

# Bridling in a Courteous Manner

By Liz Hughey, [thecowgirlpoet.com](http://thecowgirlpoet.com)

This is the 4th article in the "Being Courteous to your Ride" series.

The riding animals that I care for and refer to as "my animals," are actually owned by my family. The animals are not mine, but I am their caretaker and their most consistent handler. Having them owned by an entire family of people means that they are handled by an entire family of people, and unfortunately for the animals, we all do things differently. However, spending time with the stock is far more important than how you do it in my book, so I don't complain or point fingers. I simply lead by example and undo bad habits taught to the stock with my consistent behavior. I am the person that handles our small herd the most, so the horse and mules are used to my consistency. I can always tell when others have been messing with the herd, because they pick up little habits so quickly. Whether it be pulling back on the lead, trying to walk in front of me while leading, or stepping away before I am seated in the saddle; these habits are taught by lack of consistency and can be picked in just one outing.

My most unfavorable habit taught to our mules and horses is not excepting the bit and raising the head to try and escape it. This is a habit taught to the animal by someone, unknowingly, bridling in an awkward position or hitting them in the teeth with the bit. This article will touch on how to courteously bridle your riding equine.

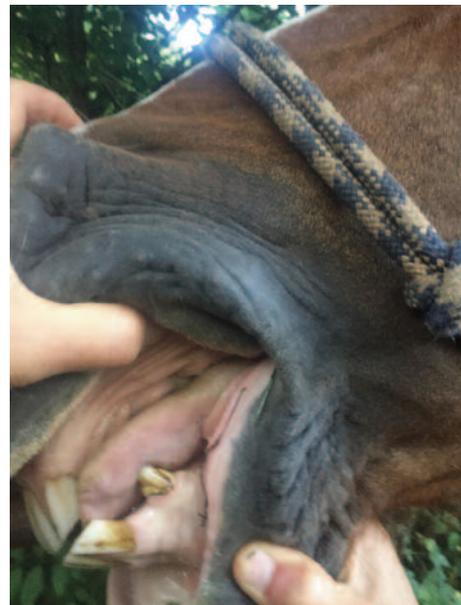
After catching, leading to the rail, grooming, and saddling your animal, the next step is usually bridling them. Approaching at the animals left side, the "on-side", the first thing I do when bridling is untie the animal from the rail, leaving the lead rope hung over the rail. This gives the animal a bit of comfort in escape; if they do raise their head, there is no pole pressure applied by the lead tied to the rail and gives them the release/escape that they are looking for. They are not trapped and I do not want them to feel this way.

My next step is placing the reins over their head and hanging them on their neck. I am a trail rider/guide/packer. I have had little to no riding instruction; in fact, I am

an instructor's worse nightmare. I ride with my reins tied in a knot, so that if I have a problem with another rider or animal behind me and have to quickly dismount, I can hang the reins over my saddle horn and not worry about my animal stepping on and breaking them. We all do things differently. I feel with equines, there are many ways to do certain things; we all have our own style.

If my animal raises its head to escape me putting the reins on its neck, I simply place my hand on the animal's pole, the area on top of the equine's head and behind the ears, and rest it. I may apply a slight bit of pressure downward, but I am not pushing on them. As soon as their head starts to fall toward the ground, I release pressure and let their head fall. This may need to be repeated a few times to get their head in a low working position.

After the reins are hung over their neck, I take the crown of the bridle into my right hand and rest it on top of the animal's pole. Again, applying slight pole pressure if the animal raises its head. I then take my left hand and cradle the bit in front of the animal's nose. Using my left thumb, I reach into my animal's mouth into the lateral,

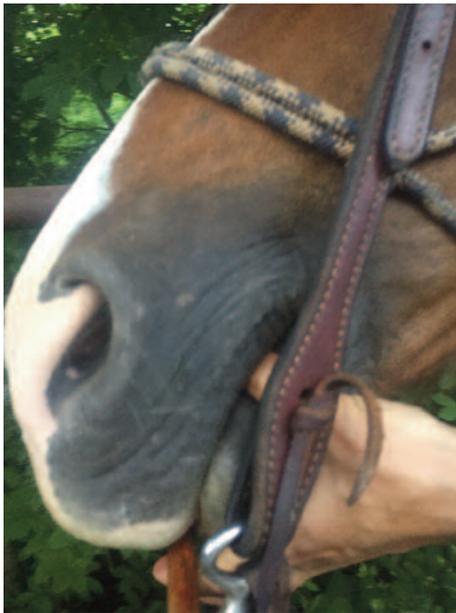


toothless gab on the left side and tickle the top of their mouth and tongue with my thumb. This cues the animal to open its mouth and gives me time to place the bit into the mouth without ever having contact with teeth.

Many novice equine owners might think this move is crazy for fear of being bitten.

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However, most equines have a toothless area on the lateral sides of their mouth and will open the mouth when asked in this manner. I love feeling the inside of an equine's mouth, so soft, like the skin of a dolphin, it gives an appreciation for what the animal is feeling when a rider is constantly pulling on the reins and applying pressure to the bit and the roof of the animal's mouth.

The last step in bridling your ride in a courteous manner, the ears. When placing the crown of the bridle over the ears of the equine and onto the pole, the ears should be gently folded forward while the leather is taken over them. No crinkling here. Wad up your ear with a hand and let me know how it feels. With mules, I prefer to either undo the left side of the bridle completely or use a mule bridle, that has a crown latch that can be done and undone, allowing one to work around their ears.

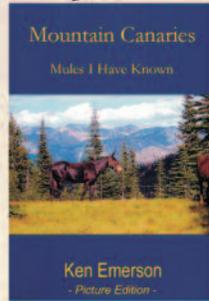
When fitted correctly, applying the slightest bit, snaffle, or shank pressure with the reins should give the animal a slight smile, and the bit should not ever be resting on or in the animal's teeth.

You are ready to ride! Don't forget to tighten your cinch before mounting up like discussed in article three.

Please read the 5<sup>th</sup> and final article in the "Being Courteous to Your Ride Series; A Courteous Day Ride, What to Take to Ensure Comfort for Yourself and Your Animal". And check out my website, [thecowgirlpoet.com](http://thecowgirlpoet.com) to view my literary work and order your author signed copy of the children's book Barney the Lopsided Mule. Follow me on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter @thecowgirlpoet

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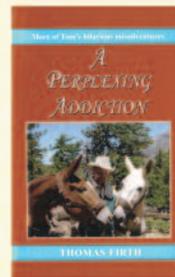
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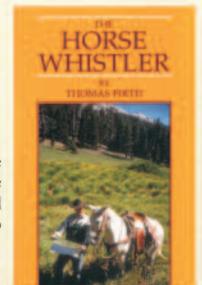
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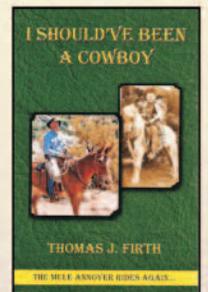
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