TONGUE GUARD FOR HORSES

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ABSTRACT

Tongue guard having a deeply ported, bit-like crossbar element and a headstrap for positioning and maintaining the crossbar element within a horse's mouth immediately adjacent to, and behind the conventional snaffle or bar bit for preventing horse from moving its tongue over the latter. Tongue guard is a part of the bridle arrangement, but is separate from, and is positioned independently of all other bridle elements, including the referred to conventional bit for controlling the horse's movement.

9 Claims, 5 Drawing Figures
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TONGUE GUARD FOR HORSES

This invention relates to the bridling of horses, and more particularly to so-called tongue guards for preventing the horse from putting its tongue over the bit of the bridle.

When during riding or handling a horse puts its tongue over the bit, so that the bit is under its tongue, any pull on the reins will cause irritation or pain, and the horse becomes difficult to hold or control. Especially in the case of a pony being ridden by a child, such occurrence can cause the animal to bolt or otherwise become temperamental and unsafe for riding, until the condition is corrected. Thus, to confine the movement of the horse's tongue to the lower jaw region below the bit, it is a common expedient to provide the conventional bit with a so-called "port" or somewhat U-shaped bend, which projects rearwardly with respect to the mouth of the horse from the middle location along the bit as it spans across the mouth. Depending upon whether its rearwardly extending length is relatively longer or shorter, such conventional bit ports are characterized as "high port", "medium port", or "low port".

In addition, variations on the ported bit have been used, these being the conventionally known, so-called "spade" and "cricket" type bits, and a more recently tried bit having a "floating" tongue guard in the form of a narrow flat plate extending both forwardly and rearwardly of the bit axis, which is pivotally mounted on the bit along a transversely extending axis of the flat plate. As in the case of the ported bit, it will be noted that all of these tongue guard variations constitute permanent and integral parts of the bits themselves.

However, and because the reins of the bridle are connected to the bit via the bit rings, the normal pull on the reins — for example for stopping the horse — causes bits having these various forms and known tongue guards to exert sudden abnormal pressure on the horse's tongue or other parts of its mouth, possibly accompanied by some pivoting or turning of the tongue guard relative to the horse's mouth. Moreover, the floating type tongue guard has been found to cause pinching of the horse's tongue. In any event, such guards are irritating to the animal, and may cause him to bolt or otherwise become suddenly unmanageable.

It is intended by the present invention to provide means in a horse bridling arrangement for preventing the horse from moving its tongue over the conventional bit, but in manner avoiding the aforementioned deficiencies of known tongue guards which limit their use. Specifically, it is intended to provide a tongue guard means which will be fully effective to prevent such undesired positioning by the horse of its tongue, yet which will be comfortable to the horse and will not irritate the parts of its mouth when in use. The intended tongue guard should be usable under any conditions and at any time, such as during training of the horse, or when it might be used to ride children.

Briefly describing the invention, in general it provides a tongue guard device which is separate from the conventional restraining bit, having its own leather headpiece to which is connected to a rigid cross-bar element which passes through the horse's mouth adjacent to the conventional bit during use. The cross-bar has a deep-ported structure which extends rearwardly towards the throat of the horse during use, and which has such length as to make it virtually impossible for the horse to work its tongue to a position above it, and thus above the adjacent conventional bit, yet which is not long enough to extend so far into the throat as to cause the horse to gag. The port structure is preferably of the open type formed by a U-shaped bending of the cross-bar midway along its length and within the same plane, the base of the U-shape having rounded configuration and defining the apex of the port structure.

The width of the cross-bar as it extends across the horse's mouth may vary from regular bit size of 5 inches or 5 1/4 inches for mature horses down to 4 inches or 4 1/4 inches for ponies. However, it has been found that the depth of the deep-port structure to be effective should be not less than about 1 1/2 inches, nor more than about 2 1/4 inches to avoid gagging of the animal during use. The U-shaped, open port is about 3/4 inch in width.

For connection of the plain leather strap headpiece, which in use will extend around the back of the horse's head in the manner of a headstall, either a rigid or a flexible ring is attached at each end of the crossbar. In the preferred embodiment each end of the crossbar is bent 90° and extends from 1 1/2 inches to 2 inches in the same direction, and in the same plane as the port structure, and has an eyelet formed at its free end to receive an end of the leather headpiece. Of course, the length of the headpiece is adjustable. In an alternative embodiment, the 90° bent end extensions of the crossbar element are omitted, its outer ends which terminate its width dimension having fixed eyelets formed therein, through each of which a ring is linked in chain-like fashion, to which in turn is connected an end of the leather strap headpiece.

These and other objects, features, and advantages of the invention will become more fully apparent from the following, more detailed description of it, which has reference to the accompanying drawings. In the drawings:

FIG. 1 is a perspective showing of the head of a horse wearing a complete bridle which includes a tongue guard in accordance with the invention as a part thereof;

FIG. 2 is a similar perspective showing of the head of a horse, but wearing only the separate tongue guard apparatus in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 3 is a fragmentary perspective showing of the crossbar element of the tongue guard in its normal wearing position inside the horse's mouth, only the tongue and lower jaw of the horse being illustrated for clarity;

FIG. 4 is a plan view of only the crossbar element in its preferred form as also illustrated in FIGS. 1-3, inclusive; and

FIG. 5 is a plan view of a modified form of crossbar element.

Referring first to FIG. 1 of the drawings, a conventional bridle, generally indicated by reference numeral 10, has a headstall 11, a throatlash 12, a snaffle ring 13, a bit 14, a rein 15, a noseband 16, a front strap 17, and cheek straps 18 and 19.

As indicated in FIG. 3, the conventional snaffle or bar bit 14 extends across and through the mouth of the horse at a location behind its teeth t, and normally above the horse's tongue T. However, it is not uncon-
mon for a horse to work its tongue T out from under, and then into position over the bit 14, whereupon a pull by the rider on the rein 15 when attempting to govern or restrain the animal will cause irritation of its mouth or tongue.

To prevent the horse from moving its tongue into such position above or over the bit 14, the present invention incorporates a tongue guard apparatus as a separate yet integrated part of the bridle. The tongue guard is generally indicated in FIGS. 1, 2 and 3 by reference numeral 20, and is formed by a rigid, bit-like crossbar 21, and an attached leather strap headpiece 22. The headpiece 22 extends around the horse's head, behind its ears in manner similar to the conventional headstall 11.

The crossbar 21 is made of non-corrosive metal such as a non-rusting steel which may be nickel or chrome-plated, or of aluminum or the like. It need not have great strength so long as it is stiff or rigid, and preferably it should have light weight. Ideally, the crossbar 21 is made by bending to the desired shape a metal wire or rod of about 3/32 inch diameter.

As illustrated in FIG. 4, the bent shape of the crossbar 21 includes a pair of aligned transverse portions 21a, 21b which, midway along the overall width W of the crossbar, a deep port 24 is formed by parallel extending, laterally spaced apart leg portion 24a, 24b which extend at right angles from and on said side of the axis of alignment of the transverse portions 21a, 21b. The width w of the port 24 is about 3/4 inch, and the apex end 24c of the port is arcuate or round in shape, as shown. The depth d of the port 24 is relatively deep, within the range of from about 1 1/2 inches up to about 2 1/4 inches for larger horses. In the preferred embodiment the crossbar 21 has respective end extensions 25, 26 formed by parallel bends of the wire at right angles to the transverse portions 21a, 21b and which are, in turn, parallel to the port leg portions 24a, 24b. Closed loops or eyelets 25a and 26a are formed at the respective outer ends of the end extensions 25, 26, as has best been seen in FIG. 3. As previously noted the overall width W of the crossbar 21 may be from 4 inches or 4 1/2 inches for ponies and smaller horses to about 5 inches or perhaps 5 1/4 inches for mature horses. Thus, the ratio of the depth d of the port 24 to the overall width W of the crossbar is from about 0.3 (i.e., the ratio of 1 1/2 inches to 5 1/4 inches) to about 0.56 (i.e., the ratio of 2 1/4 inches to 4 inches).

In a modified form as illustrated in FIG. 5, the crossbar indicated generally by reference numeral 27 is bent from wire or rod stock to form a U-shaped port 28 whose defining parallel leg portions 28a, 28b are spaced apart about 3/4 inch as in the previously described embodiment, but has closed loops or eyelets 29, 30 respectively formed at each of the free ends of the transverse portions 27a and 27b which are of equal length and extend in opposite directions, the end extensions or returns shown in the previous embodiment being eliminated. Flexible rings 31, 32 are linked to the respective eyelets 29 and 30 to receive the ends of the leather strap headpiece 22 when the latter is attached.

The headpiece 22 is a straight length of 3/8 inch wide leather strap or the like, having respective buckles 23 at each of its ends for adjusting its length. Its ends are looped, as at 22a, 22b, respectively through the eyelets 25a, 26a at the ends of the crossbar 21 as seen in FIGS. 2 and 3, or through the respective rings 31 and 32 at the ends of the crossbar 27 of FIG. 5, and buckled and buckles 23.

Referring especially to FIG. 2, it will be noted that the tongue guard 20 is not connected to any other bridle component, and is not controlled by the rider during use. It is mounted on the horse before the main bridle is fitted, the crossbar of the tongue guard being placed within the animal's mouth as indicated in FIG. 3, and the connected headpiece 22 being then brought over the head as indicated in FIG. 2. The headpiece is appropriately fitted by adjustment to either or both of its buckles 23. The remainder of the bridle 10, including the conventional bit 14, is then fitted on the horse in conventional manner. As seen in FIG. 3, the bit 14 will normally be positioned in front of the crossbar of the tongue guard.

It will be found that the horse's tongue T is kept by the tongue guard 20 always beneath the bit 14, yet any pull on the bit 14 will not cause pivoting or turning of, or otherwise significantly affect the tongue guard.

Thus, a tongue guard apparatus has been described which achieves all of the objects of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. Tongue guard apparatus for a horse or like animal, comprising a rigid crossbar element having aligned, equal length transverse portions extending in the direction of the width of the crossbar element, and a port structure between said transverse portions, the lengths of said aligned transverse portions and the dimensions of said port structure therebetween together defining substantially the width of said crossbar element, said port structure projecting on one side of the axis of alignment of said transverse portions to a depth of from substantially 1 1/2 inches to substantially 2 1/4 inches, and said width of said crossbar element being from substantially 4 inches to substantially 5 1/4 inches.

2. Tongue guard apparatus according to claim 1 wherein said transverse portions and said port structure of the crossbar element are integrally formed from metal wire or the like having a U-shaped bend which provides spaced apart first and second parallel leg portions between and extending outwardly from the axis of alignment of said transverse portions and which, together with the arcuate base of said U-shape therebetween, define said port structure.

3. Tongue guard apparatus according to claim 1 wherein each of said transverse portions as it extends in direction away from said port structure has an outer end, and said crossbar element further comprises means defining an eyelet on the respective of said outer ends.

4. Tongue guard apparatus according to claim 3 wherein said crossbar element further comprises a ring linked through each of said outer end eyelets.

5. Tongue guard apparatus according to claim 3 wherein said crossbar element further comprises respective and parallel outer end extensions extending in the direction of and substantially parallel to said port structure, said outer end extensions being respectively associated with one of said transverse portions adjacent to its said outer end and each of said outer-end extensions comprising a substantially right angled extension of its said associated transverse portion, said respective eyelets at the outer ends of said transverse portions being at the respective and otherwise free ends of said outer end extensions.
6. Tongue guard apparatus according to claim 3 which further comprises a flexible headstrap having respective ends connected to the respective of said outer end eyelets of the crossbar element.

7. A bridle for a horse or like animal, comprising a control bit for extending within and across the animal's mouth, strap means connected to said control bit and for mounting on the animal's head to position and maintain said control bit within the animal's mouth, control rein means connected to said control bit for exerting pressure on the latter to control the animal's movement, and tongue guard apparatus separate from and unconnected to any of said control bit, said strap means or said control rein means, said tongue guard apparatus comprising a crossbar element for extending within and across the animal's mouth adjacent to said control bit, and a headstrap connected only to the respective ends of said crossbar element and for mounting on the animal's head behind its ears to position and maintain said crossbar element within the animal's mouth, said crossbar element comprising a laterally projecting, deep port structure for positioning above the animal's tongue and extending towards the animal's throat.

8. A bridle according to claim 7 wherein said crossbar element deep port structure has depth, in said direction towards the animal's throat, which is at least 1 1/2 inch.

9. A bridle according to claim 8 wherein said depth of said crossbar element deep port structure is within the range of from substantially 1 1/2 inches to substantially 2 1/4 inches.