

Safekeeping

Daily Practices to Avert Injuries

Halter Hang-ups

By Ruthann Smith
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Do you know your horse can break his neck when tied? Or, that a halter can be a recipe for death? I have known several horses that died instantly during halter-related accidents.

Tragedies ensue because halters are ill-fitted and won't break. Picture a horse grazing: It rubs its face on its legs and stomps at flies. If it puts its foot down through a noseband that is too big, it will die. To free itself, it'll thrash and break a neck and/or leg. If the horse is tied and can't break loose when it spooks, or gets its foot over the lead, or hooks the lead over its neck, or lies down when tied too short, it is all over. There is no opportunity to intercept such an accident. We need to avoid them.

So, here are some rules to live by:

- 1. No tickling.** You want the halter to be comfortable but not dangerous. If the noseband is touching the nostril it tickles. Consequently, the horse will snort and try to rub off the halter. You don't want it to hook it on something. So, raise the noseband to let the horse relax.
- 2. Fist the noseband.** To measure the noseband, be sure a fist fits between the face and halter. If the noseband is too big,

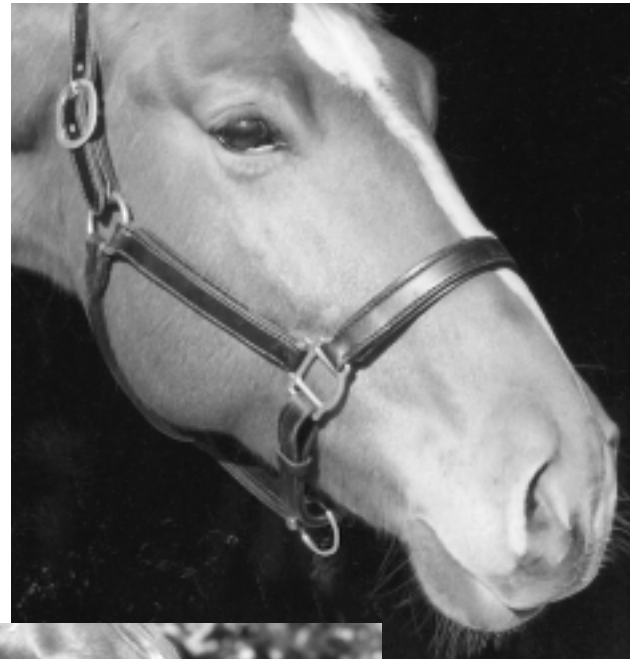


PHOTO: HELEN PEPPE
This halter needs the headstall loosened a hole or two. You want a fist to fit inside the noseband. Watch those cheek bones - this is a bit too close for comfort.



PHOTO: HELEN PEPPE
This halter is too big, but it could be fine if holes were punched in the noseband and the headstall were shortened.

shorten the headstall. Some halters have adjustable nosebands. However, they usually don't have enough holes to fit an average horse. So, you may need to use a hole punch for a comfortable and safe halter fit.

- 3. Fist the throat-latch.** The horse needs space between the halter and his throat. This allows him to turn his head comfortably and breathe well. Yes, a tight halter can hinder his wind capacity. I know tight-fitting halters are fashionable in some circles. But, fashion



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