

ESSENTIAL GEAR

Winters' Rope Halter

With **RICHARD WINTERS** • Compiled by **ROSS HECOX**

RICHARD WINTERS IS PARTICULAR about the halter he uses. The Reno, Nevada, horseman and clinician prefers a rope halter rather than a wide web halter.

He says the thin, tubular material—usually nylon or polypropylene—communicates a clearer signal to a horse than the flat, 1-inch-wide nylon used in a web halter.

“Hand-tied halters are more conducive to communicating with our horses,” he says. “It’s not that we can’t train a horse in a web halter, but there’s just a nicer feel with [rope halters]. Wide web halters are about as wide as some breast collars. What’s a breast collar for? It’s made to lean against and brace against. And often with wide web halters horses start leaning and pulling us around.”

Whether doing groundwork, tying a horse or putting the first few rides on a young prospect, Winters uses a rope halter.

“I use it exclusively,” he says. “I like one with soft material that isn’t abrasive at all. Some people have the misconception that it is just for training, and then they put on a wide web halter afterward to haul their horse or tie him up. But [a rope halter] is the only halter I use.”

Some people are confused about where to tie this knot. You go through the loop [with the tail end] and then tie the knot on the loop, rather than tying [the tail end] to itself [above the loop]. It’s a simple half-hitch around the loop, with the end pointed toward the horse’s tail. If you have excess tail, you can tuck it beneath the throatlatch piece of the halter. If it were to get super tight—because the horse pulled back or something—this knot can be loosened just by wringing the loop back and forth. Even if you don’t have the strongest fingers you can get that knot undone.

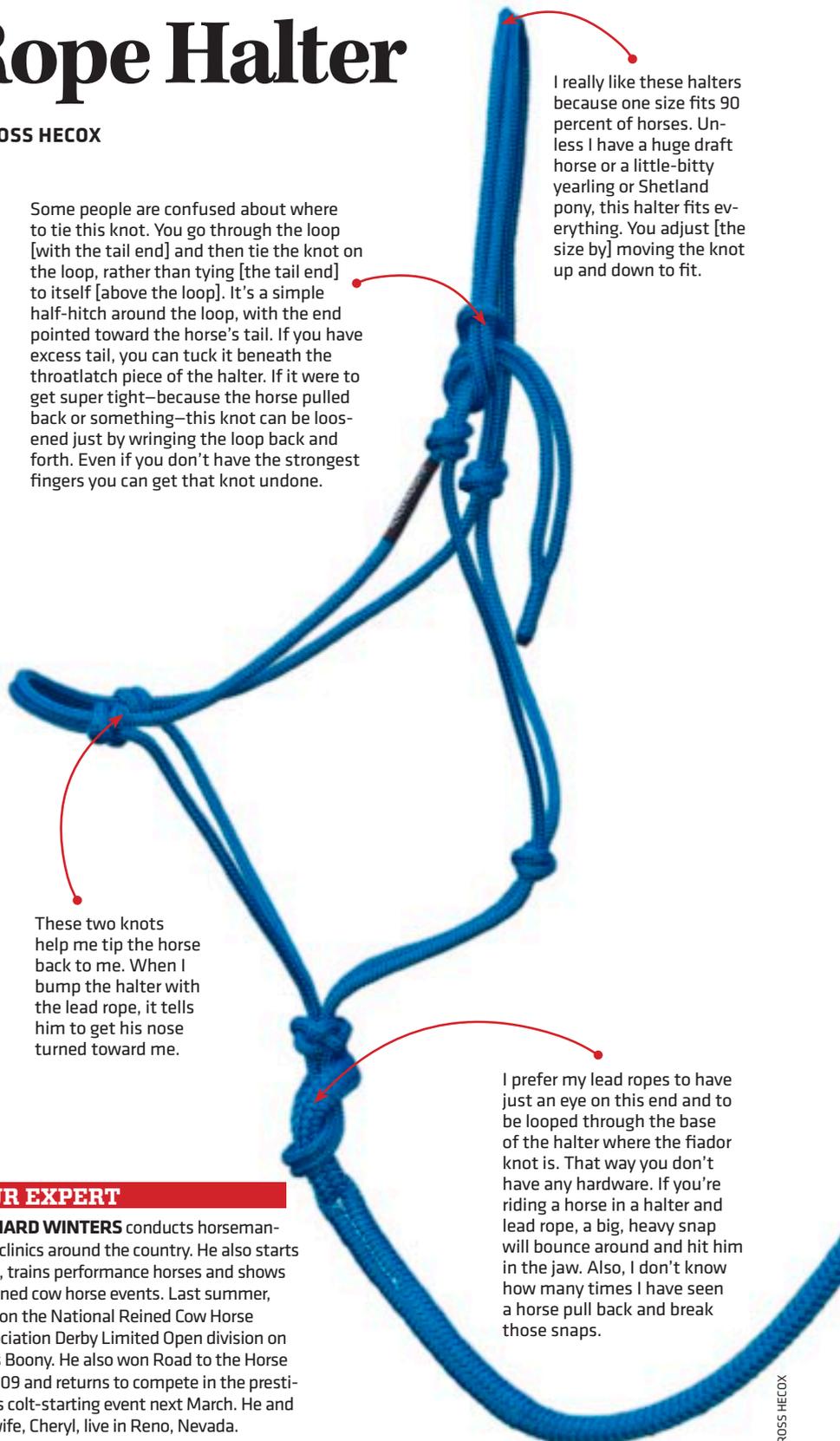
I really like these halters because one size fits 90 percent of horses. Unless I have a huge draft horse or a little-bitty yearling or Shetland pony, this halter fits everything. You adjust [the size by] moving the knot up and down to fit.

These two knots help me tip the horse back to me. When I bump the halter with the lead rope, it tells him to get his nose turned toward me.

I prefer my lead ropes to have just an eye on this end and to be looped through the base of the halter where the fiador knot is. That way you don’t have any hardware. If you’re riding a horse in a halter and lead rope, a big, heavy snap will bounce around and hit him in the jaw. Also, I don’t know how many times I have seen a horse pull back and break those snaps.

OUR EXPERT

RICHARD WINTERS conducts horsemanship clinics around the country. He also starts colts, trains performance horses and shows in reined cow horse events. Last summer, he won the National Reined Cow Horse Association Derby Limited Open division on Bugs Boony. He also won Road to the Horse in 2009 and returns to compete in the prestigious colt-starting event next March. He and his wife, Cheryl, live in Reno, Nevada.



ROSS HECOX

A cheaper lead rope is flimsy and feels like a ribbon. This has some life and substance in it. And it has the same consistency regardless of the weather, whether it's cold or hot. The end is braided back into itself, and that gives it some weight and substance when I swing it around.

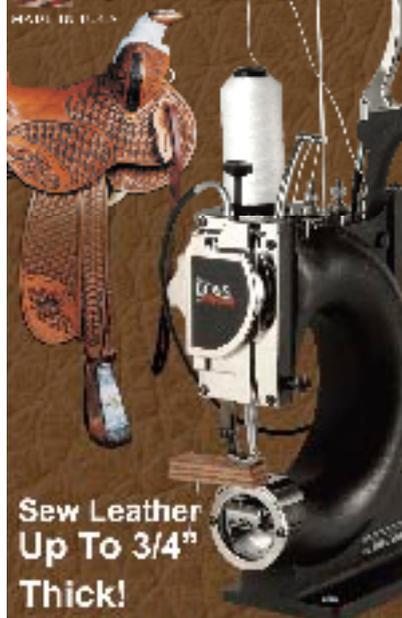


One of the tricks is getting these halters adjusted correctly [as shown]. After you tie the knot [behind the left ear], it has a tendency to drop down just a little bit. So you have to pull the halter up the bridge of the horse's nose and under his throatlatch. Then you adjust the knot.

I really like 12-foot nylon lead ropes. If you're going to do groundwork and send your horse around in circles, anything shorter than that starts to get a little bit dangerous because the horse is too close to you. Twelve feet is just enough rope for me to send my horse out and around, but not so much as to get tangled up in it.

I like the popper in conjunction with the weighted end, because as I'm sending my horse around or driving him forward, I'm going to swing that rope. If he steps into my space or I need impulsion, that popper is there and works very well. Oftentimes when I start young horses under saddle, I start them in a halter and lead rope for the first two or three rides. So that popper is there for me to go over and under, create some commotion when I'm up in the saddle, and drive the horse forward.

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