

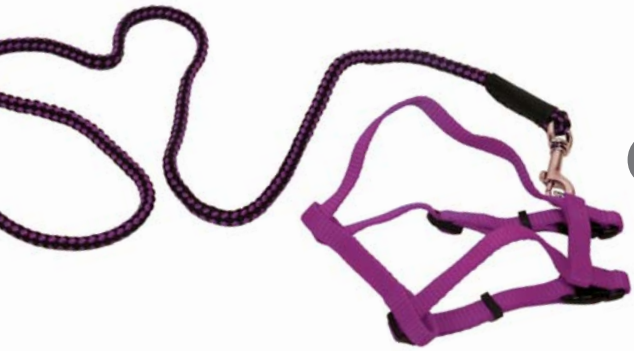
Training tools

- part 1

COLLARS & HARNESSSES

-the *good*, the *bad* and the *ugly*.

By Paul Owens



It used to be that all anyone ever used for training dogs was a six-foot leash and a choke chain. How times have changed – and for the better. In this two-part article, we'll explore the collars, harnesses, leashes and tethers on today's market, and the pros and cons of each. In Part 1, we'll focus on collars and harnesses.

As a professional reward-based trainer, I believe whatever tools you choose should be used humanely, with your first thought being what is best and most comfortable for the dog.

COLLARS

Collars should not be used for training a dog to walk nicely on a leash. Yet, they are nevertheless often utilized for training purposes. They can be made of nylon, plastic, cotton, rubber, leather and metal, and come in a range of types – rolled, flat, Martingale, buckle and snap. Here we'll review the pros and cons of the most familiar and often used collars.

Choke chains and prong collars

Also referred to as “slip” collars, chain training collars and check chains have been around for over 50 years. They were originally made popular by British dog trainer Barbara Woodhouse in the 1960s. The choke collar is placed just behind the dog's ears and constricts or tightens when the trainer pulls on the leash.

A prong collar, also known as a pinch collar, is made of a series of metal spikes, prongs, or wedge-shaped points that pinch the loose skin of the dog's neck when the trainer pulls on the leash.

Both choke and prong collars are primarily used to control a dog's pulling and lunging and to get him to heel. The trainer usually employs a series of short jerks on the leash, also called “pops”, as punishment to get the desired result. Ultimately, the dog learns to avoid the aversive tightening of the collar around

his neck by walking near the trainer's side.

Pros: None! It is certainly possible to force a dog to stop jumping or lunging, and to teach a behavior such as heeling, by using a choke or prong collar. However, our understanding of how dogs learn has come a long way in the past 20 years, and the training field has evolved, resulting in safer, easier, and more reliable reward-based methods. Using a choke or prong collar to force a behavior is no way to educate a family member and friend.

Cons: Can cause whiplash and injuries to the trachea and esophagus; these can lead to asphyxiation (such as when a dog is hung or “helicoptered”). Other injuries may include spinal cord trauma; injuries to blood vessels in the eyes; neck sprains; bruising and damage to the skin and tissues in the neck; and/or behavioral problems such as pain-influenced aggression, which may lead to severe bites.

Martingale collars

Also known as limited slip collars or greyhound collars, Martingale collars are flat, usually cotton collars with a loop that goes over the dog's head, and another attached loop, that when pulled, tightens the loop around the dog's head.

Pros: When fitted properly, it doesn't choke the dog, yet makes it virtually impossible for him to slip or back out of it.

Cons: Loose loops. People often do not fit the collar correctly. The dog's



A Martingale collar needs to be fitted right to be safe and effective.