

Headcollars

By Sue Brailey

Swissies love to pull and unless your dog is extremely well trained and behaved you will at some stage find yourself needing more control than a standard collar and leads gives. This is when you should consider using a headcollar. I do not recommend using one until the puppy is over 6 months old and you have some level of training in place to expect the dog to walk at heel, without pulling under normal circumstances i.e. generally when there are no distractions. Some owners are knowledgeable enough to be able to train their dogs not to pull under any conditions but I have to say I am not one of them and therefore resort to headcollars where necessary to ensure I have complete control of my dog or dogs.

IN today's society, with the dog laws in place, it is more essential than ever to have complete control over your dog. If your dog spots another dog across the road it could lead to a disaster if you are not in control and the dog manages to get away from you and runs out into the road.

There are many headcollars available so I will talk you through the more common ones.

The most well known one is the **Halti**. I do not recommend using one of these as they can twist and damage the eyes. The material is very thin and can easily cut into the nose and delicate eye area. Vets also do not recommend them.

The best and possibly the safest for a Swissy is the **Dogmatic**. They are similar in design to a Halti but made from better material and when fitted correctly do not twist around so much as the Halti. They come in various sizes so it is important that you get the correct size for your dog so it fits well and the dog will not be able to remove it. The fabric ones are fairly easy to get on and off, the leather ones are a bit more difficult due to buckles instead of clips. The only drawback is they work only on the nose and turn the head so you need to be careful that you do not pull too hard and damage their necks. Overuse can also lead to scarring on the nose area. I personally do not like to see dogs running loose with them on as I worry they may catch a paw in the loop which hangs down under the nose or catch it on a fence. I also feel owners rely too much on them and once they are on, they stay on for the whole walk, which means the dog never gets to learn to walk to heel without it and does not get a reward when doing so.

The one that I use is the **Susi Halter Lead and Headcollar**, all in one. These are made from strong, cushioned webbing that is easy on the dog and easy on the hand and very lightweight. They are based on a simple figure of eight design and very quick and easy to get on and off. They can also be used just as a slip lead for times when you do not need the extra control of the headcollar. This is another advantage of them as when your dog is not pulling you can slip the nose off which rewards the dog. They are light to carry and small enough to go into a pocket. What I like most about them is the fact they work on the whole head, not just the nose, so as the dog pulls they tighten around the nose, face and neck area making it very uncomfortable for the dog, but the main pull is still on the neck, not the nose. The dog is instantly rewarded as soon as he/she stops pulling as the pressure comes off immediately. The only drawback is the dog can quite easily, slip the nose section off with a paw or a gatepost or anything else that is to hand. You need to keep a fairly tight contact on the lead to stop this from happening. I find the dogs accept them very quickly and some are more adept at removing the nose piece than others. However when they are on I can hold three Swissies with one hand. The other advantage is they are one size fits all so you only have to buy one.

The **Gencor** is very similar to the Susi but made out of thinner, harder material which is not so nice for the dog or handler.

My advice is use a headcollar when you really need one but continue to use an ordinary collar and lead for training. I have to admit my pet hate is seeing dogs being obedience trained in headcollars. That is not what they are designed for. There is no substitute for lack of proper training.