



# MYLER BITS

## GENERAL OUTLINE

The Myler Biting System was invented by 3 American brothers, who were looking for a gentler, more effective way of communicating with horses.

### Comfort and Welfare

The Myler Biting Philosophy is based on making the horse as comfortable as possible in its mouth, so it can be relaxed and concentrate on what its rider is asking it. As all horses are different in their anatomy, disposition and behaviour, and as their needs change throughout their training, there are 30 different Myler Bit mouthpieces and a wide choice of cheek styles, to make sure that there is a suitable choice of bit for each individual horse and its rider.

### Part of the Puzzle

No bit will hurt a horse on its own without someone hauling on the reins. Equally, no bit will train a horse, or make up for impatience or poor riding. Effective biting is only part of the whole approach to good horsemanship, but just like every other part, it needs careful and informed attention. The Myler Bit range enables the rider to choose the most comfortable bit with the clearest signalling action for each individual horse, so the communication between horse and rider is as smooth, effective and efficient as possible.

### Resistance

Not being able to talk, horses are able to communicate with us only by resistance or relaxation. The main reason horses resist bits, in whatever way, is to escape the pressure on their tongues, which prevents swallowing, (try pressing your finger onto the centre of your tongue and trying to swallow).

### Bit Action

Generally, bit pressure works on the tongue and the bars (and the head in some cases), to control and train the horse. Most bits, and definitely all snaffles, roll down into the tongue to a certain extent (depending on the cheek style used), when the rider exerts rein pressure. The main differences with the Myler system are:

- a) that the pressure is as comfortable as possible and non-damaging and there is more tongue room to allow swallowing. (All mouthpieces are curved, some have ports, and they have barrels, or sleeves, covering the joints, to prevent pinching and to produce more of a “wrap” feel rather than the nutcracker action on the bars given by most snaffle-type bits);



- b) that the horse is rewarded by the pressure being released more effectively when he does what is asked (eg. brings his head into the desired position);
- c) that the independent side action (see below) allows a much clearer signal to the horse;
- d) that the most appropriate bit is used for each individual horse at that specific period of his training.

### **Slotted Cheeks, or “Hooks”**

Most of the cheeks are available with hooks, (like slots), to fix the position of the bridle and the reins on the cheek ring of the bit. The top hook (for the cheek pieces) does precisely what the fulmer, or full cheek, does when used, (as it was designed to be), with leather keepers. – It stabilises the bit inside the horse’s mouth and holds it off the tongue when the rider is not applying pressure. When used, the rein hook allows the rider to get more leverage, exerting pressure on the tongue as the bit was designed to do, – but more efficiently, – so less pressure is necessary. In this way the backward pressure on the horse’s mouth is **less severe and/or prolonged**. It also allows a little pressure to be applied to the poll. The hooks, therefore, allow the bit to be used as it was designed to be, but more effectively, more gently, and with instant release for the horse as soon as it does what has been asked of it. This will also help the rider to have quieter hands.

### **Independent Side Action**

Most Myler Bits have independent side action, wherein one side of the bit moves without the other, using the joint within the barrel as a pivot. This gives a clearer signal when turning or working a horse that is stiff on one rein, or when lifting a shoulder on a bend, as it allows that side of the bit to be activated, without at the same time driving the centre joint down into the tongue, as happens with an ordinary snaffle.

### **Myler Combination Bit**

The Myler Combination Bit is one of the kindest bits available. It spreads the rein pressure exerted by the rider over several different areas. Initially, it acts on the nose; poll and back of the jaw, with the mouthpiece “floating”. 1/3 of the total pressure will be felt in each of these three areas. Only if the rider continues to pull on the reins will the mouthpiece engage, as it moves up against a little “stop” on the cheek ring and activates on the tongue and bars like a “normal” mouthpiece. At this point, the pressure exerted by the rider is spread over 5 areas – nose; poll; jaw; tongue; and bars. The Myler Combination Bit is available in several different mouthpieces and in two shank lengths.



It is particularly suitable as the first bit for a young horse, which will be used to head-pressure signals from being led in a head collar. It is also a great bit for horses who are very nervous in the mouth; ex-racehorses who have been trained to “run into their mouths” and are reluctant to come into a schooled-horse outline; and older horses who think they know it all and will benefit from a very different feel in the communication they receive from the rider.

### Levels of Training

Rather than just using one bit throughout your horse’s working life, the Myler system is progressive and different bits may be required as your horse moves through his training. The bits are rated according to the horse’s level of training:

#### Level One:

A horse at Level One is at the beginning of its training, where basic balance and obedience is being asked for (eg. trot to walk, walk to halt, basic turning, etc.) and where few of the rider’s body aids are understood.

Level one bits use mainly tongue pressure. There will also be a little bar pressure and, depending on the style of bit, some curb or poll pressure, but a Level One bit basically uses the sensitivity of the tongue to give clear, concentrated signals at its centre. The pressure can be released quickly and evenly when the horse does as he is asked.

#### Levels Two and Two-Three:

A horse at Level Two has achieved a basic training, and is now progressing in a particular discipline, with a degree of balance and collection. He will be relaxed and flexing from the poll (ie on the vertical), and will be able to hold his outline when rein pressure is released. He will be stronger and able to sustain longer periods of work with better concentration and understanding. At this stage the rider wants to refine and define his aids for more precise work. Level Two and Level Two-Three Bits still use the tongue for signalling and control, but with more subtle pressure, spread across the tongue, and with ports introduced in Level Two/Three. The horse has shown that he can work without the concentrated tongue pressure of a Level One Bit, but it is still too early to release the tongue completely. The bars, curb and poll may also be utilised to a certain extent and Independent Side Action becomes very important as the work becomes more complex.

#### Level Three:

The third level of training relates to a “finished” horse from whom quite a high degree of collection and athleticism is expected. A Level Three horse will be relaxed and will work well off the rider’s seat, leg and hand.

Mouthpieces at this level give maximum tongue relief, working largely off the bars with a little poll and/or curb pressure, although the appropriate bit will depend very much on the horse’s disposition.



The Myler approach is that you allow a horse more freedom gradually as he progresses through his training, rather like gradually allowing a child more and more responsibility as he matures. The Mylers point out that we do not communicate and interact with a small child in the same way we do with a teenager, or indeed another adult, so why should we seek to use the same communication tool throughout our horse's training?

Most snaffle-type bits are level 1, and if a horse is resisting a traditional snaffle, there is not much point putting him into a Myler level 1 bit, because it will act in a similar way, (albeit more comfortably). The horse is probably trying to communicate that he needs more tongue room, so a level 2 or 3 bit, depending on what stage he is at, would probably be more suitable.

### **Bitting Advice**

It is vital that horses are bitted individually for their specific needs. All Myler Retailers are trained to be able to help their customers select the most appropriate bit for their particular horse; and further advice is available through Shaws Equestrian if required.

A very important source of information is The Myler's book *"The Level Best for your Horse"* and the DVD **"A Whole Bit Better"**. They contain lots of information on how bits work in the horse's mouth in general, and about Myler Bits in particular. The DVD covers a comprehensive seminar given by Dale Myler; includes interviews with top riders, drivers and trainers from all disciplines; and uses detailed graphics to explain the principles of good bitting.

The book/DVD package costs only about £10 and really does help to identify what a horse is trying to tell us about the bit in his mouth.