

Saddle Fit Q&A

*By Jochen Schleese, Certified Master Saddler,
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Question:

What should I expect from my horse now that I can ride after a 4 month layoff from a sore back, sore hocks, inflamed suspensory - probably all from poor fitting saddles? If a well fitted saddle is put on him, will there be some coaxing and working through some resistance because of anticipation of previous pain?

ANSWER:

You raise a valid point - even if you put a 100% perfect saddle back on him, is he going to be ready to go?

1. If all the soreness and soft-tissue injury is totally gone, confirmed by your veterinarian, and you are certain you have a "clean slate", then with a proper saddle there shouldn't be any reason for reactivity except behavioural anticipation. I have seen this behavioural anxiety in a few horses - they mentally remember and anticipate the pain from prior experience and can still harbour some reactivity or resistance until they come to realize that the new saddle isn't an issue.

2. Underlying chiropractic issues. I would stress having your horse evaluated and treated by a proper veterinarian-chiropractor to ensure there are no other issues that can create a problem for you.



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3. Time in rehab means your HORSE HAS CHANGED. Muscle loss occurs quickly, and top-lines change with even a little time off. I strongly encourage working from the ground to re-build top-line and strength before worrying about a rider on board, unless you feel that you can also start stretching him and engaging him from the saddle. It's imperative to have a correct foundation to work with. Too many lamenesses are created by hollowness and weakness.

4. Saddle-fit. This is a big-one. Whatever saddle you put back on him today - even if it fits 100%- may not fit him in 2 weeks, 4 weeks, 2 months, 2 years, etc. If you have a brand that you like in particular use what you feel is best, but ensure that you work alongside a proper fitter (not just a sales rep) who can monitor your saddle closely.

Bring him back correctly. Build him back up to be strong and engaged and happy from the ground, ensure no chiropractic issues or other underlying problems from his time off, introduce a saddle that you know fits correctly - and monitor it for correct fit, and you should have a happy, harmonious return to work.

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