

## TRAINING TIPS

# THE HORSE WORLD OF NOSEBANDS

Compiled by Khaled Assem



Photo by Cyron Taylor

Crank noseband or Swedish Cavesson

**A NOSEBAND MAY HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE FIRST TOOLS USED BY HUMANS TO DOMESTICATE AND RIDE HORSES WHILE THE BIT WAS DEVELOPED AT A LATER STAGE.**

The noseband was originally made of leather or rope. After the invention of the bit, the noseband was, in some cultures, demoted to a halter worn beneath the bridle that allowed the rider to remove the bit from the horse's mouth after work and leave a restraining halter on underneath, or to tie the horse by this halter, instead of by the bit, which could result in damage to the horse's mouth if it panicked. However, its ability to hold a horse's mouth shut over the bit was also recognised, as was its usefulness for attaching equipment such as a martingale, and so in some traditions it was sometimes left as a working part of a bridle. Still other cultures, for instance in Ancient Persia, nosebands were developed as a tool for training young horses, called a hakma, and this training noseband evolved into modern equipment such as today's bosal-style hackamore and longeing cavesson.

### USES OF NOSEBANDS:

Today the noseband has several uses. First, to keep the horse's mouth closed or at least to prevent a horse from evading the bit by opening the mouth too far. It can sometimes prevent the horse from putting its tongue over the bit and avoiding pressure in that manner

Second, the noseband is also used to help stop a horse from pulling. A stronger noseband can many times be used instead of a stronger bit, which makes it a valuable option for riders that want more control, but do not want to back their horse off, that is, to make the horse afraid to go forward, especially when jumping, which is often an undesirable consequence when the horse is placed in a strong or harsh bit.

Third, it can be an attachment for other equipment, such as a standing martingale. It is also valuable for

young horses just learning to go "on the bit", as it supports the jaw and helps the horse to relax its masseter, and flex softly at the poll.

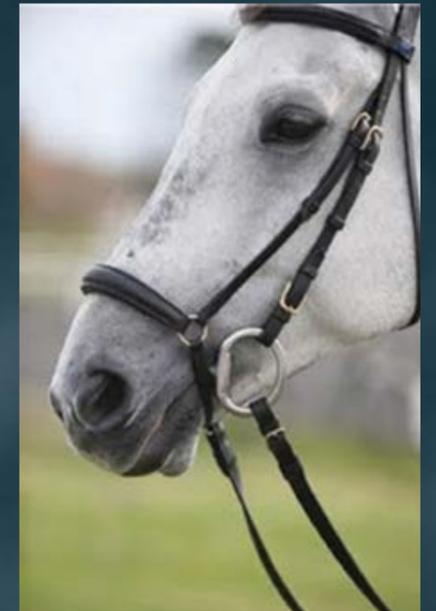
There is a correlation between the sensitivity of a noseband and the amount of tension needed in the reins to obtain a response from the horse. In a 2011 study of horses being ridden in English riding equipment with the noseband in one of three adjacent adjustments, greater rein tension was needed to get a response from the horses when they had the looser adjustment. However, the study did not go on to examine the effects of no noseband at all or a very tight adjustment. Thus, nosebands may add some pressure to the nose when the reins are applied, depending on adjustment, style and the degree to which the horse resists the bit. With a soft leather noseband on a well-trained horse, the effect is minimal.

A bridle does not necessarily need a noseband, and many bridles, such as those used in Western riding, flat racing, or endurance riding, do not have one. Some horses shown in-hand do not use a noseband in order to better show off the animal's head. Many old paintings also depict a hunting horse without a noseband, since it was not always deemed useful by certain riders.

However, even in disciplines such as western riding, where it is considered a sign of a polished horse to not require a noseband or cavesson, one is often used on horses in training as a precaution to help prevent the horse from learning bad habits such as opening the mouth and evading the bit.

### DROP NOSEBANDS:

A drop noseband hangs lower on the horse's face, hanging down below the level of the bit rings, and helps



Drop noseband

prevent the horse from opening its mouth and evading the bit.

Invented by the Spanish Riding School, this noseband encircles the nose around the chin groove, as opposed to just below the cheekbone, with the strap on the nasal bone, and never below it. It reminds the horse to keep its mouth closed and prevents the horse from crossing the jaw. Due to its position on the lower part of the face, it should not be used with a standing martingale. A drop noseband is also not suitable for galloping work, as it tends to restrict the nostrils if it is fitted incorrectly. Although the drop used to be very popular in dressage, it is very rarely seen today, partly because many riders dislike the look it gives the horse's head. However, many horses prefer the drop noseband to the flash, and it is a very useful piece of equipment.

### FLASH NOSEBANDS:

A flash noseband is a small strap attached to the top of the cavesson that buckles underneath the horse's chin, below the bit rings to keep the horse's mouth shut so it can't evade the bit. The upper cavesson is adjusted somewhat tighter than a plain cavesson to prevent it from being pulled toward the end of the

muzzle by the lower flash strap. The lower flash strap runs below the bit and under the chin groove. It is buckled so the remainder of the strap points downwards.

**FIGURE EIGHT NOSEBANDS:**

The cheek rings of a figure eight noseband sit high up on the horse's cheeks, and the straps cross over the horse's nose and buckle under the horse's chin like a flash noseband. It helps keep the horse's mouth shut, but may be more comfortable for the horse, as it does not impair the expansion of the horse's nostrils. Horses that must jump or gallop hard may be better off in a figure eight than a flash noseband. This type of noseband is often seen on race horses. This may also be called a grackle noseband. Also called a crossed, Grackle or Mexican noseband, this noseband crosses from the top of the cheekbone on one side, over the nose to the chin groove on the other side, under the horse's chin, and back up to the opposite cheekbone. It is used to remind the horse to keep its mouth closed and prevents him from crossing his jaw, and its design provides more expansion of the nostrils, which is preferable for horses performing work involving galloping (eventing, polo, racing), and has always been popular in show jumping. Many people believe that this type of noseband is more comfortable than a flash.

**LEVER OR COMBINATION NOSEBAND:**

This noseband has a half-moon piece of metal that goes on each side of the horse's face. On the "top" end of the curve (near the horse's cheek bone), a piece of leather is attached that runs under the jaw and attaches to the other side of the face. At the peak of the curve is a piece of leather that runs over the top of nose in a position slightly lower from where a regular cavesson would cross. At the "bottom" of the curve, a third piece of leather goes under the chin groove of the horse. This noseband is similar in design to the figure-eight, and works similarly by preventing the horse from crossing his jaws (which is especially helped by the metal on either side of the face). Unlike the figure-eight, it does not stabilize the bit and it tends



Flash noseband



Figure 8 noseband



Combination noseband



Kineton noseband

to push the cheeks in against the horse's molars which can be painful.

**KINETON OR PUCKLE:**

Named for the English town of Kineton, and originating in horse racing for animals uncontrollable at high speeds, this noseband often cited as being rather severe. It transfers bit pressure from the rider's hand to the nose. The Kineton has metal half-rings that pass under the bit, and a leather strap that sits below the bit and over the nose (which it does not encircle) about where a drop noseband would cross. There is no strap to keep the horse's mouth closed. This noseband is only used with a snaffle bit and without a martingale. It is most commonly seen in eventing on the cross-country phase, and in show. This noseband allows the rider to ride lightly with a mild bit and still stop a strong horse.

**CRANK NOSEBAND OR SWEDISH CAVESSON:**

Used most often on dressage horses

at levels where a double bridle is worn, this noseband is similar to the plain cavesson except it has a leveraged buckle design that may be adjusted very tight, so as to keep the horse's mouth closed. Double bridles cannot use flash or drop cavessons, so the crank is usually seen on upper level dressage horses who will not keep the mouth shut. It is also used occasionally on show hunters and hunt seat equitation horses. If adjusted so the horse can't open its jaw at all when the crank is tight, the horse also cannot relax its jaw. Additionally, it can push the cheeks against the horse's teeth when over tightened, which is painful.

**About the author:**

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