

## A Fascinating Training Tool

I first saw a rope noseband sidepull in a photograph in a western horse magazine about 16 years ago. The photo was of a pleasure horse trainer, Marty Sanford from Texas, who rode all of her young horses in a sidepull until they understood how to turn and stop in a balanced manner. Then she introduced a bit. Trained in this way, her horses stayed soft and relaxed in the bridle.

Recently, I discovered that Dennis Moreland, then-owner of Moreland Enterprises and Cowboy Tack in Weatherford, Texas, was the manufacturer of the sidepull bridle Sanford used. Moreland says he first saw a trainer using a homemade sidepull in the mid 1970s, and soon began making them himself. "In 1976, I saw Gayle Bourland, a very well-respected cutting horse trainer, riding a young horse with a bridle with a U-shaped steel noseband and no bit," Moreland describes. "Gayle said he had his blacksmith make it for him and it worked to bring the horse's head to the side. I liked the principle of it and decided to make them. We made them with steel nosebands, and with single and double rope nosebands."

I was immediately fascinated by the novel piece of equipment I had chanced to see in the magazine. I had been starting the young horses in my training stable in their halters to avoid putting a bit in their mouths. It seemed harsh to me to put a bit in the mouth of a young gangly Thoroughbred who was having trouble just operating its own body in a balanced manner, much less trying to figure out how to carry me around.

I couldn't find any tack outlets that carried a sidepull bridle at the time. I took out a magnifying glass, studied the construction of the bridle in the magazine photograph and wondered how I could construct one.

Then, in the fall of 1983, I attended a demonstration by Linda Tellington-Jones of the TTEAM Club and was thrilled to see her using a bitless sidepull. Tellington-Jones had her own version of a sidepull, dubbed a *Lindell*, and used it as a primary piece of equipment used in her programs. The Club also sold (and still sells) the Lindell.

I went home with one of the Lindells, and it immediately became my bridle of choice for working with young horses. I ground drove them in the sidepull and then rode them in it for at least a month before introducing the bit. This helped my horses learn to turn and stop without ever feeling the pull of metal against their sensitive mouths. In clinics with Tellington-Jones over the next two years, I learned to use the sidepull with older problem horses as well.

Since that time, over 14 years, I've used the Lindell and other sidepulls on numerous horses. I've also discovered and purchased half a dozen other sidepull bridles. Most of the sidepulls contained some features I liked and some features I

didn't like, so, in 1995, I approached leather craftsman and tack repair expert Joe Fermin of San Rafael, California, and asked him to help me make up a hybrid sidepull bridle. Many horse people are fussy about tack, and I am no exception, but I didn't expect it to take the on and off again efforts of four years and many, many prototypes before I had what I considered to be the perfect sidepull bridle in my hands!

One of the most effective parts of the sidepulls I liked – the lariat-style nosebands – usually came paired with one of my pet peeves: bulky and often poorly tied lariat knots at the sides of the bridle – so many of Fermin's and my efforts were directed at this section of the bridle. We tried to find a way to remove most of the lariat from the bridle, while keeping the lariat-to-leather transition smooth and yet strong. A noseband from an English jumping hackamore gave us an idea to try.

We also experimented with different designs for jowl straps.

Though this strap is missing from some designs I saw, I observed that the strap improved the effectiveness of the bridle immensely. Fermin and I tried many positions and angles for a jowl strap to fit the horse's face the way I liked.

Once Fermin finished the first model, I took it out to try on a client's horse. This horse hated wearing a bit; he had experienced pain from a bit due to severe dental problems. I had put him in a basic sidepull and the gelding had relaxed considerably with its use. Since he was so sensitive to his headgear, I figured he would be a good tester.

According to the horse, we were on the right track! The new noseband seemed to make it even easier for him to relax the poll joint and turn his head at the top of his neck. He turned with lightness and complete willingness. He relaxed his entire spine, rounded up his back and moved into self-carriage. I was thrilled with the results and my client was so happy with this next level

of improvement that she refused to let me have the bridle back. She still has that first prototype and her horse still enjoys it as they work in the arena and out on the trails.

I have continued to tinker with the sidepull for the past four years, trying version after version on a number of horses with varying levels of training. For the past year, I've been working with Gail Hought of Hought Fine Art, Leather and Endurance Tack in McKinleyville, California, to finish my design and produce them for sale. Hought, an avid and experienced endurance rider, has been doing fine leather work since 1973, and is currently building the sidepulls for me on a custom basis. (m)

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**Happy with the results that can be obtained with a sidepull, a number of trainers have developed their own designs. Diana Thompson's version, above, features a removeable Neoprene cover for the lariat noseband for horses who are especially responsive.**