

On The Bit
You Cannot Have It Both Ways
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FEI clearly stipulates the description of the 'on the bit' frame for the head and neck of the competitive dressage horse. Yet for years and years what has been seen in dressage competition is a fraudulent presentation of the rule. This appears to be caused by the riders presenting the tests and the judges who are incorrectly scoring the presentations.

What has caused this situation to become the accepted standard in competitive dressage? I have read numerous times an article by Bettina Drummond and Dr. Max Gahwyler entitled "The Definition of 'On the Bit'" in which they mention Wolfgang Niggli stating: "*Interestingly enough, this concept of having a horse in front of you and with a head carriage more in front of the vertical the more it is collected is clearly depicted in the pictures of Museler, which were adopted as correct by the FEI as long as Niggli was its chief but have pretty much fallen by the wayside as now.*"

In further researching the how and why of the incorrect 'on the bit' frame, I purchased Wolfgang Niggli's book entitled "Dressage a guideline for riders and judges" 2003. I read his words and viewed his drawings and discovered that, as a material fact, Mr. Niggli is the direct and proximate cause of the demise of the correct 'on the bit' frame as stipulated by the FEI Articles.

On page 7, Mr. Niggli states: "*We in the FEI introduced the freestyle dressage test in the early 1980s with the hope that it might improve and encourage the light and elegant, harmonious style of riding so that once again dressage might become an art form.*"

On page 20, Mr. Niggli states: *There should be a clear, **soft contact** with the bit. The contact can be just the weight of the rein, or it may be **considerably more.***" This seems to be a contradiction, for you cannot have soft contact with the bit and have considerably more contact at the same time. FEI Articles reference light contact with the bit, so the heavy contact demonstrated in the dressage competition is in violation of the rules.

Mr. Niggli continues with: *The contact is reflection of the amount of power and the manner in which it is being transmitted through the horse from the hindquarters and, as such, it may vary throughout the test. For example, in a piaffe or passage, the contact may be **very light** as the horse is very engaged and taking weight on his hind legs and not covering much ground. However, in an extension, there may be quite a **strong contact** resulting from the energy being transmitted from the hind legs through the horse's body as he thrusts himself forwards over the ground.*"

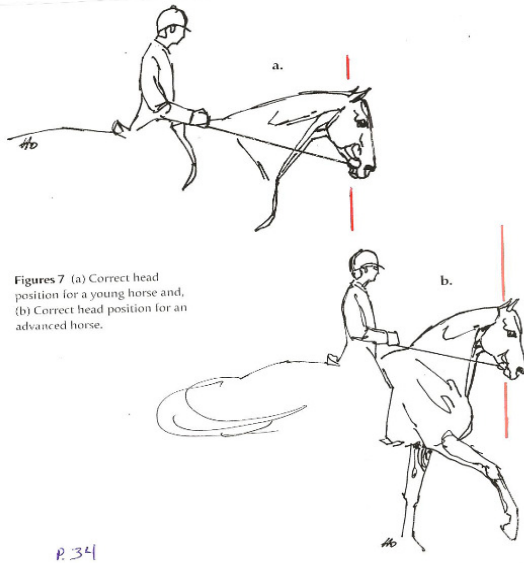
I find this to be a most intriguing statement simply because there is no visible difference in the rein contact being presented in the dressage competition arena. The curb bit has become the primary bit of contact and one can observe the snaffle bit drawn into the corners of the mouth while the curb bit shanks are at or near a ninety degree to the line of the horse's jaw bone.

FEI Articles state that the horse should appear to be doing the movement on its own. How can this image be presented when the riders are stepping on the gas and applying the emergency brake at the same time? On page 11, Mr. Niggli states: *There is not place in correct judging for personal likes and dislikes.*" Yet within the first 118 pages of his book, presents a personal vision of the image of the 'on the bit' frame which is contradictory of the stipulated FEI rules. Mr. Niggli consistently presents drawings and photographs of horses that are in violation of the basic stipulated requirement for 'all' dressage movements.

Mr. Niggli's background seems to be the key element in his overriding influence upon modern dressage competitions. From his book: "*In 1957 Niggli became a Swiss National Dressage Judge and he was a member of the Dressage Committee of the Swiss National Equestrian Federation from 1961-1986, being Chef d'Equipe at many international events, including the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. In 1964, he was promoted to FEI International Dressage Judge and he served on the Dressage Committee of the FEI from 1973-1976 and from 1979-1981. From 1981-1993 he was Chairman of this Committed and as such, became a member of the FEI Bureau.*"

Mr. Niggli's working influence upon the judging and scoring of dressage competitions was one of personal interactions with and overseeing of dressage judges."

Now I address Mr. Niggli's words found on page 33 wherein Mr. Niggli writes; "...with the nose a little in front of the vertical." Notice I have underlined the word nose and have done so for a reason. FEI Article 401 clearly does **not** use the word *nose* but instead stipulates head. This would mean that the underside of the lower jaw of the horse must be in front of the vertical.



[I am using images from his book that Mr. Niggli drew himself. I have inserted the red lines to show the vertical line from the poll]

On page 34, Mr. Niggli clearly depicts the correct 'on the bit' frame as stipulated in the FEI Articles.

He has done so for the horse that is at lower levels and for the horse that is in collection as required by the FEI Articles.

Notice that in both images the lower underside of the horse's jaw is in front of the vertical line from the poll.

On page 107, Mr. Niggli presents his personal vision of the 'on the bit' frame with two horses at passage.

What is against the rules besides the 'on the bit' frame of the Fig. 63 horse? It is the insertion of personal application of the description predicated upon the 'type' of horse.

Mr. Niggli has violated his own words and has inserted personal likes and/or dislikes into the stipulated description of the 'on the bit' frame.

The physical structure and/or breed type **does not** appear in the rules. Rather the rule applies to the stage of training.

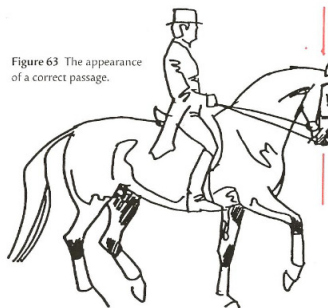
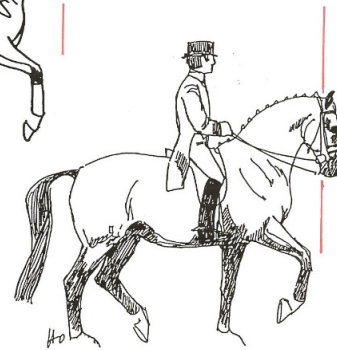
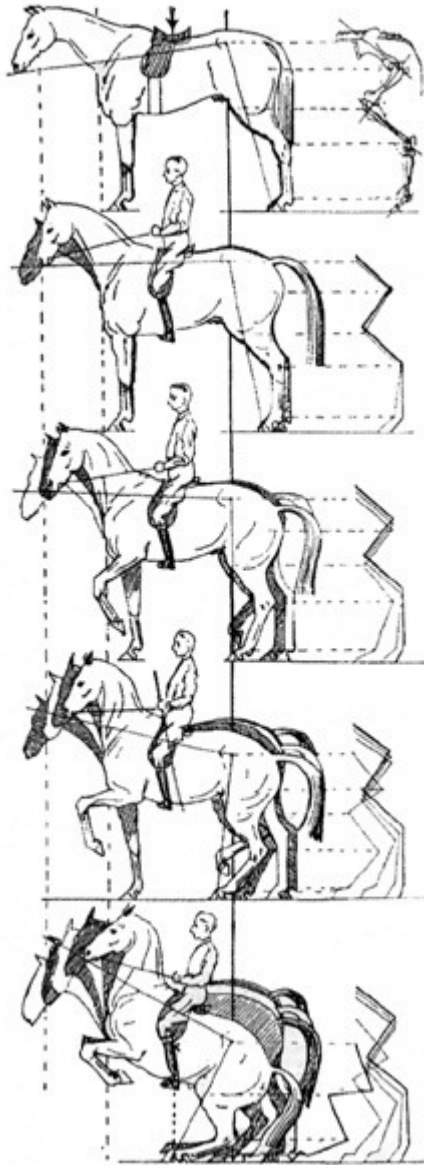


Figure 64 The appearance of a correct passage with a different type of horse from that shown in Figure 63.



FEI Articles 401 through 417 clearly and succinctly stipulate the correct 'on the bit' frame, however Article 417 Collection is the most applicable in the dressage competition arena. It states: *The position of the head and neck of a horse at the collected paces is naturally dependent on the stage of training and, to some degree, on its conformation. It is distinguished by the neck being raised without restraint, forming a harmonious curve from the withers to the poll, which is the highest point, with the nose slightly in front of the vertical. At the moment the athlete applies his aids to obtain a momentary and passing collecting effect, the head may become more or less vertical. The arch of the neck is directly related to the degree of collection.*

Notice that in this Article there is a glaring contradiction to the 'on the bit' description contained in the previous Articles. This Article describing Collection states the nose, while Article 401 states the 'the head', Article 402 states 'the nose line', Article 403 states 'the head', Article 404 states 'the head', Article 414 states 'nose line'. Article 401 is the stipulated mandated frame for 'on the bit' and is backed up by Articles 403/404.



[The image at the left is: The concept of collection and elevation in front. The lines behind the horse show the progressive flexion and engaging of the hindquarters. Wilhelm Museler from Reit Lehre 1928.]

Apparently these images by Museler are the images of collection accepted by FEI as correct under Mr. Niggli. Notice that in each position the underside of the lowest point of the horse's jaw is ALWAYS in front of the vertical, even at levade.

It is apparent that Mr. Museler understood the affects of extreme compression of the throatlatch area on the horse when excessive pressures are applied to the bit/bits. Mr. Niggli must of concurred by his acceptance of these images of collection. Yet, Mr. Niggli contradicts lightness by the allowance of more severe contact with the bit/bits, which result in the head of the horse coming behind the vertical and compressing the throatlatch region of the horse.

Examine the equine skeleton in the image to the right. You can clearly see that there is not much room between the rear bone structure of the head if it is drawn rearward.

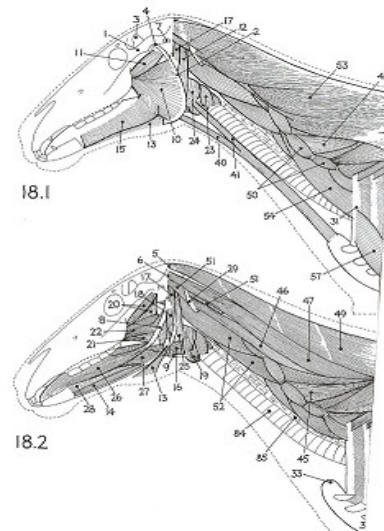


When the rider compresses the head into the throatlatch region, the muscles, nerves, airway and throat are going to be compressed. The more one 'pulls' the head into and behind the vertical, the more compression is going to be inflicted upon the soft tissues of the throatlatch region.

In the image to the right, examine closely the muscles and other soft tissues that the compression

of the throatlatch region will have an affect upon. What valid reason could exist that would validate the erroneous application of the 'on the bit' frame being allowed in dressage competitions in violation of the FEI Rules of Dressage?

FEI Abuse rule Article 142 Abuse of the Horse clearly states that; "Abuse means an action or omission which causes or is likely to cause pain or unnecessary discomfort to a Horse..."



Compression of the throatlatch region of the horse as demonstrated with the incorrect 'on the bit' over pressurized bit connections visually seen in the dressage competitive arena, in actually does cause extreme discomfort and pain to the horse, as well as, inflammation. The horse has no way to verbalize pain and discomfort so the horse is subjugated into participation.

To give yourself the opportunity to feel a 'little' bit of what these constrained dressage horses feel, please participate in a physical exercise. Tighten your shoulder muscles, tighten your neck muscles, pull your head straight down toward your shoulders, now drop your chin to your chest. Are you comfortable? Might you be feeling some areas of pain? And if you want to feel the affects of a bit, place a pencil in your mouth and pull on it like it is a bit. This is what the violations of the rules regarding the 'on the bit' frame are doing to the competitive dressage horses.

Lightness of the forehand of the horse is not achieved through excessive rein pressures. Such pressures actually cause the horse to resist the pressures by making the neck, wither and shoulder muscles have physical resistance, which removes the suppleness of the muscles that allow the horse to move with biomechanical correctness and fluidity in the forehand.

1. FEI and the numerous national equine federations must cease and desist with incorrect and fraudulent application and enforcement of the stipulated rules of dressage.

2. FEI and the numerous national equine federations must manifest changes to the licensed judges to insure that the rules are specifically followed, wherein, personal concepts, precepts and images cannot be used in administering the scoring process of the competitive dressage horse.

3. FEI and the numerous national equine federations must set in place the means to protest judges who score in violation of the rules and said means should not require any financial responsibility of the complainant.

4. FEI and the numerous national equine federations must not rely upon any equine research which adheres to the production of data that supports the anti-biomechanical processes required of the horse.

5. To insure a 'fair and level playing field', FEI and the numerous national equine federations must allow into competition, without segregation by class, the use of the various forms of bitless bridles used to school and ride horses.

In the United States, the Washington State Supreme Court held that Webster's Third New International Dictionary 1621 (1969) definition of "*pain*" as "*a state of physical or mental lack of well-being or physical or mental uneasiness that ranges from mild discomfort or dull distress to acute often unbearable agony*", applies to the abuse of the horse. [118 Wn. App. 730, *State v. Zawistowski*]