



## Protec Equestrian® - Position statement from Equestrian Action Group

Equestrian Action Group has learned through various channels that a device designed to protect horses' gums/bars has been placed on the market. This device is marketed under the name 'Protec' and is distributed by a company of the same name based in Belgium.

We have studied this product and the few references relating to it and would like to express our serious concern and our wish that the FEI take a clear position on this matter.

### **1. Technical and welfare aspects:**

The device does not consider anatomical differences between horses (size and shape of the mandibular rami on both the buccal and external sides).

Its external part is likely to compress the *Foramen mentale* region and the structures that emerge from it

To remain fixed in place, it requires tightening of the noseband, which may not be compatible with current FEI rules on this matter.

Even if it is likely to reduce the direct pressure of the bit on the gums at the bars, the device is likely to create other pressure points that are also uncomfortable or even painful for the horse.

### **2. Equestrian aspects**

This device, sold as 'protection' for horses, primarily contributes to the trivialization of poor choice, poor adjustment and/or poor use of the bit. Rather than seeking to optimize these elements, it gives the rider the feeling that they are 'doing something good' for the horse.

Indirectly, it can therefore contribute to the deterioration of equestrian training and the trivialization of the use of certain bits, on the sole pretext that they no longer cause visible injuries to the mouth or gums.

### **3. Media and social aspects**

At a time when there is a focus on ensuring the welfare of horses and when equestrian practices are coming under significant criticism, both in training and competition, promoting a device such as this gives the impression that the use of a bit is problematic in itself. This could lead to the very principle of using bits being called into question, regardless of their type, adjustment or method of use.

This type of development is likely to reduce the SLO.

#### 4. Regulatory aspects

It appears that the FEI regulations are currently unclear regarding this type of equipment. Article 1044 of the Veterinary Regulations prohibits '*mouth guards which cover the teeth*' but says nothing about similar devices that do not cover the teeth. The manufacturer of Protec also states on its website that '*Currently, Protec is FEI compliant and we are actively working to extend this approval to cover all disciplines and local areas.*' However, the situation is unclear, for example with regard to dressage.

On the other hand, the Swedish Federation officially banned the device on 11 January 2025. We fully agree with the analysis that led to this decision. (<https://ridsport.se/nyheter/nyheter-tavling/nyheter-tavling/2025-01-31-bettskenor-forbjuds-i-sverige>) However, the manufacturer states that its product is authorised in Sweden for international show jumping competitions.

This legal uncertainty must be cleared up quickly if we don't want to see different practices develop, depending on national federations or even legal provisions (see the recent bans on certain types of bits in Swiss animal welfare legislation). In the absence of clear and general regulations, we are heading towards a situation similar to that of hind boots, which is clearly damaging to the image of the FEI and/or national federations.

Consequently, the Equestrian Action Group strongly recommends that the FEI take a **rapid** decision on a **ban** on devices designed to protect horses' gums/bars in all disciplines and at all levels.

#### **About the Equestrian Action Group:**

*The Equestrian Action Group is an association under French law that brings together equestrian sports stakeholders from various countries and continents.*

*The purpose of this association is to:*

- To promote good equestrian practice and its implementation, particularly in the context of competitions.*
- Promoting animal welfare in general.*
- Protecting equestrian sports*
- Raise awareness of the industry (riders, trainers, teachers, officials, organisers, owners, breeders, sponsors, equestrian federations and associations, etc.)*
- Propose or support initiatives to improve equestrian welfare*
- Informing the public.*
- To combat all forms of mistreatment of horses.*

*This position statement was drafted by the EAG Bureau (Bernard Maurel, President, Charles Trolliet, Vice-President, Catherine Weber de Rize, Secretary-Treasurer) with the assistance of Stéphane Montavon and Géraldine Vandevenne.*