

A BIT OF A PREDICAMENT

FINDING A BIT TO SUIT YOUR HORSE CAN BE PROBLEMATIC AND IS OFTEN AN EXPENSIVE CASE OF TRIAL AND ERROR. WE ASKED THREE EXPERTS FOR THEIR ADVICE ON HOW TO SOLVE SOME COMMON BITTING ISSUES.

NOTHING BEATS CORRECT TRAINING AND MANAGEMENT, BUT SOMETIMES COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HORSE AND RIDER CAN BREAK DOWN SIMPLY BECAUSE THE HORSE IS NOT HAPPY IN HIS MOUTH. WE ASKED BITTING EXPERTS FROM MYLER, ABBEY AND INDEPENDENT ONLINE SADDLER THE SADDLERY SHOP TO HELP SOLVE THREE HORSE & HOUND READERS' COMMON BITTING PROBLEMS.



▲ Solutions to help prevent horses who are heavy in the hand include the PEEWEE bit (top) - a thin, mullen mouth bit that also exerts some poll and external jaw pressure - and the flat lozenge eggbutt snaffle (middle & bottom) which also has a slender mouthpiece & comes in larger sizes to fit Beamish



▲ Rosie Marston rotates the bits she uses on show jumper Bob

RESISTING THE CONTACT

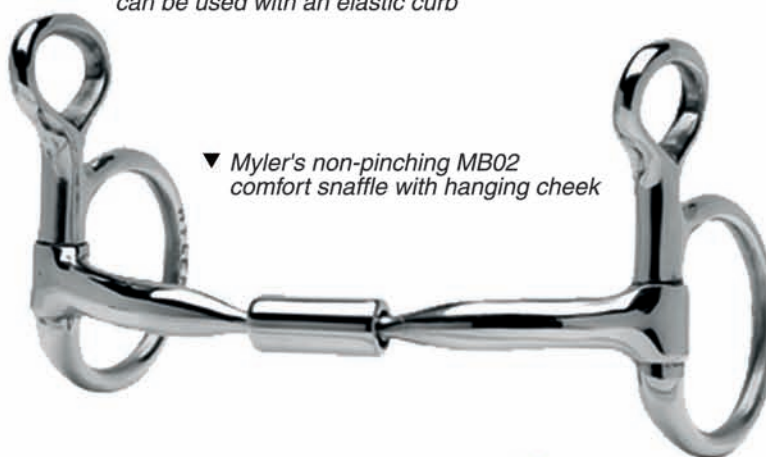
ROSIE MARSTON, 21, from Kent, has owned her 15.3hh, 10-year-old, part-thoroughbred gelding Bob for four years. They compete in British Show Jumping Association (BSJA) classes up to 1.25m. Bob has his teeth and back checked regularly and takes a 5¼in bit. ROSIE says: "Bob is forward-going without being strong, particularly when show jumping, but the moment I take a check, he sticks his head in the air and resists the contact. This means that he cannot see where he is going and often takes a pole behind. If I don't check him, he often has a pole anyway because he is too quick and flat. "I tend to rotate the bits I use as he will settle down in something for the first few outings, but

quickly reverts to his old habits. “I usually use a loose-ring French link snaffle or a hackamore. In the snaffle, I have little control and he fights me when he gets quick. His head carriage is steadier in the hackamore, but he then leans on my hands, getting too low in front and has even started making snorting noises. “I have also tried a Dutch gag, pelham, butterfly flip corrector bit, Cheltenham gag, hanging cheek snaffle and a combination bit, but he has rebelled against them all.”

BELSTANE’S Myler expert Suzanna Monteith suggests that Bob may have been trying to evade the tongue pressure on all the bits Rosie has tried, except the hackamore, where different problems arose because his airway was restricted. “The hackamore is not designed to be ridden with a constant or firm contact,” she explains. “We suggest a Short Shank Myler Combination with the Low Port Comfort Snaffle Mouthpiece, which works quite differently to a combination bit she’ll have tried. It initially shares the rider’s rein pressure evenly between the nose — cavesson position, no restriction of airway — poll and back of the jaw. “Only if she continues to increase rein pressure does the mouthpiece come into effect, after which the pressure is shared between five points — the nose, poll, jaw, tongue and bars. This makes it gentle and the restriction of the tongue and swallowing is minimised. “The pressure high up on the back of the jaw encourages the horse to flex from his withers — rather than from the second or third vertebrae by the poll — which will create a better outline and facilitate collection and impulsion.” According to Abbey Saddlery’s biting expert Hilary Vernon, the problem here is that Bob does not like jointed bits, particularly those with leverage. “To encourage him to go to the end of the rein and to look at the fence, I would try a Short Shank Dalehead with a Hartwell mouthpiece,” says Hilary. “The Dalehead cheek has three rein options to vary your signal and a jaw strap at the back. “As Bob is not strong and we simply want to get some pressure out of his mouth and on to his jaw to balance the pressures of the bit, I recommend you use a soft leather curb. This should send him to the end of the rein and give you control, but not be harsh. “The Hartwell mouthpiece is forward-curved and small-ported to encourage him to maintain his frame and allow you to ask, but then give with your hands.”



▲ The Hartwell pelham has a wide sweeping port & can be used with an elastic curb



▼ Myler's non-pinching MB02 comfort snaffle with hanging cheek



▼ The Myer low-ported mullen would be suitable for showing classes



▼ The Sprenger WH Ultra's wheeled lozenge allows for tongue movement



▼ The Sprenger Turnado is a snaffle bit with an angled joint

TONGUE OVER THE BIT

EMMA OSBORNE, 20, from Glasgow, has owned her mare Annie, a 10-year-old 15hh thoroughbred, for four years. They compete in ridden showing classes and unaffiliated dressage up to novice. Annie suffers from hooks on her back teeth, but has them checked regularly. EMMA says: "Annie seems unhappy in her mouth and frequently gets her tongue over any bit I try. It happens mainly when we go into canter, as she runs, gets overexcited and resists the contact. "I tried a flash noseband on to keep her mouth shut, but this made her rear on the approach to a jump. I also struggle to find 4½in bits for her, so I have resorted to using a 5in. I need a showing legal bit for use with double reins and a snaffle for dressage. "I am currently riding Annie in a French link hanging cheek snaffle, although she still opens her mouth and is unaccepting. For showing, I use a nutcracker jointed pelham without a curb attachment, which, again, she doesn't seem happy in. I have tried a double bridle, but it was too big for her and she got her tongue over the bit when she got excited."

LUCY NICHOLAS from The Saddlery Shop suggests that, like many thoroughbreds, Annie's vice could stem from her large-tongue, small-mouth conformation. "Thoroughbreds often have a narrow jaw and thin skin, which makes them even more sensitive," she says. "The priority is to get Annie to keep her tongue under the bit, which will require a thin mouthpiece coupled with something that will allow space for the tongue. "For showing, a pelham would be the preference, and a Hartwell pelham with its wide, sweeping port should make her feel more comfortable. If she dislikes the action of a curb chain, try using an elastic curb that will give when pressure is applied. "Dressage-wise, the Sprenger WH Ultra is often successful on horses who dislike tongue pressure — the small wheel in the middle of the lozenge allows the horse to move its tongue when swallowing, for example. "The Sprenger Turnado, a snaffle bit with an angled joint, allows the bit to lie more sympathetically in the horse's mouth



▲ Emma Osborne's mare Annie tends to get her tongue over the bit



▼ The Myler short-shank combination comes with a low-port snaffle

▼ Abbey's short-shank Dalehead cheek has 3 rein options to vary your signal



with more space for the tongue. Both Sprenger bits are made from Aurigan, a patented material that most horses prefer and accept better than stainless steel." Importantly, Emma was absolutely correct to have rejected the flash noseband, says Myler's Suzanna Monteith. "By putting her tongue over the bit, Annie is freeing it so she can swallow. The flash noseband merely forces her mouth shut, compelling her to suffer the discomfort of the bit and the panic she will feel if she can't swallow," explains Suzanna. "We suggest introducing a port to give Annie some tongue room and a direct action [non-collapsing] mouthpiece to remove any pinch. "The Myler Low Ported Mullen (MB06) is available in 4½in on a pelham cheek for Emma's showing classes, and also on a D-ring snaffle with slots for working at home. The slots allow the bridle to be fixed on to the ring, as with a hanging cheek, which holds the bit off the tongue when not being engaged by the rider, thereby offering a clearer reward. "It is also possible to fit a jaw strap or chain on to the Myler slotted cheek snaffles, which will hold the bit off the tongue, and give the horse some warning that the reins have been activated before pressure comes on to the tongue. "Inexplicably, ported snaffles are not permitted under dressage rules, so we would recommend that Emma works Annie quietly until she is confident in her new bit before changing back into a less sympathetic one. We would then suggest Myler's non-pinching version of a French link, the MB02 Comfort Snaffle on a hanging cheek."

LEANING ON THE BIT

GEORGINA INGMAN, 22, from Buckinghamshire, recently bought Beamish, a 10-year-old, 18.2hh Irish draught-cross gelding who takes a 6¼in-6½in bit. Beamish has been hunting for the past six years, but Georgina would now like to do some dressage and show jumping with him.

GEORGINA says: "Beamish is a big horse and unfortunately uses his weight to lean on me, which makes him very heavy in the hand — all his strength goes down rather than forward. He has quite a short back for a large horse so is relatively collected, but I struggle to find bits big enough for him. "He was hunted in a Waterford Dutch gag, but I want something milder to ride him in everyday



▲ Georgina Ingman needs a bit that will stop 10-year-old Beamish leaning on her hand

as this bit makes him inconsistent in his outline. I have ridden him in a fixed-ring eggbutt snaffle with a wide mouthpiece, but he was completely unresponsive to it. "I am currently using a loose-ring French link snaffle for schooling and he does seem to settle into a better contact than with the gag, but he still leans heavily. "I need a bit that will encourage him to maintain a consistent outline and become lighter in my hand."

HILARY VERNON from Abbey Saddlery believes that, unfortunately, you have inherited Beamish's leaning tendencies. "Going down the stronger bit route with him will only teach him to get stronger," says Hilary. "I would try a flat lozenge eggbutt snaffle for dressage as this bit is slender and, although comfortable, will discourage him from leaning into the mouthpiece. The eggbutt cheek will make your signals slicker and quicker and they come in large sizes. "For jumping, I would try a Medium Port Uxeter. This bit has rein options on the cheekpiece so you can vary your degree of signal and has a chain on the back which, if set properly, will take some of the pressure out of his not-so-sensitive mouth and neatly distribute it on to his jaw. "Unlike a lot of leverage bits, this one has a balanced action with a good release and therefore rewards him when he responds." With only a limited number of bits allowed under dressage rules, finding the right bit can be difficult, stresses The Saddlery Shop's Lucy Nicholas. "In cases like Beamish's, it is often more productive to first find a bit the horse really works well in for use everyday," she says. "This will advance his schooling more quickly and

allow him to develop the correct muscles and mental attitude to work. Once established, he should then accept a closely related dressage legal bit for competitions. "A strong bit used with tact is far kinder than a mild bit used with force. Kangaroo bits make a very nice hanging cheek Waterford, with a thinner, less "bobbly" mouthpiece that would probably suit him well. It would give some poll pressure, but not as much as the Continental he was in for hunting. "If you found this bit worked well, a hanging cheek French link — ideally from Kangaroo to keep a similar feel — would offer an alternative for a test." **H&H**

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