

Looks Expensive

Here's how to get a great-looking halter for not a lot of money.

By Linda Pigg
with **Tonya Ratliff-Garrison**

IT'S THE MOST ESSENTIAL PIECE OF EQUIPMENT IN HALTER.

The show halter can make or break a horse. A good one can turn him into a star, while a cheap halter can make the best-looking horse look like a nag.

Although AQHA Professional Horseman Linda Pigg's show halters are custom made, she said mass-produced halters can still help you win blue ribbons.

"These halters are not good enough to take and show a horse at the World Show but they are fine for the weekend shows and way good for 4-H and open shows," she said.

But when you buy a less expensive halter, you have to realize you will have to give up something, whether that be leather quality, the amount of silver or a less trendy style.

"You'll still probably have to spend around \$300 to \$500 but it won't cost you as much as a custom-made halter, which can cost over \$1,000," she said. "But you have to remember, in the long run, a better halter will pay for itself."

Before buying a halter, Linda recommends going to horse shows to see what top trainers and amateurs are using.

"Also, look through the *Journal* and see what the horses are wearing," she said. "Look at the different styles, because there are a lot of different styles – the way the leather attaches, the way the noseband attaches to the cheek piece, whether it has round or square rings, is the silver plain or does it have a rope edge, are the buckles big or small. Just look at what everyone is showing in." ■

Tonya Ratliff-Garrison is a field editor for The American Quarter Horse Journal. She can be reached at tonyag@aqha.org.

Jewels

Jewels are just a personal preference. The stone would be the last thing I would look at if I was going to buy a halter. I'm going to look at the blank first.

Silver

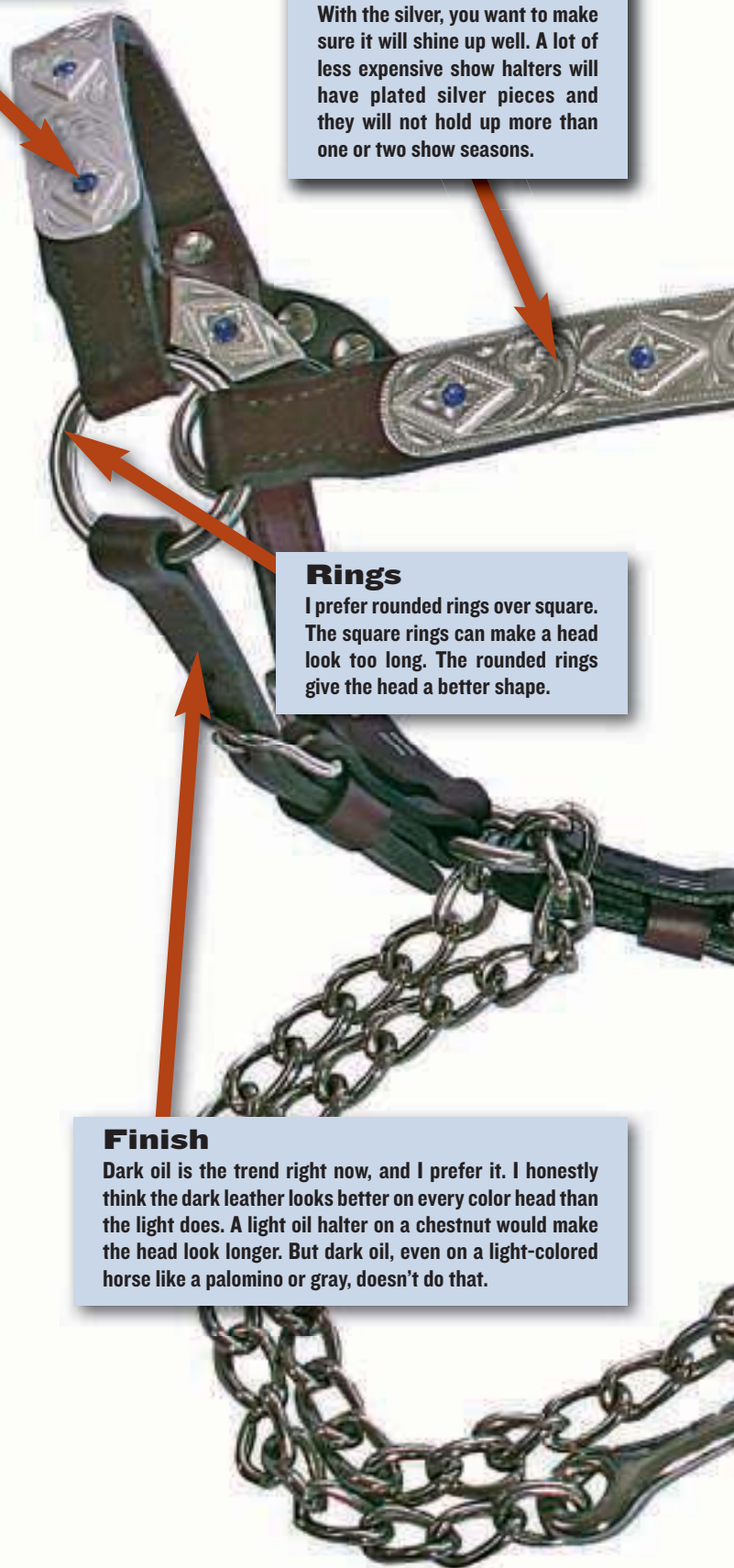
With the silver, you want to make sure it will shine up well. A lot of less expensive show halters will have plated silver pieces and they will not hold up more than one or two show seasons.

Rings

I prefer rounded rings over square. The square rings can make a head look too long. The rounded rings give the head a better shape.

Finish

Dark oil is the trend right now, and I prefer it. I honestly think the dark leather looks better on every color head than the light does. A light oil halter on a chestnut would make the head look longer. But dark oil, even on a light-colored horse like a palomino or gray, doesn't do that.



Blank

For me, this is the most important part of the halter. You've got to have a good blank. You should get one that is double leather and stitched together, even the part that goes over the poll if possible. They just hold their shape better.

Buckle

I prefer regular buckles. Some halters have these huge buckles, but I don't care for those as they can take away from the prettiness of the horse's head. If you have a horse that has a really pretty head, you should buy a halter with very small buckles.

Tips

Make sure the poll piece has a silver tip on each side.

Jowl

I preferred a rolled leather jowl strap without buckles. It just makes the horse's face look cleaner.

Lead

The lead is very important to me. All of my leads are double leather all the way down. If you do buy single leather, you need to make sure to keep it oiled. If you don't, the lead will curl and look awful.

CARE & FIT

No matter what kind of show halter you own, if you don't take care of it or if it doesn't fit your horse properly, then the judge is going to notice the halter, not the horse.

CARE

You need to keep the silver and leather clean.

Before I go to a horse show, I'll take out my show halters and clean them. If the leather needs oil, I will do it at this time. However, many times, we don't need to oil them because of the oil on the horse's face from showing. I also clean and oil the lead.

Clean the silver at this time with a regular silver cleaner. There's not one silver cleaner that is really better than the other, it just takes some elbow grease. They are all about the same.

When you get done showing a horse, wipe off the halter with a dry towel or cloth and put the halter back in the halter bag. I usually put in two halters per bag.

Don't forget to take care of your lead, too. People will have a beautiful halter they worry so much about and then they'll have this lead that looks like it has ridden in the back of the truck all year. The lead is important to the look of the halter; it's just all one picture.

When putting away a lead, I take it and start with the end that's not the chain. I roll it up so it's a flat little coil. Then I take the chain and I wrap it around through the center. That keeps the leads nice and neat, and I put them in the bottom of the bag.

FIT

Fit is important in any show halter but especially in a less expensive halter. You want it to fit.

You don't want the halter too far up on the horse's nose and the part under the throat latch needs to be tight. I don't mean choking the horse, but it needs to fit under the jaw and tight under the throat latch. The poll piece needs to be behind the ears.

If you're showing a yearling, don't buy a 2-year-old halter and try to take it all the way up. If won't work because it won't fit.

If you're not sure if the halter fits properly, don't be afraid to ask a more experienced amateur or a professional trainer for advice. Sometimes exhibitors seem almost afraid to ask us for help. But if they will come up and ask us, we'll be more than happy to give some suggestions.

But you have to ask. If I'm standing there, and I see a new person standing over there and their halter is down on their horse's nose and it's way too big and it needs adjusting on every buckle, I don't want to go over there and say anything, because I don't want to hurt their feelings.

However, if they have a question and they say, "Gee, my halter doesn't look like it fits like yours," that's part of what I'm there for. You shouldn't be afraid to come up to ask for advice.