



November 2017

In response to the open letter to FEIF on the matter of ported bits

Dear Friends of the Icelandic horse,

The mission of FEIF is to focus on horse welfare – and our goal is to put the welfare of the horse first in everything we do. We believe horse welfare considerations are not limited to certain bits, but rather go much further. The focus of the discussion should be reducing the tolerance of mouth wounds, no matter which bit is used.

After two years of checking the condition of horses' mouths and watching mouth controls implemented in many different ways in FEIF member countries, the FEIF Sport Committee revisited the topic of ported bits. The Icelandic bits in question were on the prohibited equipment list of sport riding since 2015, in support of the decision taken in Iceland not to allow any ported leverage bits. Ported leverage bits other than the Icelandic bit continued to be allowed in sport competitions.

In October 2017 the FEIF Sport Committee decided to lift the ban on ported Icelandic bits, as checks over the last two years did not provide sufficient grounds for banning the general class of ported bits with leverage altogether. At the same time as lifting the ban on ported bits, it was discussed to increase the number of mouth checks and thus further promote good practice.

Evidence suggests many mouth injuries occur in connection with a range of bits that are of the wrong size or that are not correctly positioned in the mouth of the horse. Stigmatizing a class of bits does nothing to address this problem. This can most efficiently be addressed by increasing the number of mouth inspections and further penalizing positive findings.

In all considerations of whether to ban equipment, we have to begin by assuming the equipment is used correctly. In the case of bits this includes the following checks:

- Is the bit of the right size?
- Is the bit placed correctly in the mouth of the horse?
- Is the curb chain/strap (if present) set correctly?
- Are the reins connected in the right place?
- Is the rider sufficiently experienced in the use of the bit?
- Is the horse sufficiently trained for the use of the bit?

If all these assumptions are satisfied, the decision to ban or not will be made based on whether it is possible to use the equipment without causing harm to the horse or gaining an unfair competitive advantage.

Regardless of whether specific bits are on the prohibited list or not, all riders and officials have a duty to monitor the effects of the bit on the mouth and not only on the quality of the performance. Horse welfare is best served by increasing awareness of the importance of mouth checks and decreasing the acceptance of “small” injuries.

FEIF is the collective voice of the member associations. If the member associations believe it is important to have a bit on the prohibited equipment list, the appropriate way is to bring a motion and put it to the vote at the annual Sport Leader meeting.

We welcome your input and are looking forward to constructive discussions and any other concerns in connection with the welfare of the Icelandic horse.

The FEIF Sport Committee and the Board of FEIF

