

# “Bad Horse!”

## *Consider “bad behavior” from a poorly fitting saddle*

*By Jochen Schleese CMS and Saddle Ergonomist*



**Jochen Schleese**

There have been many recent articles in all sorts of publications discussing “how to slow down the rushing horse”; “how to ride the stumble out of your horse”; “how to make your horse go forward”; how to, how to, how to. Many of these negative and unwanted horse ‘behaviors’ may actually be due to

something as simple as a poorly fitting saddle. This can cause an instinctive reaction by impacting reflex points, rather than the horse consciously ‘acting out’. These articles point to the fact that many of these indicators are a result of rider error, and attempt to address corrections by either offering solutions to change rider behavior (or training methods), or – more drastically – calling in a vet to administer pharmaceuticals to address specific issues.

Sometimes there are valid psycho-somatic reasons or actual illnesses causing these kinds of unwanted behavior (or lamenesses), but we would like to suggest before you resort to expensive veterinary or ‘neuroscientific’ treatments, consider investing in a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation of your saddle fit using a qualified saddle fitter who understands equine biomechanics and anatomy, and the ramifications for your horse if the saddle doesn’t fit properly.

### **The 9 Points of Saddle Fit**

There are 9 basic areas which should be taken into consideration when determining whether or not the saddle fits your horse – and many more to consider for assessing fit to the rider. The 9 points of static saddle fit are summarized below (these points will be elaborated on in future articles). Each of these points is illustrated in a YouTube Video (on [www.saddlesforwomen.com](http://www.saddlesforwomen.com)).

#### **Saddle Balance**

A saddle too high in the pommel and too low in the cantle causes pressure on the horse’s back. It will be difficult to engage his back because too much of your weight is on his last 2 floating ribs. A saddle is too low in the front will pinch the shoulder.

#### **Wither Clearance**

No clearance on the side and top of the withers will restrict movement and free range of motion through his shoulders – resulting in reluctance to go forward.



### **Gullet/Channel Width**

A gullet that is too narrow or wide can cause permanent damage to your horse's back. The width of each horse's spine will determine how wide his saddle's gullet must be.

### **Full Panel Contact**

The saddle should sit evenly on the saddle support area of the horse's back, ending at the last rib.

### **Saddle Straightness**

The center of the saddle should be in alignment with your horse's spine. A saddle that falls or twists to one side can lead to problems with your horse's SI (sacroiliac) joint;

### **Saddle length**

Even a horse with a back that appears to be of normal length may actually have a very short saddle support area (SSA). The length of the SSA will determine the length of the saddle panels.

### **Tree Angle**

The angle of the tree should match the angle of the horse's shoulder to allow the shoulder to slide freely up and back during movement.

### **Tree Width**

The tree width must be wide enough for the horse's shoulders to rotate freely under the tree. Sometimes you have the paradox of a 'narrow wide' tree (narrow angle with wide width!)



Founder of Saddlefit 4 Life® Certified Master Saddler and Saddle Ergonomist, Jochen Schleese teaches seminars and equine ergonomist certification courses throughout North America and Europe. Jochen's book 'Suffering in Silence – the Saddle Fit Link to Physical and Psychological Trauma in Horses' (2013) and 'Beyond the 9 Points of Saddle Fitting' DVD document 34+ years of research. Saddlefit 4 Life® is accredited by the United States Dressage Federation, Ontario Equestrian Federation, American Riding Instructors Association and Certified Horsemanship Association.

[www.Saddlefit4Life.com](http://www.Saddlefit4Life.com) [info@Saddlefit4life.com](mailto:info@Saddlefit4life.com) 800-225-2242 x 45



**Saddlefit 4 Life®**