

# Jochen Schleese

Founder of Schleese and Saddlefit 4 Life® now offers equine ergonomics courses in addition to his diagnostic saddle fit evaluations in his mission to protect horse and rider.



In the never-ending endeavor of being the "female saddle specialists," Schleese Saddlery founder Jochen Schleese and his team at Schleese Saddlery have become experts in many related subjects. Much of what they do is aimed at helping riders and horses find answers to questions and issues they are experiencing – using Saddlefit 4 Life® principles and systems to protect horse and rider from long term damage. Now an autonomous entity, Saddlefit 4 Life® is taught informally in barn lecture-demos, and as seminars for professional development or certification.

The most direct benefit to horses and riders are the Saddlefit 4 Life® Diagnostic Saddle Fit evaluations, performed by Jochen himself and many independents who've been certified by him. Looking to broaden understanding of proper saddle fit for horse and rider, Jochen founded the Saddlefit 4 Life® network to spread the saddle fit gospel to both aspiring saddle fitters and other equine professionals who consider an understanding of saddle fit complexities as critical to their overall horsemanship abilities. Jochen surrounds himself with a global network of experts (DVMs, trainers, REMTs, osteopaths, chiropractors, MDs, equine institutions) where he teaches the rigorous Saddlefit 4 Life® curriculum.

Saddlefit 4 Life's certification is all about "protecting horse and rider from long term damage," per the course material's headline. The first course is an introduction to the analysis and evaluation of saddle fit. It includes theoretical instruction and practical demonstrations covering several subjects. Topics include the latest empirical evidence and current moral and legal issues, the signs and causes of poor saddle fit, a diagnostic checklist with "the nine points of saddle fit," principles of equine and human anatomy and how gender affects saddle fit. The next course for equine professionals is a one-week course in July 2012 in Ontario Canada. Dates for upcoming courses can be found on [www.saddlefit4life.com](http://www.saddlefit4life.com).

Jochen and his team are taking saddle fitting one step beyond with additional training courses for those who want to be "saddle ergonomists," a new focal point in the evolving body of knowledge surrounding saddle fit. "Physical ergonomics is very relevant to the equine industry, as it is concerned with human and equine anatomical, anthropometric, physiological and biomechanical characteristics as they relate to physical activity," Jochen explains. "The

term 'ergonomics' is derived from the Greek words *ergon* [work] and *nomos* [natural laws]. Therefore in the equestrian field, 'equine ergonomics' refers to the natural laws for working horses.

"Equine ergonomics is the scientific discipline concerned with understanding the interactions among humans and horses," Jochen continues. "It's the profession that applies theory, principles, data and methods to design in order to optimize equine well-being and overall performance. Equine ergonomics is employed to fulfill two goals - health and productivity for both horse and rider - and is therefore concerned with the 'fit' between people and horses, using the saddle as the interface. It takes account of both the horse and rider's capabilities and limitations in seeking to ensure that the design of the equipment (including saddles and tack) suit both.

"Proper ergonomic design is necessary to prevent injuries, which can develop over time and can lead to long-term disability. People and horses come in all different shapes and sizes, and with different capabilities and limitations in strength, speed, judgment and skills. All of these (and many more) factors need to be considered. When sitting in a saddle, the main part of the body weight is transferred to the seat, and onto the horse's 'saddle support area.' Where the weight is transferred is the key to a good saddle design. When the proper areas are not supported, sitting in a saddle can put unwanted pressure on the rider's back as well as the horse's back, causing pain to both.

"Ergonomics is important in the equestrian field, particularly to riders diagnosed with physiological ailments or disorders and for horses displaying symptomatic signs of discomfort. Pressure that is insignificant or imperceptible to some may be very painful, or render a saddle unusable, for those who are. Ergonomically designed saddles are recommended to treat or prevent issues, causing such symptoms, and to treat pressure-related chronic pain.

"Saddlefit 4 Life® certified Saddle Ergonomists use these principles to conduct comprehensive diagnostic evaluation of the fit of the saddle to horse and rider in both static and dynamic phases. The 80 point evaluation (25 points to rider/ 55 points for the horse) examines the many factors and variables of each unique horse and rider partnership, including sex and physical attributes of the rider/ the discipline/ the age, physical

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condition of, and demands on the horse/ the equipment used - size, shape, and appropriateness.

"Saddle ergonomists and saddle fitters take either a reactive or proactive approach. Reactive ergonomics is when something needs to be fixed, and a corrective action is taken. Proactive ergonomics is the process to seek areas that can be improved and making changes to fix issues before they become a larger problem. Saddle ergonomists always work proactively, however, in some instances a reactionary approach is all that is available to fix a problem caused by something else."

Jochen came to his passion for saddle design and fit from the perspective of an active horseman. As a young eventing rider in his native Germany, Jochen qualified for the 1994 European Championships, but had to drop out when his star horse became unsound. Over time, Jochen realized that the horse's gradual lameness was likely caused by saddle fit issues, a subject that simply wasn't much addressed at that time. The sense that he could have prevented that horse's pain became the catalyst for all that he has since learned about proper saddle fit and its importance to performance and health for horse and rider.

Via the Saddlefit4Life principles and system endorsed by Schleese Saddlery and dozens of independent affiliates worldwide, thousands of horses and riders the world over have benefited. In his 29 years in the business, Jochen has earned many industry and business awards and has been featured in the Wall Street Journal and twice on The Discovery Channel.



*For more information about Saddlefit 4 Life® personal diagnostic saddle fit evaluation, upcoming classes, and Schleese's unique saddles designed for women, visit [www.saddlefit4life.com](http://www.saddlefit4life.com) and [www.saddlesforwomen.com](http://www.saddlesforwomen.com).*

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