

THE CAVESSON

The cavesson is a versatile headpiece distinguished by three rings across the noseband. While often associated with longework, it's ideal for groundwork, long reining, work in hand, and even riding and driving. Its design allows for clear, precise communication with your horse's head, encouraging healthy movement and alignment.

When working from the ground with a single line, attaching that line to the center ring on top of the horse's nose allows you to feel deeply into the horse's body, and to guide the horse's head in a healthy way.

When you ask a horse for a gentle bending, from the ring on top of his nose, the horse is encouraged to bring his skull to the inside and look into the turn. By contrast, asking the same from the chin ring of a halter will have the horse instead bring his lower jaw to the inside, resulting in a twisting of the head away from the direction of travel. This is the opposite to a healthy bending!

For basic leading work, a halter and lead rope are sufficient. But when you're looking to influence the horse's head position, balance, or self-carriage, switch to a cavesson for better communication and support.

Cavessons are available in a wide range of qualities and price points. The best are made of soft leather, with a sturdy but flexible noseband that conforms to the shape of the horse's nose.



Photo from www.barock-flair.com

Fit the cavesson like a snaffle bridle. The noseband should sit about two fingers' width below the cheekbones, snug but not tight. Cheekpieces should stay clear of the horse's eyes, and any throatlatch should allow free movement of the jaw, poll, and upper neck.

Finally, be mindful of the line you attach to the cavesson. Because it will be resting on sensitive tissues on the horse's nose, it is considerate to avoid big heavy clips that will bang his face. A lunge line with a simple lightweight clip is fine. An old pair of reins with a clip fastened to one end is an easy, effective option. Your line can be leather, nylon, or biothane, so long as it is sufficiently long enough (12-15 ft is a great starting length) and not excessively bulky.

CAVESSON RECOMMENDATIONS

Shopping for a cavesson? There are many out there, but here are a few I quite like, at varying price points.

First Choice: [Barock Flair cavecon](#)

Material: quality leather
Sizes advertised: pony, cob, full
Shipping: worldwide from Germany

Second Choice: [Manolo Mendez cavesson](#)

Material: quality leather
Sizes advertised: pony, cob, full, oversize
Shipping: worldwide from Australia

Economy Option: Shires cavesson, available from:

[Shires \(UK\)](#)

[Horse and Hound \(Canada\)](#)

[Bit of Britain \(USA\)](#)

Material: Nylon with fleece padding
Sizes advertised: pony, cob, full, oversize

Note: The Shires cavesson is commonly available at many local tack stores worldwide.

Draft Size Economy Option: [drafttack.com](#)

Material: Nylon with fleece padding
Sizes advertised: draft, warmblood
Shipping: worldwide from USA

Mini Size Economy Option: [Tough1 from minitack.com](#)

Material: Nylon with fleece padding
Sizes advertised: mini
Shipping: worldwide from USA

Custom Option:

You can also get your local leather worker to make a cavesson custom-fit to your equine. A good saddle maker or leather repair technician will be able to either build one from scratch, or modify an existing halter to add the rings and padding on the noseband.

Best to Avoid:

Please note that the cavesson commonly available from Greenhawk is very poor quality, and NOT recommended. (See following page for notes on what to look for.)

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A CAVESSON

NOSEBAND

The noseband should be comfortably padded, and of a material that shapes itself to the horse's face, without being restrictive in any way. High-quality leather nosebands, like the Branderup and Mendez above, use a chain for a flexible but supportive core, wrapped in foam, wrapped in soft leather. The rings on these cavessons are fairly small and attached directly to the core. This provides both stability and comfort and allows for the clearest transfer of information to and from your hands.

In the more economical nylon cavessons, I prefer a noseband that is padded with fleece, with a simple piece of nylon on top and D-rings sewn in. While you don't get the same stability offered by the chain core on the leather cavessons, the piece fits comfortably to the horse's face and you still get a clear transfer of information with minimal "white noise".

Many nylon cavessons, however, have chunky metal plates with big, floppy rings on top of the fleece and nylon noseband. While these do work, they have some significant drawbacks: The metal plates make the noseband more rigid so that it cannot conform as smoothly to your horse's face. Furthermore, the bulky metal and large rings (often on swivel joints) cause a lot of information to get lost in the tack, creating a "white noise" effect and reducing both the effectiveness of your aids and your ability to feel your horse.

JAW STRAP

The purpose of a jaw strap (throatlatch) on a cavesson is to prevent the cheekpieces from rubbing too close to the horse's eyes. Depending on your cavesson and your horse, a jaw strap may not be necessary at all on a high quality leather cavesson, but is entirely acceptable. Ideally, the jaw strap should be adjustable in length and also in position to allow the best possible fit. Many nylon cavessons are built more like a halter, with a built-in jaw strap and gullet strap (connecting to the noseband). These are fine as long as a good fit can be achieved that allows for both stability and freedom of movement in the horse's jaw.

A gullet strap (which connects the jaw strap to the noseband) is entirely optional, and a matter of personal preference. The gullet strap has the added advantage of allowing for a chin ring, making it possible for the cavesson to double as a halter, which is nice for switching between leading work and lunging work.