

The Mute Scream – an Appeal

by Barbara Schnabel



A horse whose mouth is tied shut is not able to chew contentedly, communicate precisely with the rider's hand, swallow or breathe freely – and is also not able to evade any pain generated by the rider, by opening its highly sensitive mouth. A flight animal without the ability to voice pain is unable to let us hear suffering and pain. But we could see both – if we would allow it.

This interlude sprang from complete bewilderment and great indignation – but also from hope. Bewilderment over the FEIF sport committee's completely ignoring the horses' welfare.

Great indignation over the fact that potentially approving the combination of curb bit with English flash noseband again is even being discussed.

And from the hope that at the upcoming FEIF conference the combined curb bit/flash nose band will be banned for good for sport competitions, and that this decision will be extended to breeding competitions as well.

And while they are at it, they will hopefully also debate something else relevant to animal welfare we see very often and that should have been addressed a long time ago: placing saddles too far back onto areas of the spine not able to carry loads. Hope for progress, not regress; hope for pro horse initiatives that mean something; hope for insight and real change.

Obviously, we cannot just leave it to the riders alone – contrary to the FEIF sport director's opinion – how and with what equipment they present their horses.

Nobody has any influence over what happens at home during training. But where we do have the power and the influence, we have to take a clear and unmistakable stand; for the welfare of our horses.

Thus this appeal:

- To FEIF – to use their decision making power “the power to place a piece of equipment on their prohibited list at any time” (FEIF sport director Doug Smith to TK) truly and responsibly for the welfare of the horse.
- To the executives and delegates of all FEIF member federations – to use their voices for something they all signed off on “the Code of Conduct for the welfare of the horse”.
- To the judges – to always be aware of their true task and to look closely and to judge according to the welfare of the horse: the riding, the tack and the saddle placement.
- To all competition riders – to ride their horses cleanly and fair from day one and without ever manipulating them, and to present them according to their schooling level.
- To all horse lovers in all clubs – each association lives because of us and through us, its members. It has never been easier than today to communicate with each other and to share opinions. Write to your clubs and associations and tell them what you want, and what you don’t want to see.
- To all vendors of equipment – you are horse people with a responsibility; ban dubious bits and equipment from your stores and explain to customers asking for them why you won’t sell them.
- To all visitors of competitions, shows and exhibitions – don’t be intoxicated by roaring music and horses that are being ridden too fast, and then forget about those who matter and whom we want to see: finely schooled and happy horses that do not need a flash noseband. Look into their eyes and to their mouths. Be ecstatic about good rides. And voice clearly when something is wrong. Don’t worry, the riders, judges and those responsible will become aware.
- To all of us who love horses – to educate ourselves all the time, to read, to learn, to practice and to always listen to our horses. We ride our whole lives. We can therefore always look into that mirror with joy that our horses place in front of us every second we spend with them.

Let’s create a pro horse alliance!

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