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A Horse's Prayer



Horse's love it when their owner's understand them.

Horsemanship is about the horse teaching you about yourself.

Care and Cleaning of Bosal and Rawhide



No discussion of the Bosal and Hackamore would be complete without mentioning, [Ed Connell](#). His books about using, starting and training with the Hackamore are from long ago and explain things well. If you want to completely understand the Bosal and Hackamore, his books explain it in detail.

Bosals and Hackamores were originally used to start colts in training. Since untrained colts make many mistakes, a hackamore does not injure sensitive tissue in the colt's mouth and provides firm and safe control. The term Hackamore and Bosal are interchangeable, however, technically the Bosal is only the rawhide braid around the nose of the horse. The hanger and reins together with the Bosal completes the Hackamore.

Parts of a Hackamore :[Hackamore](#) came from Spanish culture and was derived from the Spanish word jaquima (hak-kee-mah). The parts of the Hackamore are:

Bosal (boz-al):This is the part around the horse's nose usually made of braided rawhide, but it can be made of leather, horsehair or rope. The size and thickness of the bosal can vary from pencil size (thin) to 5/8 size (thick). The Bosal can vary in length and stiffness. A mutation of the bosal can have a cable or steel core. Traditionally, the core should be rawhide to make it pliable and fit closely to the horse's nose. Parts of the bosal are the nose button and cheek buttons, cheeks or shanks, and the heel knot. I like soft bosals, but when schooling a young horse, who may have more resistance, I use a stiffer and thicker one. I never use a cable or steel core bosal. They are heavy, do not give, will hurt the horse and will ruin any softness you are trying to achieve.



Mecate (meh-kah-teh): [Mecate](#) is a continuous rope, traditionally horsehair, that is wrapped around the cheeks of the bosal in a manner to provide loop reins and a lead line. Other types of ropes are frequently substituted for the mecate but are used in the same manner. I like using Yacht rope that is used on sail boats. This rope is soft and is designed to be around salt water. Since a horse sweats salt, this will not damage or weaken the rope. Cotton is another good rope that is affordable, soft and works well. (You may hear a Mecate called a Macarty. This is a mutation by Americans of the word Mecate)



Fiador (fee-ah-door): A [fiador](#) is a rope throat latch that usually consists of a doubled rope that is passed around the neck just behind the ears and is attached to the bosal at the heel knot. It helps keep the bosal at right angles to the face of the horse. A variation of the fiador is the rope halter, also known as a natural halter.

Reins: When a Mecate is not used any reins can be used on a bosal. The problem will be

*Photos Rick and Horses

Clinics on Request

*Contact Rick



Think Like A Horse
By: Rick Gore

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securing them to the bosal. You can attach them the same way you do the Mecate.

Hanger/Headstall/brow band: These complete the hackamore and is usually made of leather, but small ropes or cords are also used. The headstall should be adjusted to raise or lower the bosal on the horse's nose. Brow bands are added to prevent the headstall from slipping back on the neck. A hanger is more of one piece of leather that runs from the Bosal to around the back of the horse's ears.

Fitting and adjusting a hackamore: A [hackamore](#) must be properly adjusted to achieve the best results. It is placed low on the nose, near the soft cartilage, but not below it. Low placement assures maximum leverage and encourages flexion. The bosal should be short enough to make both nose and chin contact without sliding up the nose. To put more pressure on the nose than on the chin, adjust the bosal to allow a slight lift of the heel knot before the cheeks touch the horse's chin. If more contact on the chin is desired, the cheeks of the bosal should be precisely adjusted to make simultaneous contact with the chin and nose. Fitting is the most argued point about a bosal. Some like it higher and some like it lower. Lower will give more leverage and higher will give less movement. We are only talking about two inches or less of play. As long as it is not hurting or uncomfortable to the horse, it makes little difference. You can help make a bosal fit better by using a bosal shaper. The photo to the right shows how to shape it so it will fit better around the horse's nose. I have another link on my [horseman tips](#) page to a great site with good gear who sells a bosal block.



Making these adjustments will necessitate selecting a bosal length appropriate for a particular horse's nose. Sometimes finding the exact length needed is difficult. Bosals that are too short cannot be used, but those too long may be shortened by binding the cheeks tighter together with the mecate. Some Horsemen prefer to use bosals made from manila lariat rope (too rough for me). I like soft rawhide because - if I was a horse that is what I would want on me.

Braided Rawhide Bosal Care and Cleaning:

Most good Bosals are rawhide and require minimal cleaning if cared for properly. Do not use oils on rawhide, conditioning cream works best. Two things that will damage rawhide are water and heat. Both will dry it out or rot it and will remove conditioning.

If a bosal gets very wet, it will need to be dried to minimize this damage. The best way is to hang it from the heel knot not in direct sunlight.

Reins should be removed and allowed to dry in a straight manner. Don't hang rope/reins from metal that can rust or stain your gear. Wood, plastic or using a string to hang from metal are alternatives.

When the bosal is dry, look at the edges of the rawhide strings to if they look fuzzy or feel rough. If they do, then they need conditioning. Ray Holes Vaquero Rawhide Cream seems to work best and gives good results. Rub and massage the bosal (or other rawhide) with the cream. As you rub in the conditioner, you may see it turn brown or dirty. If you want you can use a cloth, wipe away all the dirty cream, and then re-apply clean conditioner. Work in any excess conditioner with your hands, fingers and then use a clean cloth to remove any that can't be worked it. Then hang the bosal for drying, NOT in direct sunlight.

You can use a block to shape a bosal or you can allow them to shape themselves by hanging them from the heel knot over a can nailed to the wall or a small piece of round fence post (about 3 inch in diameter) are two possibilities. When you finish riding, just hang your bosal upside down on the can, block or fence post to keep it open and ready for the next ride.

For Light Cleaning of the Bosal:

If you just want to clean your bosal you can use cool, clean water, a soft tooth brush, a towel and some Murphy's Oil Soap Paste or Fiebing's White Saddle Soap. The Murphy's paste is the better if you don't mind the slight yellow color. If you don't want to change the color of the rawhide, then choose the white saddle soap.

Rub the bosal with some of the Murphy's paste or white saddle soap and then dampen the tooth brush and use it to brush the braiding. Wipe off the dirt and suds with a cloth or towel. Never spray or wet rawhide with water. You want to use minimum water and try and keep it as dry as possible doing cleaning. Remove excess water and soap suds as soon as possible. Let it dry. If it looks like it needs conditioning, you can just rub it down well with the Murphy's paste or white saddle soap since that works as a light conditioner. Buff off excess conditioner with a soft cloth or towel. If it needs a deeper conditioning treatment, use the Vaquero Rawhide Cream as I described above.

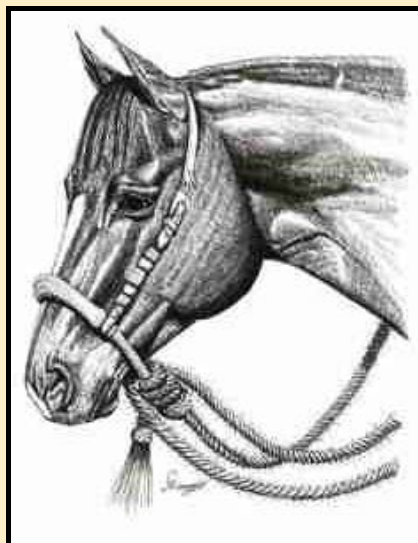
I have attached three links on where **you can order the Vaquero Rawhide Cream below:**

[Vaquero Cream 1](#)

[Vaquero Cream 2](#)

[Vaquero Cream 3](#)

The severity of the bosal is important and lies in the hands of the rider. Severe contact can cause the horse to overreact to pressures. It is difficult to show the horse what you want if it is distracted by pain. Too soft of contact can result in the horse disregarding completely what the rider is trying to show it. Hardness and rigidity of the bosal are a couple of prime factors affecting severity. Braided rawhide bosals that are large in diameter and have rigid cores can be severe. For extreme softness, bosals may be made from soft cotton rope. The severity of bosals may be varied by adding or removing certain cushioning materials from the cheeks and nose button. Many materials are satisfactory for this purpose; the most commonly used is sheepskin. Soft Hands is the key to any training.



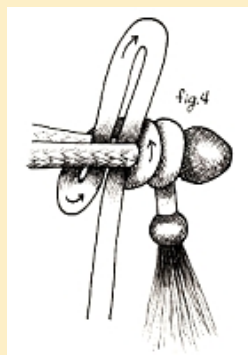
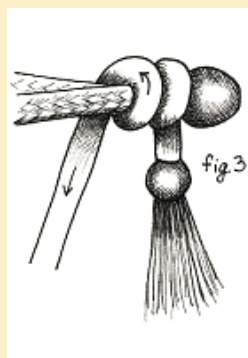
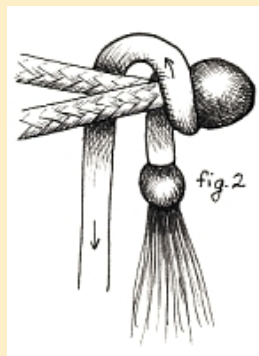
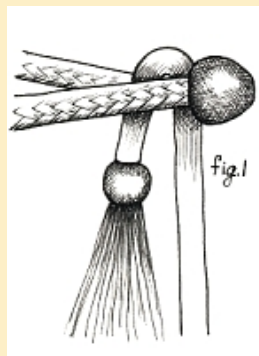
Weight at the heel knot of the bosal should be sufficient to cause instant release of chin pressure when the rider quits pulling and the horse puts his head in a neutral position. When the fiador is used, it must be loose enough to allow this release of chin pressure and tight enough to prevent the bosal from slipping off the nose. A fiador also helps the bosal to balance when the head is neutral. Use of a hackamore is based on the simple principle that the horse learns to respond to pressures on its nose and under its chin.

Tying A Mecate:

Tying a Mecate onto the bosal is simple once you do it a few times. I have attached some pictures that demonstrate this so it may be easier. In the pictures the bosal is hanging as if it was on a horse, so the tassel is hanging toward the ground. In the fourth picture is where you are making your reins, you can make them as long or as short as you like by just adjusting how much rope you pull in step four. So the loop in step four is going up and over your horse's head. The last picture is securing the rope and making your lead rope with the end of the Mecate. Notice the last loop sends the end of the rope the same way as the start tassel and opposite as the reins. You should be able to copy and blow up these pictures for more detail.

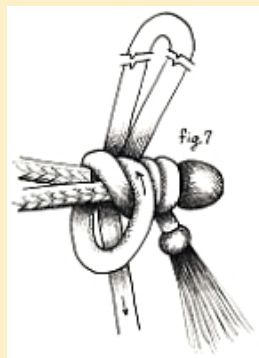
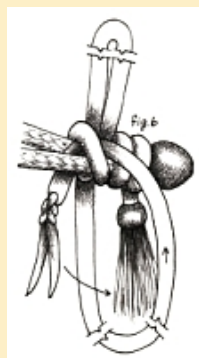
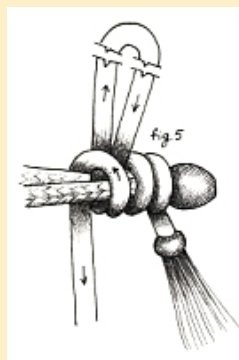
To watch a video [Click Here to see how to tie a Mecate Rein to a Bosal by Rick Gore.](#)

You can also click any of the pictures below to view my video on tying and connecting reins to a bosal.



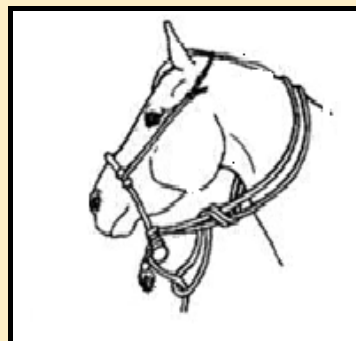
NOTE: Do NOT cut rope, in the photos it looks like the rope is cut, that is just to show loop

part, a Mecate Rein is one solid rope.



Mecate Reins Wrap for Leading

The photo below shows how to wrap your mecate reins around the horse's neck and use the lead rope without pulling the bosal off the horse's nose. If you do not wrap this way and try to lead your horse, you will pull the bosal off the horse's nose and your horse will be loose.



Biggest Mistakes When Using a Hackamore:

Hard or rough hands. If you pulling and fighting with the horse you have not prepared him

correctly. A horse has to respect you and the bosal. If you have done your ground work properly, your horse will trust you and will accept the bosal without much resistance. If you throw it on the horse and start trying to force the horse, he will associate the bosal with pain and will never accept it. Riding with a bosal, NO BIT, is a purer form of horsemanship. People that use bits, any bits, are cheating themselves and the horse. Using a bit is easier and will cover up what you lack in understanding the horse. You can force and use pain to get a horse to do most anything. To get a horse to respond with ease and to ride as partnership is a dance that both you and the horse enjoy. I believe the absolute key to handling reins is minimal movement. Reins are not used for balance, security or forcing head movement. They are an extension of the soft touch of your hand. Move them less, move them soft and only move them if you want the horse to do something. **For The Record** I prefer riding in a rope halter over anything else. Many do not trust or have confidence to ride in a rope halter, so they like the bosal better, they think, they ARE wrong, that a bosal gives more control than a rope halter and a bit gives more control than a bosal and bigger harsher bit give the best control. This all so wrong on so many levels, but **there are none so blind as those that do not want to see.**

Starting to Use the Bosal

Bosal Training



The [hackamore](#) is the oldest form of horse control. It works on pressure points on the horse's nose, chin and face. Possibly the truest form of hackamore is the bosal, simply a braided rawhide device that goes around the nose, ending in a heel knot under the chin. The word "hackamore" is thrown around quite a bit in the horse world today, and for good reason. It has been and still is considered by some, the ultimate training system for the horse, but it is also an art form, because not just any rider can use it. The rider has to understand the horse and communicate with the horse, unlike a bit where the rider can hurt and cause pain to make the horse respond.

If you to see why a bit is bad watch [How Bits Create Pain to a Horse](#)

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The bosal should hang balanced, so the horse can feel the slightest touch or movement. You never pull hard on the reins of a hackamore or your horse will learn to run away from the pressure and you'll have undone all your hackamore training. There is a term called "doubling" that teaches a horse to respect the bosal. Most horses don't need this if they are properly started.

Many endurance and pleasure riders are using rope halter hackamores, which have knots placed over the nose to contact the sensitive spots on the horse's face.

Another alternative to the bit is the side-pull hackamore or halter, which is a rope and leather nose band that has rings for reins on both sides. This is a useful tool for starting colts, because it is easy to turn their heads left or right and to teach the horse how to give to pressure and learn direct reining.

Direct reining (plow reins) is when the head comes to the side you are pulling on. In a hackamore and a bit, when you pull the left rein, the horse feels pressure on his right side and moves away from the pressure to the left. A bit makes it easy to cheat and pull the head verses suggesting and letting the horse move away from pressure. Most people don't even realize that a snaffle bit pulls on the opposite side of the horses face.

Indirect reining (neck reins) is when the horse has advanced to moving away from the rein pressure when it is laid against his neck. Many people say or think their horse is neck reined, but they are actually still pulling the horses head. A true neck reined horse will work on loose and slack reins. The reins will never be tight, even on a stop. A good neck reined horse will be advanced enough to know leg pressure and body position. If you want to test and see if your horse is neck reined, ride it without a bit, bosal or headstall (bridleless riding). Put a rope or string around his neck and ride the horse with only that rope. A true neck reined horse will do just fine. Of course, the rider has to know how to give clear signals with their body and legs. (Pat Parelli calls this a savvy sting)

Both the bosal and side-pull are good for new riders or for horses that have been soured to a bit. You still need to ride any horse with a light touch. When steering, start with your hands wide and don't be rough. Move both hands to turn, getting both neck and direct rein. I like to move my hand so the horse can easily see it. Seeing my hand go out is an additional cue for the horse. So when I turn left, I move my left hand out so my horse can see, I give slight pull with my left hand and I lay my right hand and rein over the neck, also to the left, I push with my right leg and move my left leg away from the horse. While doing this I look to the left (where I want to go) which cocks my hips to left. All of this sends a clear signal that I want to go left. As my horse progresses, I slowly do less and soon, my horse will turn left with just a little leg pressure and moving my hand an inch or two in the direction I want to go. When training in a hackamore you will always use both hands and have one rein in each hand. After the horse is trained you can use one hand and neck reining.

I see people talking on the phone, smoking a cigarette or talking to someone else, while holding their reins in one hand, looking in the opposite direction they want to go, and then blame the horse for not listening. The old saying: ***"To err is human, but to blame the horse is even more human."***

The mechanical, or leverage hackamore is another bitless device. It puts pressure on the nose and under the chin. The mechanical hackamore acts somewhat like a curb bit. Some add a noseband that is thick, soft and flat and people think this will be more comfortable and easier on the horse. However, this is not the pain area; the chain under the chin is what causes the pain as it digs into the jaw bone and nerves. A mechanical hackamore can break the jaw of a horse in rough hands. As I have said before, any bit or training tool that causes pain is a "cheat" and shows a lack of understanding for the horse and a lack of horsemanship.



It is important to do some groundwork and make sure your horse knows how to give its head to the bosal. You can do this by walking your horse in a bosal, attach a lounge line and round corral him with the bosal. From the ground, teach him to flex left and right and give to the bosal. Reach over the horse, grab the reins on the other side and put slight pressure to see if you can get the horse to back up with the bosal. You will know when you horse is ready and understands it. Then you will teach him to move, stop and turn on a light rein.

About the worst time in the life of a young horse is when a bit is first placed in their mouth. Most horses are broken to saddle between 2 to 3 years. At that stage in their life, there is a lot going on in their mouths. A snaffle bit can do a lot of damage and set the course for many more problems to come. I suspect this set of events has ruined more horses than just about anything else.

Here is a good video about the negative affects of a bit.

:Negative Affects of Bits

One thing hackamore training does is never teaches a horse to brace (the rider can teach this but should not). A hackamore cannot overpower a horse. A horse that has learned to brace himself cannot be lite on the bit. He cannot be a well balanced horse. He cannot collect himself and give to the bit. I have just described a horse than not only will not gait, he will not perform at anything well. I will even go further and say this is not a safe horse.

There is an old vaquero saying, "If a horse is not safe, you are stealing rides". Hackamore training is especially beneficial for an aged horse. Because you are not in their mouths anymore, you do not have to deal with that baggage. You start with a fresh horse and a fresh attitude. What is so interesting about the hackamore training system is that it incorporates the principles of natural horsemanship and dressage. Just think, the hackamore has been on this continent for about 300 hundred years. This is not a new idea!

Most horsemen and horses like the hackamore because the horse can easily eat and drink. And of course, any horse likes not having metal in his mouth.



I have attached a copy of a question and answer about using a bosal verses a snaffle bit.

Question: Hi Rick, your site is very informative, thanks. I always here that a snaffle bit is the mildest and best training bit out there. Almost everyone I know uses a snaffle bit. What is the difference between a bosal and snaffle and why do you prefer a bosal? How do you use the two differently?

Answer: Metal bits in the mouth = Less Horsemanship, more pain, and a lack of partnership between horse and rider.

Hi Tom, great question and I can tell you are thinking like a horse. If you were a horse, you would want a bosal and not a piece of metal in your mouth. A bosal takes more time, softer hands and requires more communication from the rider. I like the bosal because I know if I was a horse, I would rather be in a halter or bosal, than have a piece of metal in my mouth, stopping me from eating, hitting my teeth and pulling on my sensitive lips.

Many people are not secure enough in their riding skills and think they cannot handle or stop a horse in a bosal. Therefore, it is easier to use a bit (a cheat) where they think they can force or make the horse listen by pain. This is not a good philosophy, especially for the horse. Not to mention it will not work. If a horse is scared enough or is in pain enough, he will jump off a cliff, run through barbed wire, run through a fence, bust down a door or whatever else, he thinks he has to do, to survive. I don't care how big of a bit you have, if a bear walks out onto the same trail you and your horse are on, hang on because you are going for a ride. When a horse survival skills kick in, your only hope to control him is your ability to clam him down, bring him back to you, control his mind and make him feel safe period. Pain rarely makes a horse feel safe! Bits = Pain, especially when both rider and horse get scared and or nervous.

You use a bosal and snaffle about the same way, except I believe that a bosal sends better cues and a clearer signal to the horse than a snaffle, it is kinder than a snaffle and requires more finesse than a snaffle. A snaffle and bosal are direct reining bridles. A bosal is a bitless bridle and a snaffle is a bit bridle.

Direct reining, sometimes called plow reining, is when you use one rein at a time to communicate to the horse. If I want to go left, you use the left rein. Inexperience riders think that when you use the rein you are pulling the horse, the rein is the cue, and the horse comes to the rein. In fact, the horse is moving away from pressure on the opposite side of the rein and that is what is causing him to come to the rein.

If you pull on the left rein of a snaffle, the horse feels pressure on the right side of his face, as if someone was on the right pushing his head to the left. Therefore, when you teach a horse to move his head left, you should be pulling more left than back. Most people pull back, this sends poor cues to the horse and confuses him. Most people, like horses will take the easy way if given a choice. For a rider, it is easier to pulls back on the left rein than it is to lean forward, slide their left hand way out to the side, so the horse can see it and slightly suggest

the horse come left. So what do riders do, they sit comfortable and pull left and the horse gets pulled out of position, gets multiple conflicting cues and tries to do something.

Later when the horse learns how to read your body cue, with the rein cue, he will get more responsive and you will have to do less and less. Then you can start using an indirect reining method. If you are paying attention and doing it right you will be laying your opposite rein on the horse's neck when giving the direct rein cue. So later, when you lay the rein on the neck, the horse will know that you want him to move away and go the opposite way and soon you will not have to direct rein anymore. However, you must know how to direct rein properly, so when and if your horse needs some fine tuning you will know how to go back and fix it.

A bosal is more forgiving and uses less pain. To get a horse to do some things you have to make him feel uncomfortable. Not hurt him or cause him pain, just uncomfortable. Therefore, when you move the rein on a bosal, the horse feels it. It does not hurt him and he does not fear it, so he thinks, responds, and does not react as he does to pain. We want horses to respond not react.

So, besides the fact that my horse, my buddy and my partner likes the bosal better, and the fact that the bosal is more forgiving of my mistakes, and causes less pain to my horse, the question is, why would I use anything else?

Many people stick with a snaffle because it is easier, faster and they think it gives them more control. Most trainers use snaffle bits because it is faster. In a trainer's mind, why would I want to spend more time on a horse than I have to? Why would I use a bosal which takes longer and requires more time? Why do I worry about hurting the horse a little, if it is not my horse? And, if the owner is sending this horse for training they don't understand a horse anyway, so why waste the time on a bosal?

No, I am not cracking on any specific trainer, but think about it. I know many "so called" trainers that have a philosophy of: If I train a horse too good and too fast, I make less money and they won't come back. I actually know one guy (we will call him Tom) that trains horses and told me the reason he uses spurs to train other people's horses is that most people don't use spurs or don't know how to use them. So the horse won't listen to the owner after a while and they will have to bring the horse back to him, for more training. In addition to my disbelief, it works. I see a lot, mostly woman, keep bringing him back their horse for more and more training. If I talk to these people they say, I know it cost a lot of money, but look how good my horse does when "Tom" rides him. Trainers such as this are crooks and predators. They take advantage of poor unsuspecting horse owners (which there is no shortage of), he uses them, and horses, to rip people off, gets people hurt to make money. Just because someone says, they are a trainer and they can get your horse to work good FOR THEM, does not make them an ethical person, a good trainer or a friend of the horse.

Here are some tips for picking trainers; Beware of trainers that will not provide a specific schedule for working your horse. You should be encouraged to attend all training sessions with your horse. You absolutely should schedule training so you can attend all training sessions with your horse. Trainers abuse more horses than anyone else. Some trainers get short, frustrated, in a hurry and angry at horses, especially ones that are not theirs and they know they will not have to ride or deal with the horse for very long. Pain and fear gets faster results. Get specifics of what your horse will be able to do after training. Like in 30 days your horse will be able to move off the leg and you will be able to walk, trot, canter and control the horse's downward transitions, his hindquarters and front-end. Your horse will not buck and will allow you to saddle him with no resistance. You should tell your trainer that you do not want any other bits used on your horse, other than the one you provide (a bosal would be better than a bit) and you DO NOT want spurs worn or used while training your horse. Slick trainers will tell you, I wear spurs but I don't use them. BS, if you don't use them, then why the hell are you wearing them? If you pay for training, you decide how and when your horse is trained. You would not send your kid off to some school without knowing anything about the school and without making sure your child is safe and well cared for, but horse people do this all the time with their horse. In my opinion, a good trainer will not want to train a horse without the owner present. Nothing keeps people more honest than witnesses. Those who have nothing to hide - - hide nothing. If you do not know how your horse is trained, what cues are used, and how to get your horse to respect and listen to you, then you are throwing away your money. I can ride or train most any horse. So how does it help you, if I can ride your horse and make him listen to me? It doesn't help you one bit. So why do people continue to send their horse away for training and expect to be able to ride the horse just because it was sent to a trainer?

So back to the bosal, if I were to train your horse, I would use a bosal and teach you how to use it properly. I would train you and your horse together. If a marriage is in trouble, only one party goes, and gets help (training) will the marriage be fixed. No, if both people are not involved and both don't understand the rules and have the same foundation, then the partnership will not work. Sending your horse to training will not make you a better rider or horse person.

I hope you decide to use a bosal and get rid of bits forever. This will help you, your horse and will improve your partnership.

Good luck on your training.

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Small minds and big mouths have a way of hooking up! --- The less you say means the more you will hear! --- If there is a hole in your fence or story, something you rather did not get out, will. -- Folks don't change, they just get more so -

Rick Gore Horsemanship - Horsyguy@yahoo.com