from pulling up into the horse's eye. This is essential," he says.

I suggest that buyers pay special attention to the construction of the noseband. I prefer sidepull that use a lariat as the noseband, but you need to check the type of rope that is used and the "lay" of the knot of the rope as it meets the headstall. Some ropes are too stiff or rough, and poorly made knots (especially the melted nylon knots)

can gouge the horse's face.

"Tying the knot of the sidepull rope is an art, as is selecting the right rope," Moreland says. "There is a real process to putting the rope and headstall together so the bridle stays where it is supposed to and doesn't turn on the horse's face."

Sonny Miller, Cowboy Tack's current Vice President of sales and marketing, describes how Cowboy Tack has addressed that problem. "We don't add an extra rein ring to the sidepull because it can contribute to a bad fit and lopsided position on the horse's face," Miller says. "The rope we use is braided through the ring of the headstall three times; it is not going to come apart."

Miller explains his company sells twice as many of the sidepulls with double rope nosebands as the variety with a single rope. He says the double rope is less severe on the horse's nose because it covers a broader surface of the nose. He recommends the single rope construction for an older horse who has learned to lug on the bit.

Sidepull position

Trainers and manufacturers disagree as to where to position the bridle on the horse's head and how snug the noseband is fastened. In the TTEAM system of training, the noseband is placed approximately two to three fingers below the horse's cheekbone. The noseband adjusts to a somewhat snug, but not tight fit.

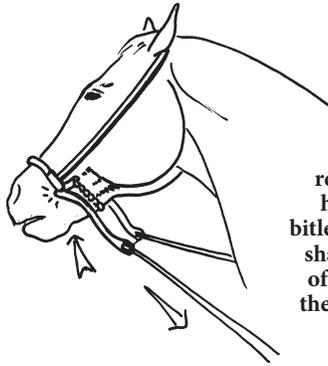
I, too, like to position the sidepull higher on the horse's head and keep the noseband adjusted somewhat snugly, but so the horse can still lick and chew and move his jaw. When the sidepull is in this position, I find it communicates a clear sideways instruction to young horses who are just learning how to turn and those older horses who have become stiff and braced against the bridle.

Many reining or cutting trainers, however, place the bridle much lower on the horse's head and fasten the noseband so there is quite a gap between the nose and the noseband.

In the Cowboy Tack catalog, says Miller, "You'll see the noseband placed down on the horses' nose, just above the cartilage of the nose. The one in the catalog photo (also seen in the middle of the next page) looks really loose because it is brand new and hasn't settled down onto the horse's face. It is adjusted loosely so it doesn't turn the horse too quickly after the cow. The big thing is not to adjust it any lower because it might cut off the horse's air."

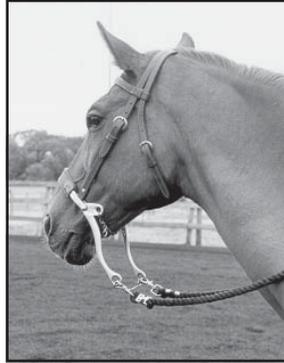
One of the advantages of the sidepull, however, is the choices it offers both in adjustment on the horse and in terms of use.

Most Bitless Bridles Provide “Brakes” But Not “Steering”



Left and right: MECHANICAL HACKAMORE.

Pulling on one rein of a mechanical hackamore or other bitless bridle with long shanks causes the top of the shank to PUSH the horse's nose in the wrong direction.



Left: “SCISSORS HACKAMORE” OR VOSEL. Just as with the mechanical hackamore, the vosel does not give a clear turn signal to the horse. Rein pressure only slows or stops the horse.

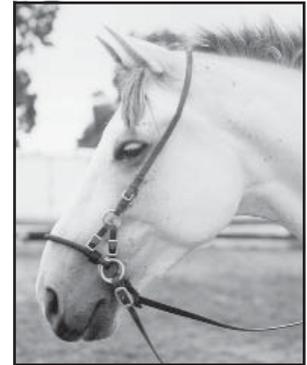


Left: BOSAL. Meant to be “neck reined;” use of a single rein with a bosal tends to make a horse counterbend.

Right: This harsh, if not cruel, bitless bridle combines a wire-wrapped metal noseband with shanks for leverage. This would no doubt stop any horse, but it fails to provide any lateral control or direction.



Right: This sidepull is designed to clip onto an existing headstall and lacks the all-important jowl strap. Also, with its soft nylon noseband, it lacks stopping power.



The Best Sidepulls Provide Superior “Steering” AND Adequate Brakes

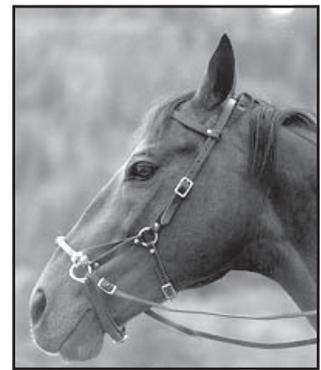


Left: This low-quality Western sidepull lacks a jowl strap; also, the melted knot of the Nylon rope noseband is too big and lumpy.



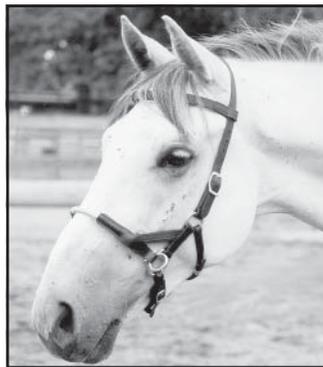
Left: COWBOY TACK'S “DOUBLE-ROPE” SIDE PULL. Features a jowl strap, and a smoothly knotted noseband.

Right: LINDA TELLINGTON-JONES' “LINDELL” SIDE PULL. Well-designed and constructed of quality materials.

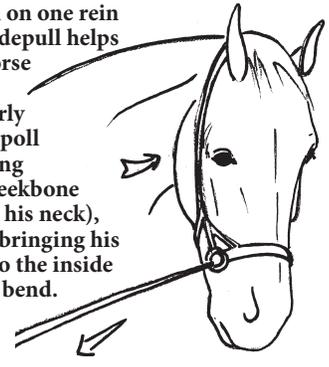


Left: With its wide leather noseband, this sidepull helps turn horses properly, but may not provide “brakes.”

Right: DIANA THOMPSON'S SIDE PULL. This attractive bridle uses a lariat noseband (sewn in, rather than knotted), providing steering AND brakes.



A pull on one rein of a sidepull helps the horse bend properly at the poll (tucking his cheekbone under his neck), while bringing his nose to the inside of the bend.



For purchasing information on all of the recommended sidepulls on this page, see “Resources,” page 24.

Introducing a Sidepull to Teach Proper Turns

The following photos illustrate the process I use to introduce horses to the sidepull bridle. It is best to educate the horse about his poll joint using a combination of massage and training. Then and only then can he easily release the muscles at the top of his neck and turn his head properly in response to rein pressure.

Regardless of which type of sidepull you try (or even if you keep the horse in a snaffle bit), I would recommend taking your horse through these steps. (For further information and photo how-to lessons on the principles of a proper turn, refer to the WHJ articles

with clinician Harry Whitney: "Is Turning a Real Drag?" in the March/April 1998 issue, and "The Role of the Reins," in the May/June 1998, as well as "Poll Power," by Barbara Chasteen, in the March/April 1997 issue.)

Please note: A horse with tight muscles due to vertebral misalignments, dental problems, or saddle fit problems may not be able to do these movements. If your horse fails to improve or resists these movements, contact an equine massage therapist, or a veterinarian trained in chiropractic care or acupuncture for assistance.



Meritaj is extremely stiff when turning left (see photos on page 7). The poll turn exercise will teach him to release the muscles at the top of his neck and turn his head properly. First, I massage Meritaj on his neck right behind his ear, to soften the muscles of the poll. I also stroke in the direction of the hair or plant my fingers and move the tissue in small circles.



I use my right palm to stroke the channel between Meritaj's jaw bone and his neck. Then I plant my right hand on the round part of his jaw (cheek) and gently push his jaw away as I use the fingers of my left hand to pull his nose toward me. I don't force him; I simply add pressure until I equal his resistance and hold the pressure until he yields. Note that his right eye barely shows in the photo.



Although his right ear and eye are trying to look straight ahead, Meritaj starts to turn his head to the left. We can clearly see his right eye now and his head and neck have turned to the left. If his poll had released completely, the bridge of his nose and face would have turned even more to the left and we would see more of the round part of his right jaw sticking out to the right.

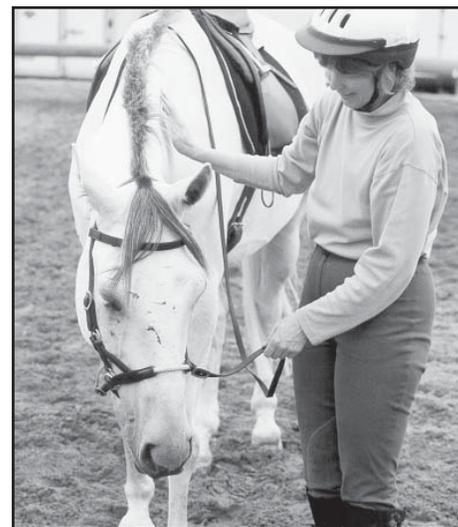


Now I'll teach Meritaj how to turn his head in response to the sidepull. The noseband rests at least two inches below his cheekbone (horses with long faces or protruding cheek bones need it placed lower). The jowl strap is tightened snugly below the curve of his cheek, but the chin strap is loose enough so that I can get two fingers between his jaw and the strap.

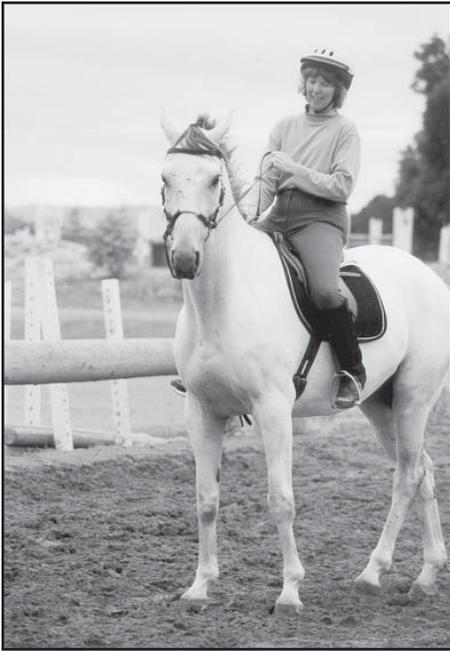
I pet Meritaj in the groove between his jaw and his neck to demarcate where he should turn. I position my left hand out to the side and tighten the rein until I meet resistance. My right hand holds steady to encourage Meritaj to tuck his cheek under his neck.



Meritaj has turned his head and put slack in the rein. I praise him and release even more rein so that he has freedom to lengthen down to the ground (see next photo). Here, he has not released his poll joint completely and turned correctly. He has tipped his nose up slightly toward me and kept his left cheek pushed out toward me instead of tucking it under his neck so his head could truly swivel toward me.



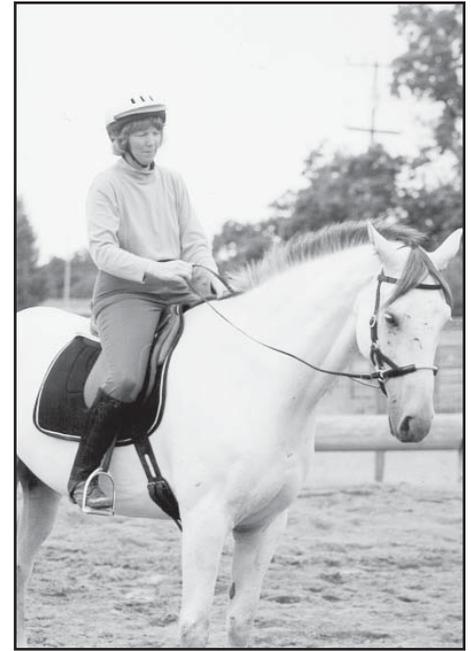
Meritaj has completely released his poll joint, and then stretched toward the ground. All the earmarks of a proper turn are present: his head is softly turned to the left so we can see his right eye, his eyes and ears have remained level, and he has allowed his jaw to rotate under his neck so we can see the curve of his right jaw bone out to the side. Note how relaxed he is – the poll release feels good!



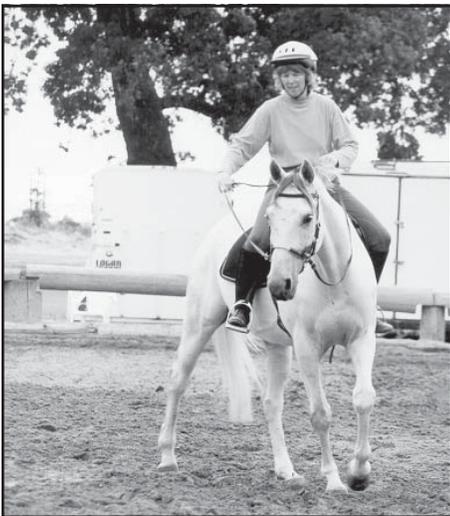
Mounted up, I first check whether Meritaj will turn in response to rein pressure when standing still. I take the slack out of the left rein to ask him to turn his head to the left (his stiff side). Instead of yielding, he raises his head and braces hard against the rein. In response, I move my rein hand to the center of his body to match his resistance and wait for him to yield. Locked up in the front of his body, he starts to move his hind legs. His pinched nostrils and high head reflect his stress.



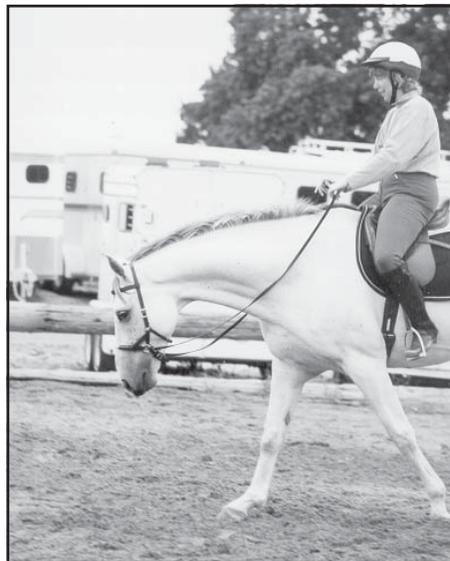
Meritaj finally turns his head and his neck in a big round movement in response to rein pressure. His ears are level and his eyes are level, but he has not allowed his jaw to turn as much as I would like. I put slack in my rein, praise him verbally and pet him on the withers. His ears and his nostrils have relaxed but his face shows that he is not too sure about what just happened. It is important to give Meritaj a moment to think and relax before I ask him for the next step.



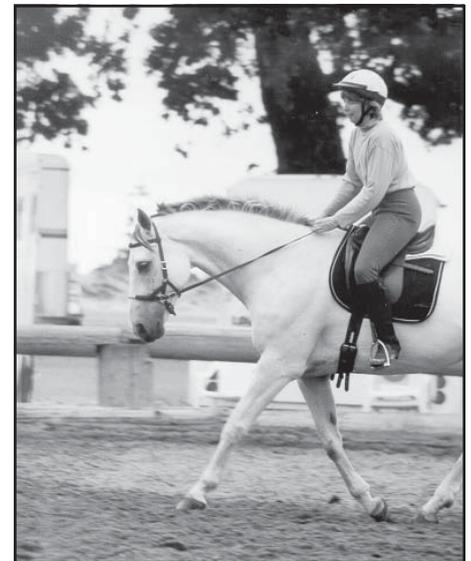
Now I try a poll turn to the right. As I take the slack out of the right rein, Meritaj listens to me and starts to turn his head properly. He is relaxed (shown by the position of his ears out to the side and the open position of his nostril and softness of his mouth). His neck is lengthened and stretched forward so that his poll is the highest point of his neck. When Meritaj is in this position and state of mind, it is easy for him to allow his head to turn on the top of his neck properly.



Guiding the horse through big round turns is an important way to teach him to turn at the poll properly *and* turn his body. I am holding my right hand out to the side (a "leading rein") to give Meritaj a clear cue to turn his head and body to the right. Meritaj is relaxed and bending around the turn nicely, but he is not completely released at the poll. He is not bracing against my rein but he is looking to the outside of my circle and not allowing his jaw and face to swivel to the right. If he had turned properly we would not be able to see his right eye.



As you wind your horse around through big round turns, he should relax his poll joint and turn his body properly through the turn. Once this happens, he may further relax and offer to stretch his head and neck down toward the ground. I am feeding out the reins to Meritaj as he stretches downward. His neck muscles are relaxed and he is taking nice long strides. His muscles all along his spine have relaxed and he is able to lengthen from head to hindquarter.



Once your horse turns properly at the poll and relaxes all the way down his spine, you may feel him move into the light and elevated movement called "self-carriage." In this photo, Meritaj is carrying himself effortlessly in a beautiful working trot. His right hind leg is reaching well up underneath him, indicating that he is pushing off strongly from his hindquarters. He has arched and lengthened his neck and remains in light contact with the reins.

A Fascinating Training Tool

I first saw a rope noseband sidepull in a photograph in a western horse magazine about 16 years ago. The photo was of a pleasure horse trainer, Marty Sanford from Texas, who rode all of her young horses in a sidepull until they understood how to turn and stop in a balanced manner. Then she introduced a bit. Trained in this way, her horses stayed soft and relaxed in the bridle.

Recently, I discovered that Dennis Moreland, then-owner of Moreland Enterprises and Cowboy Tack in Weatherford, Texas, was the manufacturer of the sidepull bridle Sanford used. Moreland says he first saw a trainer using a homemade sidepull in the mid 1970s, and soon began making them himself. "In 1976, I saw Gayle Bourland, a very well-respected cutting horse trainer, riding a young horse with a bridle with a U-shaped steel noseband and no bit," Moreland describes. "Gayle said he had his blacksmith make it for him and it worked to bring the horse's head to the side. I liked the principle of it and decided to make them. We made them with steel nosebands, and with single and double rope nosebands."

I was immediately fascinated by the novel piece of equipment I had chanced to see in the magazine. I had been starting the young horses in my training stable in their halters to avoid putting a bit in their mouths. It seemed harsh to me to put a bit in the mouth of a young gangly Thoroughbred who was having trouble just operating its own body in a balanced manner, much less trying to figure out how to carry me around.

I couldn't find any tack outlets that carried a sidepull bridle at the time. I took out a magnifying glass, studied the construction of the bridle in the magazine photograph and wondered how I could construct one.

Then, in the fall of 1983, I attended a demonstration by Linda Tellington-Jones of the TTEAM Club and was thrilled to see her using a bitless sidepull. Tellington-Jones had her own version of a sidepull, dubbed a *Lindell*, and used it as a primary piece of equipment used in her programs. The Club also sold (and still sells) the Lindell.

I went home with one of the Lindells, and it immediately became my bridle of choice for working with young horses. I ground drove them in the sidepull and then rode them in it for at least a month before introducing the bit. This helped my horses learn to turn and stop without ever feeling the pull of metal against their sensitive mouths. In clinics with Tellington-Jones over the next two years, I learned to use the sidepull with older problem horses as well.

Since that time, over 14 years, I've used the Lindell and other sidepulls on numerous horses. I've also discovered and purchased half a dozen other sidepull bridles. Most of the sidepulls contained some features I liked and some features I

didn't like, so, in 1995, I approached leather craftsman and tack repair expert Joe Fermin of San Rafael, California, and asked him to help me make up a hybrid sidepull bridle. Many horse people are fussy about tack, and I am no exception, but I didn't expect it to take the on and off again efforts of four years and many, many prototypes before I had what I considered to be the perfect sidepull bridle in my hands!

One of the most effective parts of the sidepulls I liked – the lariat-style nosebands – usually came paired with one of my pet peeves: bulky and often poorly tied lariat knots at the sides of the bridle – so many of Fermin's and my efforts were directed at this section of the bridle. We tried to find a way to remove most of the lariat from the bridle, while keeping the lariat-to-leather transition smooth and yet strong. A noseband from an English jumping hackamore gave us an idea to try.

We also experimented with different designs for jowl straps.

Though this strap is missing from some designs I saw, I observed that the strap improved the effectiveness of the bridle immensely. Fermin and I tried many positions and angles for a jowl strap to fit the horse's face the way I liked.

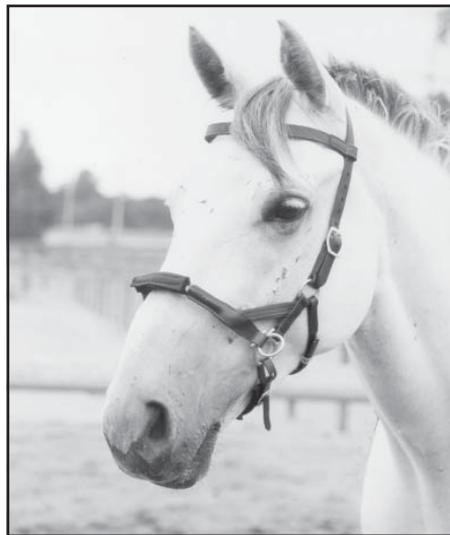
Once Fermin finished the first model, I took it out to try on a client's horse. This horse hated wearing a bit; he had experienced pain from a bit due to severe dental problems. I had put him in a basic sidepull and the gelding had relaxed considerably with its use. Since he was so sensitive to his headgear, I figured he would be a good tester.

According to the horse, we were on the right track! The new noseband seemed to make it even easier for him to relax the poll joint and turn his head at the top of his neck. He turned with lightness and complete willingness. He relaxed his entire spine, rounded up his back and moved into self-carriage. I was thrilled with the results and my client was so happy with this next level

of improvement that she refused to let me have the bridle back. She still has that first prototype and her horse still enjoys it as they work in the arena and out on the trails.

I have continued to tinker with the sidepull for the past four years, trying version after version on a number of horses with varying levels of training. For the past year, I've been working with Gail Hought of Hought Fine Art, Leather and Endurance Tack in McKinleyville, California, to finish my design and produce them for sale. Hought, an avid and experienced endurance rider, has been doing fine leather work since 1973, and is currently building the sidepulls for me on a custom basis. (m)

Diana Thompson is the founder and now Editor-At-Large of TWHJ. A professional horse trainer for the past 18 years, Diana's work with horses includes teaching horse owners how to use massage, acupuncture, and non-violent training methods. For contact information, see "Resources," page 24.



Happy with the results that can be obtained with a sidepull, a number of trainers have developed their own designs. Diana Thompson's version, above, features a removeable Neoprene cover for the lariat noseband for horses who are especially responsive.