

Fitting the Working Cavesson

Notes by Kip Mistral

Adjunct to Instructions in *Horse Training In-Hand*

Placement of the cavesson. Please see page 20 of *Horse Training In-Hand*, top photograph, and also the text for the Working Cavesson on that page. The cavesson needs to sit low on the nasal bone because that is the most sensitive area, yet not on the nasal cartilage where it can cause discomfort and cause real damage. Keep checking the placement as you work because leather does stretch. Most people associate working with a cavesson with longeing a horse that is leaning on the cavesson. Usually people work with heavily padded “longeing” cavessons that are fit one inch below the cheekbone so the horse CAN lean on it while they are “exercising” him, holding on to him by the weight of his head, neck and ultimately his body. The work they are doing is different from the work one does when developing a light horse. A horse should never lean on the handler’s hand on the ground or the rider’s hand from the saddle. To do so is disrespectful, and the indulgence of the habit will not result in lightness and responsiveness.

Tightness of the cavesson. The working cavesson must be tightened firmly in the nosepiece so it doesn't slide to one side as does a halter when you longe from the halter. Horses that are longed on halters and heavily-padded “English-style” longeing cavessons tend to lean heavily on the line and the hand, which we want to avoid when we are developing a light, responsive horse. The nosepiece of this cavesson will cause the horse to pay attention, at the same time it is humane. The jowl strap can only be tightened so much before it pulls on the sides of the headstall. If that happens, the jowl strap is too tight. *When* the horse is responsive and obeys the hand, he doesn't lean when you do work in-hand of *any kind*, even longeing, and the cavesson does not need to be tightened firmly.

This traditional type of “working cavesson” is also used from the saddle. Note the bottom photograph on page 20. Here Ellen is going to put a set of reins on the cavesson and ride with both the snaffle bridle, to create bending from the poll, and use the cavesson reins at the same time to lift the head. This method has the effect of the function of a double bridle, and was used extensively by the old classical masters, as the horse had only one bit in the mouth, instead of two which is so demanding of a horse. In those times, the sensitivity of the horse’s mouth was guarded as if it was gold.