

## To Buy Or Not To Buy: A Guide to Dog Training Equipment

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### Abstract

Guardians wishing to purchase equipment for their dogs often have no reliable criteria on which to base a decision to choose between available products. In this study, head collars, flat collars, harnesses and leads from nine equipment companies were assessed by personnel with varying experience in dog training. The products were ranked using a scoring system, and their advantages (pros) and disadvantages (cons) were separately recorded. The top-ranking products in each category of equipment were the New Trix Easyway™ Collar for head collars, the Premier Keepsafe Break-Away Collar™ for flat collars and the Softouch SENSE-ation™ Harness for harnesses. Black Dog Wear™ Double Ended Lead and Smart Lead® were equal in the lead category.

### Introduction

A dog guardian who wishes to purchase equipment for his/her dog may be confronted with a wide range from which to choose. Often the equipment is packaged, and the package cannot be opened to inspect the equipment before purchase. The choice must then be made on the basis of a visual inspection of the parts of the equipment that can be seen and the manufacturer's recommendation regarding the size of the dog and the appropriate size of the equipment. This study has assessed various parameters of some selected equipment and endeavored to give an overall rating of the products studied.

### Materials and Methods

Twenty-five equipment manufacturers from five different countries were contacted. The aim and methodology of the study were explained, and the manufacturers were invited to submit equipment for assessment. Ten manufacturers responded positively; eight of these sent equipment and one distributor contributed equipment on behalf of a manufacturer, with the manufacturer's knowledge. The companies that supplied equipment and the equipment submitted are shown in Table 1. Two manufacturers agreed to participate in the trial but failed to supply equipment. Equipment was received from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. One piece of equipment (Kumalong No Pull Harness) was tested at the manufacturer's request, despite being only a prototype.

**Table 1. Companies that Provided Equipment for the Trial and the Equipment Submitted**

<b>Company</b>	<b>Equipment</b>
Agline (distributor for EzyDog™)	Neo Collar Harness
Black Dog Wear™	Training Halter® Infin8 Halter® Double Ended Lead Smart Lead® Strong Lead Standard Collar
Kumalong Dog Products	No Pull Harness (prototype only)
NewTrix™ Advanced Pet Products	Easyway™ Collar
Premier™ Pet Products	Gentle Leader® Head Collar Gentle Leader Easy Walk™ Harness Keepsafe Break-Away Collar™
Softouch Concepts Inc.	SENSE-ation™ Harness SENSE-ible™ Harness
Sporn Pet Products	No Pull Harness™ Training Halter™ Double Handled Lead™
The Canny Company Limited	Canny® Collar
Tug N Hug Pet Harness Company	Easy On/Off No-Pull Harness Tuff N Huff Easy On/Off Dog Harness

Ten individuals, with levels of expertise ranging from accreditation and certification by the Delta Society Australia in positive dog training to inexperienced pet guardians, together with their dogs, were recruited to assess the equipment. A collective of seven aspiring positive trainers and five dogs participated in the assessment of the head collars only, as part of their trainer education; their assessments were recorded as a single entry. Assessors were located throughout Australia in both urban and

rural locations. Due to the differing numbers of each piece of equipment submitted for inclusion in this trial, not every piece of equipment was assessed by all assessors. Head collars were not tested on the four brachycephalic dogs in the testing team.

Assessors were asked to rate each of the 14 criteria in the Assessment Protocol (Table 2) on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = average, 4 = good and 5 = very good.

**Table 2. Assessment Protocol**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Instructions for putting on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These are the instructions that show the dog's guardian how to attach the equipment to the dog—not instructions for use.</li> <li>• How clear are these instructions to someone who has not used this equipment before?</li> </ul>
Ease of putting on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How easy was the equipment to place onto the dog?</li> <li>• Take into account that some dogs have not been conditioned to equipment and some guardians will not use successive approximations to habituate the dog to the equipment.</li> </ul>
Adjustability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the item easily adjusted to fit the dog?</li> <li>• Given the size/weight range that the article is to cover, is there enough adjustability to meet the extremes of size and weight?</li> </ul>
Instructions for use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These are the instructions that show the owner how to use the equipment—not how to attach it to the dog.</li> </ul>
Ease of use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the guardian need to be a contortionist/genius in order to have the equipment work effectively on the dog?</li> </ul>
Efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How efficient is the equipment in doing the job for which it is designed?</li> <li>• How efficient is the equipment in doing the job it says it will do?</li> </ul>
Suitability for dog tested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not all equipment is suitable for all dogs.</li> <li>• Was this piece of equipment suitable for the dog on which you tested it?</li> </ul>
Dog's comfort level/acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider this comfort/acceptance level from both the point of view of a dog that is taught how to accept the equipment and also from the point of view of the dog whose guardian places it on the dog with the expectation that it will be accepted by the dog.</li> </ul>
Quality of fabric from which it is made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the webbing/material of high standard?</li> </ul>
Quality of fittings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of buckles.</li> <li>• Quality of rings (has the company adequately changed the gauge of the rings/buckles for the size of the item?)</li> </ul>
Overall quality of materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the materials compliment each other?</li> <li>• Are there inferior buckles/rings on good-quality webbing or vice versa?</li> </ul>
Quality of construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the materials been well put together?</li> <li>• Could the equipment rub, pinch, pull out coat etc.?</li> </ul>
Value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given the above criteria, is it worth the given cost?</li> </ul>
Aesthetics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the equipment look good?</li> <li>• Is the colour range to your liking?</li> <li>• Is it old fashioned/modern looking etc.?</li> </ul>

Where a manufacturer provided equipment in several sizes, the assessments of each size were combined and the mean score in each criterion was calculated. An overall score was calculated for all criteria for each item of equipment by summing the scores given by each assessor and expressing this as a percentage of

the maximum score possible. This percentage was used to rank each manufacturer's product within a given equipment type. For each item of equipment, an assessor mean score was calculated; the interassessor difference was measured by the range of assessments given for each item of equipment.

## Results

Tables 3, 5, 7 and 9 show the rank order of overall scores as a percentage, the mean assessor

score and the range of assessor scores for each item of equipment. Tables 4, 6, 8, and 10 list the principal positive and negative comments expressed by the assessors.

### *Head Collars*

**Table 3. Head Collars: Rank Order of Scores, Assessor Mean and Range**

	<b>Overall score (%)</b>	<b>Assessor mean/ maximum (range)</b>
NewTrix™ Easyway™ Collar	87	61/70 (51–69)
Gentle Leader® Head Collar	82	57/70 (49–64)
Canny® Collar	66	46/70 (37–65)
Black Dog Wear™ Training Halter®	65	46/70 (34–55)
Black Dog Wear™ Infin8 Halter®	60	42/70 (29–55)

NewTrix™ and Gentle Leader® scored well, both with scores over 80%. NewTrix™ achieved high scores in the quality of material, fittings, construction and efficacy categories. Gentle Leader® had comprehensive instructions

and scored well in aesthetics and efficacy. While not as high as the scores of NewTrix™ or Gentle Leader®, the scores for the Canny® Collar and the Black Dog Wear™ products were still 60% or higher.

**Table 4. Head Collars: Positive and Negative Comments**

<b>Product</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
Black Dog Wear™ Infin8 Halter®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dog still secured on inbuilt collar if nose band is slipped.</li> <li>• Cotton fabric rather than synthetic. More comfortable for the dog.</li> <li>• Once correctly fitted, conveys feeling of security to the handler.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fitting difficulty, particularly for beginners.</li> <li>• Nose piece is too thin and can twist, causing discomfort for dog.</li> <li>• Instructions for fitting and use need expanding.</li> </ul>
Black Dog Wear™ Training Halter®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to fit and to use.</li> <li>• Dog still secured on inbuilt collar if noseband is slipped.</li> <li>• Dog comfortable once fitted correctly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noseband could cut or rub due to poor fit or lack of padding.</li> <li>• Difficulty adjusting noseband.</li> <li>• Instructions for fitting and use need expanding.</li> </ul>
Canny® Collar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controls from behind—dog’s neck not subjected to trauma from turning suddenly.</li> <li>• Can use as a normal collar if not using the head collar.</li> <li>• Easy to fit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dog’s nose pulled down when pressure applied.</li> <li>• The D-rings are not strong enough for larger, powerful dogs.</li> <li>• Loose rings insubstantial and easy to lose.</li> </ul>
NewTrix™ Easyway™ Collar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality construction with padded noseband.</li> <li>• Failsafe safety connector.</li> <li>• No obstruction of airways, mouth, flews.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expensive for some.</li> <li>• Placing over head and ears could be a problem to some dogs.</li> <li>• Collar increases overall lead length.</li> </ul>
Premier Gentle Leader™ Head Collar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent support and instruction material, including training DVD.</li> <li>• Easy to fit.</li> <li>• Value for money.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No safety connector with basic package.</li> <li>• Noseband unpadded and too thin.</li> <li>• Requires very specific fitting to be effective, otherwise too tight (resulting in discomfort for the dog) or too loose (resulting in its being ineffectual or coming off).</li> </ul>

*Flat Collars*

**Table 5. Flat Collars: Rank Order of Scores, Assessor Mean and Range**

<b>Product</b>	<b>Overall score (%)</b>	<b>Assessor mean/ maximum (range)</b>
Premier Keepsafe Break-Away Collar™	81	57/70 (46–69)
EzyDog™ Neo Collar	76	54/70 (37–65)
Black Dog Wear™ Standard Collar	71	50/70 (41–60)

Premier’s Keepsafe Break-Away Collar™ was assessed highly in adjustability, efficacy and aesthetics. The strength of the EzyDog™ Neo Collar lay in overall quality of materials, ease of

putting on and aesthetics. The Black Dog Wear™ flat collars scored well in the categories of ease of use and comfort/acceptance level for the dog. As all of the collars scored over 70%,

each would be satisfactory for its intended use. all the collars differ in appearance.  
Personal taste would dictate preference because

**Table 6. Flat Collars: Positive and Negative Comments**

<b>Product</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
Black Dog Wear™ Standard Collar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6-month guarantee on materials and workmanship.</li> <li>• Double-stitched reinforcement.</li> <li>• Value for money.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plastic clip may not be strong enough for some heavier dogs.</li> <li>• Fabric likely to stretch with use.</li> <li>• Slim design has more adverse impact on throat if dog pulls.</li> </ul>
EzyDog™ Neo Collar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well padded, soft, durable.</li> <li>• Reflective trim great for night-time visibility.</li> <li>• Good value for money.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too cumbersome for some breeds.</li> <li>• Requires second loop for dog ID tags, rather than putting them on current ring or collar.</li> <li>• Velcro adjustment may become “fuzzy” with use (particularly with long-coated dogs) and lose its adjustment value.</li> </ul>
Premier Keepsafe Break-Away Collar™	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Took just enough pressure to break away but not so little that it would come off easily.</li> <li>• Good instructions—very clear and easy to understand.</li> <li>• Relatively easily to re-clip after having broken apart.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead must be attached to both D-rings or collar could pull apart while walking. Incorrect fitting could lead to potential danger because of this.</li> <li>• Could be constantly chewed up if worn by multi-dog households who pull collars off in play.</li> <li>• Cannot grab hold of dog collar at all as it gives way too easily—can’t grab dog in emergency.</li> </ul>

*Harnesses*

**Table 7. Harnesses: Rank Order of Scores, Assessor Mean and Range**

<b>Product</b>	<b>Overall score (%)</b>	<b>Assessor mean/ maximum (range)</b>
Softouch SENSE-ation™ Harness	84	59/70 (52–69)
Softouch SENSE-ible™ Harness	81	57/70 (52–64)
EzyDog™ Harness	80	56/70 (42–66)
Premier Gentle Leader Easy Walk™ Harness	78	55/70 (50–59)
Sporn Training Halter™	71	51/70 (45–54)
Sporn No Pull Harness™	69	49/70 (40–64)
Tug N Hug Easy On/Off No-Pull Harness	69	48/70 (34–53)
Kumalong No Pull Harness (prototype)	60	42/70 (27–52)
Tug N Hug Tuff N Huff Easy On/Off Dog Harness	49	34/70 (24–45)

The widest range of interproduct scores was seen in this category. The high scorers (80% or

above) were Softouch Concepts Inc and EzyDog™. Both the Softouch SENSE-ible™

and Softouch SENSE-ation™ harnesses scored well in ease of putting on, product quality and each of the instruction categories. Efficacy also rated highly with the Softouch products. Although not marketed as a training harness, the EzyDog™ Harness scored well in efficacy and extremely well in quality and acceptance/comfort level for the dog. The remaining harnesses, with the exception of the Tug N Hug Tuff N Huff Harness, rated between 60% and 78%. Premier Gentle Leader Easy Walk™ Harness scored highly in quality, efficacy and ease of use, but some assessors thought it was a little expensive. Each of the Sporn™ harnesses was considered easy to fit and effective, but concern was expressed about

the movement of the Sherpa Sleeves™ on the thin leg straps causing irritation to the dog. It was also felt that the instructions for use could have been more detailed. The Tug N Hug Easy On/Off No-Pull Harness scored well in quality of materials and construction but did not rate highly on value for money. The Kumalong No Pull Harness was assessed as a prototype. Many comments were made about the need for improvement in the quality of fittings and construction. However, the Kumalong did score well on aesthetics, ease of use, value for money and adjustability. Tuff N Huff also scored well on quality of materials and construction, but was not considered easy to put onto the dog nor well accepted by the dog.

**Table 8. Harnesses: Positive and Negative Comments**

<b>Product</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
EzyDog™ Harness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Padded chest plate for comfort.</li> <li>• Great versatility, with excellent adapter for car harness.</li> <li>• Reflective strips for safety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No fitting instructions.</li> <li>• If not fitted correctly, may slip, causing discomfort (need written fitting and usage instructions).</li> <li>• Synthetic material—may be slightly sweaty in breast plate area.</li> </ul>
Premier Gentle Leader Easy Walk™ Harness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well constructed from quality components.</li> <li>• Very adjustable.</li> <li>• Excellent instructions on product and on website.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustrating to adjust.</li> <li>• Appropriate size (as per packet) did not fit properly.</li> <li>• Some rubbing and hair pulling at buckle attachment.</li> </ul>
Kumalong No Pull Harness (prototype)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple to put on and effective.</li> <li>• Lightweight.</li> <li>• Basic product, basic price.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of materials needs improvement.</li> <li>• Not much use against an established puller—strong dog could break harness.</li> <li>• Limited adjustment.</li> </ul>
Softouch SENSE-ation™ Harness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent instruction manual for fitting and use.</li> <li>• Well-constructed, quality product.</li> <li>• Easy to fit, adjust and remove.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buckles undersized for large dog. Was the product strength tested?</li> <li>• Ensure correct fitting or could impede movement.</li> <li>• Impacts on shoulder movement.</li> </ul>
Softouch SENSE-ible™ Harness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very easy to fit and remove—no need to move body parts on the dog.</li> <li>• Excellent instructions.</li> <li>• Quality product.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead clip could dig into the dog.</li> <li>• Some sharp edges.<sup>a</sup></li> </ul>
Sporn Training Halter™	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to put on and adjust.</li> <li>• Effective once correctly fitted.</li> <li>• Dog’s comfort level appeared good.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sherpa sleeves can slip, causing discomfort.</li> <li>• Collar too large for small dogs.</li> <li>• Better instructions for use required.</li> </ul>
Sporn No Pull Harness™	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lightweight.</li> <li>• Easy to fit.</li> <li>• Effective.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thin straps may cut into dog if padding moves.</li> <li>• Largish flat metal strap holder became very hot on the skin of short-coated dog.</li> <li>• Easy to get muddled if straps get twisted or entwined.</li> </ul>
Tug N Hug Easy On/Off No-Pull Harness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dog unable to back out of harness.</li> <li>• Good quality materials and fittings.</li> <li>• Good adjustment for sizing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too many straps to adjust.</li> <li>• Instructions need improving—photographs not clear.</li> <li>• Didn’t stop dog pulling.</li> </ul>
Tug N Hug Tuff N Huff Easy On/Off Dog Harness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy to take on and off.</li> <li>• Comfortable for the dog.</li> <li>• Effective.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complicated to put on.</li> <li>• Bulky.</li> <li>• Too expensive.</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup>These were the only two negative comments made on this product.



*Leads*

**Table 9. Leads: Rank Order of Scores, Assessor Mean and Range**

Product	Overall score (%)	Assessor mean/ maximum (range)
Black Dog Wear™ Double Ended Lead	78	55/70 (51–64)
Black Dog Wear™ Smart Lead®	78	55/70 (48–61)
Sporn Double Handled Lead™	74	52/70 (42–61)
Black Dog Wear™ Strong Lead	64	45/70 (42–50)

With the exception of the instruction categories, Black Dog Wear™ Double Ended Lead did well across the spectrum of criteria. However, some assessors commented that they believed it to be a little too expensive. Black Dog Wear™ Smart Lead® suffered from the same lack of adequate instructions, but scored

well in suitability, dog comfort/acceptance level and ease of use. The Sporn Double Handled Lead™ scored highly in overall material quality and the quality of the instructions for use. Black Dog Wear™ Strong Lead did not score as highly as the other leads and again was let down by lack of instructions.

**Table 10. Leads: Positive and Negative Comments**

Product	Pros	Cons
Black Dog Wear™ Smart Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6-month guarantee.</li> <li>• Suggestions for appropriate sizes for the dog given by weight on tag (can see at a glance if size is right).</li> <li>• Adjustable and good quality product.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the wrong hands, this could be used as a non-release choker (hopefully mistakenly)!</li> <li>• Would like to see a heavier duty clip for very large dogs.</li> <li>• Stitching on fabric can hurt hands when handle is clipped.</li> </ul>
Black Dog Wear™ Double Ended Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• D-rings allow for a combination of adjustments.</li> <li>• 6-month guarantee.</li> <li>• Versatile.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fingers can be injured on D-rings if lead is pulled through hand.</li> <li>• A little expensive.</li> <li>• No instructions for use or fitting.</li> </ul>
Black Dog Wear™ Strong Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great to have a guarantee.</li> <li>• Good quality and size clip.<sup>a</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fabric could burn hands if dog lunges or pulls constantly.</li> <li>• Doesn't really offer any more than the less expensive leads.</li> <li>• Hand grip not padded, not adjustable for hand sizes.</li> </ul>
Sporn Double Handled Lead™	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very comfortable padding in the two handles.</li> <li>• Love its versatility and length [of lead] is great.</li> <li>• Excellent quality lead.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs to be lighter and easier to adjust.</li> <li>• Confusing, even with fair instructions.</li> <li>• Fingers could be injured on metal clips if lead pulled through hand.</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup>These were the only two positive comments made on this product.

## Discussion

Using the assessment criteria selected for ranking, the top product in each type of equipment was the New Trix Easyway™ Collar for head collars, the Premier Keepsafe Break-Away Collar™ for flat collars, the Softouch SENSE-ation™ Harness for harnesses, and, for leads, Black Dog Wear™ Double Ended and Smart Leads. There was considerable variation in the assessments given by the assessors for any given product. Variables such as guardians' experience, and the breed, weight and morphology of dogs, may explain this. Guardians' personalities may play a role as well; some may have been reluctant to be critical; others may have been excessively critical. Perhaps the dogs' temperaments and level of training could also have affected the guardians' assessments. These factors may explain some of the contradictory entries in Tables 4, 6, 8, and 10. It further suggests that individual preference may always be a marked factor in choosing equipment.

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