

Cradle FAQ's

Nov 21st, 2007

How does the bridle distribute the pressure to cradle the horse's head? How does it work? How can a snugger Noseband be less pressure on the bit?

The more points that are activated on the horse's head and mouth area, the less pressure it puts on every point. Most bits exert pressure in only one to two places and usually only in the mouth such as the tongue and the bars. The Cradle disperses pressure over five major points: tongue, bars, nose, chin and poll so horses become less defensive, more relaxed and more open to communication because the communication is felt in a more positive way. We have found that every horse we trialed, from the lowest to the highest level, performed better in the Cradle than in the bits they were used to.

The looser the noseband, the more is felt in the mouth. When you make the noseband more snug, the bit and nose share the pressure more equally, and when you attach the reins to the small rings, it activates the noseband more than the bit. This gives you a lot of options to find what your horse is most comfortable with. If your horse is really scared of bits because of past 'abuse' you may find that having even less pressure on the bit for a while will help renew confidence more quickly.

Use the Bridle Wisdom chart to find what bridle is going to work best for your horse given the stage of development you are in, select the Cradle according to Horsenality, and then experiment between the small and large rings to see what works best for your horse.

Note: If you are still having control issues and need to bend with one rein, it is best to attach the reins to the big rings.

Which Cradle mouthpiece should I choose for my Horsenality? My horse is very complicated and is in more than one Quadrant.

RB Extrovert- C1 RB Introvert- C2 LB Extrovert- C3 LB Introvert- C3

One thing to consider if you have a very complex horse who is 'all over the chart' is to fill out a chart on his behavior only when riding. This will help you focus on what Cradle mouthpiece will probably work best in that situation. For example if your horse is more RB and unconfident when ridden he will need some tongue contact in the mouthpiece (C1 or C2). Over time you may find that your horse becomes more confident and dependable and the RB reactional behavior has gone revealing an innately more LB horse as his character. You would then find that a mouthpiece with more tongue relief will make him happier (C3). Some indications of this may be that he starts overbending to avoid tongue pressure and is less willing to go forward because his tongue feels trapped. The wrong bit will exacerbate the problem whereas the right bit, and especially the right Cradle will help the horse to relax.

In the normal world people go to more severe bits when horses are hard to control, things like twisted wire, shank bits, gags, etc. which only makes the horse more bracey and scared because of the pain they inflict. Even the wrong Cradle mouthpiece will improve things for the horse dramatically because it disperses the pressure over five areas, but choosing the right one will be the best. And then, you must be willing to change when down the road your horse has revealed his real self because he's no longer so disturbed or scared... and when you redo his Horsenality Profile you realize that he is really not all over the chart equally any more, but there is one quadrant that has the most dots... and it now doesn't change when riding him.

How will I know if my horse doesn't like the cradle I chose?

Your horse will probably be happier in the Cradle than in any snaffle you have ridden him in! However we have found that LB horses prefer more tongue relief than RB horses, and that Introverts need more tongue relief than Extroverts. When a horse is having trouble with the bit it's usually about tongue pressure... either too much or too little. They will tend to pull their tongue back or push it out to the side to avoid the pressure, and have a strong tendency to open their mouth and either throw their head up (invert) or resist coming to a soft contact on the bit with a flexed neck and back.

If there is not enough tongue contact they tend to stick their tongue straight down and poke it in and out of their mouth as if they are playing with the gap in the bit (the port) and will carry their heads too high as if looking for contact or support.

When the horse is happy his mouth tends to be quiet and he is not bracy or defensive about the use of the bit. While selecting a mouthpiece via knowing your Horsenality, this is only a way to guide success and avoid having to try bit after bit to see which one your horse likes best. I'm sure it's not foolproof, but as yet it has not failed.

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One more note: Be careful not to confuse emotional tension with the bit not being right. Even our own horses, in the exact right bit, can fiddle with the bit when they are emotionally worked up or have really busy thoughts and it's not about the bit!

Also, please know that even the 'best' bit can be unpleasant for a horse if the rider has unsavvy hands or tends to use their hands too much. Most students tell us the the Cradle has helped them get lighter because the horses are much more connected and responsive.

How do I know what size of Cradle Bit my horse needs?

At this time we only have the 5" Cradle Bit mouthpiece available. Other sizes may be ordered directly from Myler (CONTACT DETAILS NEEDED HERE). If you already ride

your horse in a bit, you should select the same size Cradle for your horse. If you are unsure, it is better to have the Cradle a little on the snug side than too large and therefore 'sloppy' because it moves around more. The way the bit is constructed means that it will not pinch the corners of the lips.

Most average sized horses will need the 5" Cradle. Larger horses with wider muzzles will require a 5.25" (example, Allure) or a 5.5" (example, Remmer but he can also take the 5.25". Bigger horses than him definitely need the 5.5" size.

How do I know what size of Cradle Headstall my horse needs?

Take a measurement with your savvy string or a tape measure from one corner of the mouth, around the poll and to the other corner of the mouth just like a headstall would lie. Take this measurement three times and write down the average size you measured on your horse's head in inches. This will help you get the best size for your horse when you order your Cradle bridle (we have already factored in the cheek pieces of the Cradle itself). Once you collect your measurements you are ready to order your Cradle. Give us a call and we will help you select the appropriate headstall from there! If the measurement is "on the line" then select the larger sized headstall.

The special Cradle Headstall sizes are:

Pony: 40"-43"

Regular: 43"-46" this fits Liberty 43", Aspen, Magic and Casper 44",

Large 46"-49" this fits Allure 46", Kokomo 47", Remmer 48"

XL: 49"-52" this fits Lightning (draft) 52"

Please note that normal bridles are usually too large for the Cradle because it's design comes up the side, more so than a snaffle bridle.

My Cradle's Noseband and chin strap is tight on my horse's muzzle.

The noseband / chin strap is supposed to be snug, but not tight. Before putting it on your horse the first time, stretch the cord between your hands as it will give quite a bit. Several customers have already experienced that the knots and braids on the noseband and chin straps tend to "settle in" and will lengthen by 1-2" after several weeks of use so by stretching it before you first use it, it will be a more accurate fit right away.

Can I ride with the cradle on trail rides?

You can use the Cradle on trail rides, but we do recommend using a bridle that is more suited to the job of trail riding such as the Natural Hackamore or Snaffle Bridle with Horseman's Reins. This is much more versatile for longer rides, or on trails that are more extreme (fallen logs, steep hills, etc.) because the reins have a built in lead rope. This means that if you have to get off your horse and send him over a log or ditch, or you need to tie him, you have exactly the right tool. Trail riding is usually done on a Casual Rein because it is not something that requires a lot of precision. You tend to give the horse his head for maximum vision and balance and allow him to follow the trail only picking up two reins momentarily say to go through a gate, sidepass an obstacle, etc. The Cradle is designed especially for precision riding with contact via Concentrated Reins and to develop more flexion and collection. Of course you will ride the Cradle with a Casual Rein too, but unlike regular snaffles, the Cradle is designed for when you pick up the contact.

What is the order Parelli recommends to develop our horses with Bridle wisdom in mind?

At each level of development in the Parelli Program students are guided to the type of equipment that works in concert with the approach and techniques used and that will

make the most sense to the horse. Pat Parelli calls this BRIDLE WISDOM. Having the right tool is consistent to the principle of the Six Keys of Success: Attitude – Knowledge – Tools – Techniques – Time – Imagination; and it should have no more or no less importance than the other five. To put it simply, it is not just about the bit! However, having the right bit can make the world of difference for the horse both in terms of what you are trying to achieve, and in the type of mouthpiece offered in the bit. Different Horsenalties* have different preferences, and many horses have had their confidence ruined from being ridden in the wrong bit or with rough hands.

**Refer to the section on Bit-Anality*

There are three main stages in developing the horse using the Parelli Program:

- Control - first on the ground, then riding
- Contact - for developing more precision
- Collection - for elevating and beautifying the gaits

...and there are seven types of bridles / bits recommended as you progress through these stages, two of which are optional according to the rider's preferred activities or ambition:

CONTROL (Parelli Level 1 – 2)

1. Halter & 12' Line (ground skills)
2. Natural Hackamore (50 – 80% on the ground)
3. FreeStyle / Trail snaffle bridle (optional because if trail riding is not something you do much of, you can go straight to the Cradle)

CONTACT (Parelli Level 2 – 3)

4. Cradle Bridle – reins attached to large or small rings
5. Confidence Snaffle (optional when teaching a horse to stretch into the contact)

COLLECTION (Parelli Level 3+)

6. Cradle Bridle – small rings, curb strap
7. Western Curb or English Double Bridle

For more details on each stage, see the article in the November Savvy Times, and soon you'll be able to see it on our website too.

Is the loose ring snaffle an option before the Cradle or is it recommended after the Natural Hackamore in most situations?

By referring to the three phases CONTROL – CONTACT – COLLECTION mentioned in the last section you will see that the loose ring snaffle is an optional step in Level 1 – 2 for those who want to do a lot of Trail Riding. The loose ring snaffle is recommended for riding FreeStyle, on long reins, for using one rein for control through lateral flexion, and for trail riding when there is the potential for having to dismount and direct the horse from the ground (such as in situations where the horse becomes right brain, scared, overexcited, etc. or you need to send the horse over a log you don't want to jump!) The Rein Leathers and Horseman's Reins are a major factor here because they allow you to adjust the reins in a number of ways to suit the situation, from 12' line up to a 22' line, plus they allow you to tie your horse by fashioning a collar from the reins so the horse's mouth will never be pulled on (see directions on website).

The loose ring snaffle is not a good bit for riding on concentrated reins and that's where the Cradle now provides us with just the right tool for that stage of riding. Some riders will go from the Hackamore to the Cradle and never want to use the FreeStyle / Trail bridle (with loose ring snaffle) because they do not trail ride extensively and they are more focused on riding in arenas and developing skills for precision and then collection. Of course you can still ride FreeStyle in a Cradle, but with the Finesse Reins attached it is not the ideal tool for a horse you have to get off a lot for safety reasons or situations. The Cradle really is for use when your control issues are mostly over.

How do I fit the cradle to my horse? The nose band?

The noseband needs to be not too loose, not too tight, just right. We recommend being able to lift the front of the noseband up approx. ½ inch off the bridge of the nose as a

fairly good indicator of having the right adjustment. (DO NOT PUT YOUR FINGER UNDER THE NOSEBAND in case your horse opens his mouth and it gets trapped.

The tighter the noseband, the less it involves the bit... the looser the noseband the more it involves the bit.

Horses who are really afraid of bits (from past damage for example) will do best with the noseband adjusted more snug. They will probably also like the reins attached to the little rings because it operates the noseband of the Cradle more and makes even less contact on the bit.

Experiment with these options and you'll quickly figure out what your horse prefers, and you can always switch back and forth according to how things change with your horse, either different situations or as you make progress. This may sound complicated, but it's really not. It's so easy to adjust the Cradle noseband or switch from the big rings to the little rings, so it's more about your willingness to explore and experiment.

Special Note: If you have control problems or expect to have them in certain situations, it is better to ride on the big rings because it makes lateral flexion a lot more effective.

How do I adjust the noseband? Perpendicular? Higher?

The noseband should sit almost level with where it threads through the bit. This positions it at the start of the bridge of the nose and above the soft tissue of the nostrils.

Where do I wrap the support string? Front of the Concho or the back?

You can wind the string around the front of the concho to make it quick and easy. (Trying to do it behind the browband does not work well because the back of the screw is too small and it can come off).

An alternative is to tie a loop in the support string at the exact right length that allows you to bring it up behind the browband and over it, and then loop it over the concho at the front.

You can cut off the excess or tuck it under the browband if you are only using it on one horse (or same sized horses) but if you think you'll be using it on horses of different sizes it's best to have the option of easy adjustment by quickly winding it around the

concho. Of course, make sure that you straighten the concho so the silver horse head is the right way up!

I heard we shouldn't lead our horses by the bit. Where should I connect the snap to lead my horse?

This is a good habit to get into so as not to damage a horse's mouth or poke him in the palate by pulling the bit forward. Attach the rein to the strap that forms the back of the noseband or to the throatlatch of the bridle. If your horse tends to get exuberant, attaching it to the back of the noseband is the better option.

How do I know I am ready to try the cradle with my horse?

If you are studying Level 2 and no longer have daily control issues you are ready to go to the Cradle so you can begin working on more precision. Refer to the Bridle Wisdom program for more detail on this.

What about young horses?

Professionals and savvy riders will find the Cradle a wonderful way to introduce a bit to a young horse for the first time, but rather than choosing it by Horsenality, the first Cradle mouthpiece should be the C1 so we have more points of contact to teach through. It is more like a loose ring snaffle but with the added benefits of dispersing contact and stabilizing the bit through the noseband.

If you are following the Parelli approach, the horse will have been developed first on the ground with the Horseman's Halter, then ridden for at least 300 hours in the Natural Hackamore so he has learned to trust and respond to the rider and is not worried about getting hurt in the mouth. We use the same approach with mature horses, in a sense re-starting them and helping them to gain confidence without having to worry about being hurt again in the mouth say if the rider loses their balance or uses aids that are too sudden or strong due to their inexperience. However because they have been ridden with bits before, you can choose the Cradle mouthpiece appropriate for his Horsenality.

The C1 will be used for riding the young horse on a Casual Rein and developing him through the FreeStyle aspects of the Parelli Program (Level 1 and 2) because it has all the good elements of a snaffle when used in savvy hands, plus it gives support through the other four points of contact resulting in more positive receipt of the rider's communication. When the young horse is developed enough to begin riding with Contact, you would then evaluate the choice of a mouthpiece more in concert with his Horsenality (Level 2 – 3).

Which of the three Cradles is the least severe?

A bit only becomes severe when used by arrogant, unfeeling or cruel hands and attitudes. But even in this unfortunate situation, the Cradle will protect a horse from being hurt in the mouth because it disperses the pressure over five areas instead of it being concentrated in the delicate, sensitive mouth.

Choosing the right Cradle according to Horsenality is all about recognizing that some horses are more comfortable with tongue relief, while others feel more secure with some tongue contact.

Can I use a regular headstall for this bit?

Most headstalls are too long for the Cradle because they are designed for bits that don't have an extended cheek piece above them. Going to a smaller bridle may mean that the browband is too tight. In addition, most bridles are not designed to hold a support string for the Cradle noseband so you'll find it hard to attach it to a regular browband without it sliding to one side.

We designed the Cradle headstall as part of the whole kit so you can be sure it does all the right things to hold the Cradle as it was designed to fit the horse.

What do I do if my horse gets claustrophobic with the cradle when I am on his back?

This is unlikely to happen when using the elastic noseband strap because there is some give and even though the horse feels it, he is not trapped. This is why we recommend

using the elastic strap throughout the Contact stage of your horse's development, and you can even continue with it into the Collection stage and never go to the fixed strap. (Refer to the Bridle Wisdom information to understand the reason for why you might want to move to the fixed strap.)

When you use the fixed strap, it is inevitable that a horse will encounter the restrictive feel of the the first time he opens his mouth and be totally surprised by it. (Note: the Cradle noseband is not fitted like standard dropped or cross over or cavesson nosebands which totally prevent the horse opening his mouth. They can open their mouths a little which is important for the rider to notice in case it is 'feedback' for the rider's hands). His reaction will probably be to momentarily throw his head upwards and from side to side and he may even back up at the same time. While he is startled, he is usually not panicked by it. Should this happen, push down firmly on your horse's neck near the withers, relax your legs and leave the reins loose.

To avoid this it is advisable to at first adjust it quite loosely and gradually increase the tightness over 2 or 3 sessions until you reach the recommended or ideal fit. In this way you avoid a sudden change that might surprise the horse. You should also always warm him up on the ground first so if he has a problem he can get through it quickly without causing concern to the rider. We have found that the horse will only react in surprise a few times before he realizes that he can avoid the contact by closing his mouth, and usually will not do it again. If for any reason he does surprise himself while you are riding, simply push firmly down on his neck right by the withers and relax your legs. This will quickly comfort and stabilize him.

Remember to undo the fixed noseband strap before you graze a horse or give him a treat, and to loosen the elastic strap.

My horse is great in the hackamore..Why would I want to move into the cradle?

If you are advancing in the Program to where you want to ride with contact and more precision, the Hackamore will prove to be too clumsy a tool and cause you to use your

reins too much. But if you have no desire to ride with more subtlety, precision and collection, you will have no need to go to the Cradle at all.

Which Cradle should I buy?

For best results you should complete a Horsenality Profile to know which Cradle to choose. A Licensed Parelli Professional can help you if you are confused for any reason, but the chart should make things pretty clear for you.

What is relationship between Myler/Parelli and Toklat?

The Parelli/Myler Cradle is a totally new product co-designed by Pat Parelli and Ron Myler, and it is only available through Parelli at this time. It will be available in the future at retail outlets that feature Myler bits (from Jan. 2007).

The leather bridle / headstall itself is new from Parelli specially designed for the Cradle because most bridles are too long for the extended cheek of the Cradle. It has an easy crown adjustment and a concho on the browband to attach the support string for the noseband (by winding it around the concho, or tying the cord to create a kind of button hole.

When the Cradle bit is offered for sale through retail outlets it will be without the headstall. Customers potentially could be directed to buy the headstall at Parelli, or they will adapt one that the store sells. We have tried to make it all hassle proof for Parelli students and that's why we designed a special headstall for it.

Parelli will always be the authority and will provide the highest level of education and expertise on the use of the Cradle, dovetailing it with our Program and Bridle Wisdom directives. We will be the main contact for answering questions and solving any problems.

Toklat is the worldwide manufacturer and marketer of the Myler production line of bits which includes the Parelli/Myler series. Toklat only sells wholesale to distributors. The bits are stamped on the cheeks with Parelli/Myler on one side and Toklat and the patent number on the other cheek. Having Toklat on the cheek distinguishes the bit as production bit vs a handmade bit (which is what you would get if you specially ordered a different size).

I am surprised that Parelli is promoting a bit that looks so mechanical, can you explain what this is all about?

Perhaps the best way to explain this is to read the following letter and answer:

Student Question: As a long time Parelli student, professional horse trainer (not Parelli, however), and a competitor in the event world who has embraced Parelli and taken the heat for it, I have to say I am really disappointed and surprised at the release of such a tool. No I have not seen it in person as I was not at the Conference, but I don't have to try it to know basically how it works. It seems to pretty much be almost opposite of what Parelli has preached all these years. Already people on the Savvy Forum who's horses 'run through the snaffle' have raved about how great they went in this bit. I know that is not the idea of this bit (control), but that is what is going to happen. How is that any different than buying 'more' bit in the 'real world'?

I got away from leverage in the 'real' world thanks to PNH, and understanding my horse more. I attended the Parelli/O'Connor week at the ISC. I retrain off the track TB's, successfully, in plain snaffles and plain nosebands. I personally do not see how I can defend this move by Parelli to include such a piece of equipment in their approved tools. I thought the whole point of natural horsemanship was to be able to do the things that other people NEEDED such equipment for, WITHOUT having to use it?? I don't think I am totally off base here, so maybe someone can enlighten me. They might want to enlighten the Savvy Club as well, as it is a pretty divisive subject.

Linda Parelli's Answer:

Dear (Student's name withheld),

I can totally see why you are perplexed by the thought of our new Cradle bridle, because I was too. It looked like a contraption to me and I couldn't believe Pat was working on something like this. I'm embarrassed to admit that I doubted him, someone I've known and trusted and respected for 18 years now. Thank goodness he was patient with me, he just quietly said to me, don't make up your mind until you try it.

So I tried it and my horses LOVED it. In some ways it is hard to explain because it's all about a feeling you get. The horse is more through, more confident in your hand (and I thought Remmer already was!), more relaxed. It's quite amazing. I felt that even though I was convinced with my own horses that I needed to see other students, more horses, different levels before I knew what to think.

Every other horse we tried it on loved it and had all the same reactions as I describe above. This is because the Cradle is five times more gentle than just about any other bit you would put in a horse's mouth, including a snaffle, primarily because it disperses the pressure rather than concentrating it all in the mouth. Hypersensitive horses, the ones that don't do well in bits but go fantastically in hackamores, are the best advertisement for the Cradle, they quickly relax as they realize they're not going to get bothered in their most sensitive place... the mouth.

When you get to see our educational piece called Bridle Wisdom I think it will make more sense to you. First of all, we don't advocate the Cradle as a bit for more control. The Hackamore is still advocated for that because people need to stay out of the horse's mouth until they have more control of both the horse and of their own balance and emotions and therefore their hands. The Cradle does not come into the picture until you

want to ride with contact and increasing precision, which is a Level 2-3 concept. The Cradle causes horses to want to go into the bit, to stretch their topline instead of contract and hide behind it as so often happens in snaffles. In addition suiting different styles of mouthpiece to different Horses makes another huge difference. Some horses really need tongue contact, others can't stand it and open their mouths, pull their tongue back or put their tongue over the bit, invert, overflex, etc. etc. We've studied this intensely to work out what it is that different horses prefer especially when riding with contact and flexion, because almost any bit can be acceptable on loose reins.

I don't blame you for being skeptical, as a lot of people will be, but at the same time I'm surprised by your lack of trust. We are always looking for ways to help horses have a better deal and to help riders communicate in a more humane way with their horses. For people to think that one is doing natural horsemanship because they use a snaffle or a rope halter / hackamore, is erroneous. Natural horsemanship is about an attitude and approach that is based on using horse psychology to enroll the horse in a partnership. We knew that coming out with a new bit would be somewhat controversial, but after long discussions on it we figured that given a little time, this addition to our tool box would help horses and humans achieve more understanding and harmony. But a bit does not train a horse, a human does. Even the seemingly most innocuous bit can be torturous in the wrong hands, however we find that the Cradle actually protects the horse from harsh hands.

As you know, we teach people to understand that there are Six Keys of Success: Attitude, Knowledge, Tools, Techniques, Time & Imagination. Having the right tools, better tools, is part of success. We thought our horses were going just fine in the snaffles until we tried a better tool. Now they hate the snaffle unless we're riding on a longer rein.

Thank you for taking the time and trouble to write and I hope one day you will get to try a Cradle on your horse and let him give you an opinion. Our horse's opinions are much more important than our own.

Yours naturally,

Linda

PS Following is just one of many testimonials we are getting for the Cradle. This lady is close to Level 3 but was having terrible trouble riding her complicated mare in the snaffle with contact.

First off let me say, "I am having so much fun"!

In my warm ups before I would attempt snakey bends, when she was right brained. It was not always successful for us. Now I have been experimenting with lateral moves "very slight", which I've never been able to do. Now I'm able to soften her and get her to work the left side of her brain. This always backfired in the past creating a fight & resistance in her. Granted my hands have been too rough, but being able to feel so much more with this cradle allows me to be softer. Allows her to not fight me, but ask questions and go into a learning frame of mind. She experiments now too, I like that! I've never enjoyed so much SITTING TROT on her, WOW!

When we are tracking on the rail she has always dropped her shoulder or just veered away to the inside. It has become a game I couldn't change or win.

All my corrections would cause resistance. Today for the first time EVER I was able to just slightly move my inside hand laterally placing the rein against her neck, she softly put a bend in her neck and glided her body back on the rail following my feel "I was shocked" this was at the trot. When cantering I got the same opportunity. The adjustment was so slight with her response just as soft. It was if I was just reminding her not so much a correction.

My other main observation is that she's not so impulsive. I had to play point to point today before we could do any cantering. This was all very new to me. Point to point has always been leap to leap LOL.

She still fusses a little with her mouth, but Not consistent. I'm listening & trying to more feel what's going on. When she fusses I try something different or check to make sure my hands were not too fast or rough. I'm going to also experiment with a C3 Next week to see how she might respond to that.

She is changing so much, is it really all due to this new cradle?

With everything she has been offering me the last few weeks it has opened up doors for my ability to progress in my riding. I have not had the opportunity yet but I do want to film her, to share with you the changes she has made. I think you remember how she moves & I would love for you to see what your new tool is doing for us.