



Frank Bell Horse Whisperer

Young Horse Refuses Bit

Hi Libby,

I have a question for Frank that he maybe able to help me with.

My name is Christine and I reside in Australia. I have a question that I think you can help me with. I have a 3 year old colt that was only recently saddle broke and at the time doing everything right. He was turned out for 6 months to grow out some more and also being winter in Australia there was no point in giving him work only on w/ends. He is well handled, well bred and at this point in time being a typical colt. No fault there. We are about to bring him back to full work, but have struck an obstacle that I do not wish to turn into a fight.

He will NOT take the bit. I don't know why as this was not a problem before turning out. But he has now decided he does NOT want to take the bit by way of totally refusing, constantly trying to back up and now rearing quite high.

How can I turn this around or what reason may he have for doing this? As stated, I don't want to turn this into a fight which I cannot win.

Please help. I have read most of your training tips on the website and also receive your e-mails that are extremely helpful to me.

Awaiting your help patiently and thank you in advance,
Christine Pearson

Hello Christine –

My first inclination is to think this is a dental issue. There is a whole lot going on in a horse's mouth at that age. So begin with a dental check. Once that is sorted out then we can look at some other options.

Some horses just plain don't like the bit and there's no reason to use one. There are many alternate types of tack that you might consider- bitless bridles, side pulls, hackamores, and even riding with a simple rope halter/lead as I do.

So often we just assume that our horses should accept the bit and there's no reason they should when we really think about it. Treating the horse the way you'd like to be treated, you wouldn't want a piece of iron in your mouth, right?



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Once the dental issue is sorted out, there are some other ideas to explore. Put some molasses on your finger, then on the horse's lips. Your horse will get a taste and begin licking his lips with gusto. Put some more on and the horse will begin thinking this is all pretty good. Then coat the bit with it and allow him to just lick it off for awhile. Next time while he's licking it off and that mouth is open, simply ease the bit into his mouth and allow him to enjoy getting the molasses off, then EASE it out, allowing him to let it drop out of his mouth. Never pull it out, let him open his mouth and release the bit. Do that a few times and the problems should be over as he'll associate the bit with a great taste.

But get a good vet or dentist to check those teeth first. This is serious business as horse with sharp teeth will do anything to avoid the bit, including rearing over backwards. There are instances of riders being killed in this exact scenario!

Please let me know the outcome.
Safe Riding Always,

Frank R. Bell