

Why I Do What I Do!

By Jochen Schleese CMS, CSE

Argentina was the first place I saw gauchos when I was a young boy. Although I was born in Hannover, Germany, I spent the first seven years of my life in South America. It was here that I discovered my love for horses. One day when we were out for a drive in the country, I watched the gauchos galloping alongside my father's car, chasing a rhea (wingless bird) at full tilt while swinging the bolo with both hands. The magic was the feeling that horse and rider were one – almost like a centaur! No reins, no obvious “riding” by the cowboys. From that moment on, all I wanted to do was capture this magic and experience this same type of harmony.

After we moved back to Germany, I kept bugging my parents to buy me a horse. My wish was finally granted and I got my first pony. I began to ride obsessively and started competing in eventing. Unfortunately, the next years saw a shift in focus for me - while following my childhood dream and seeking this magic, I fell into the trap of money, medals and fame. Nothing could really come close to what I was looking for – it was all about man and the horse/machine. I lost touch with everything I was drawn to horses for in the first place. When I found my calling in my career, it was the opportunity for me to reconnect and finally recapture this magic I first felt in Argentina. I'm now able to share this worldwide with people who are searching for the same miracle where man and horse move and feel and think as one.

“I followed the advice of experts, but the result was a textbook case of torture for my poor horse!”

I finally got my first real horse in 1978 – a beautiful Hanoverian gelding named Pirat. I began showing him and placing in state championships, all the way to the Germany Nationals in 1982 as part of the Young Rider team. However, he began to show significant signs of lameness after this and we began all sorts of treatments and diagnostics. He would rest, be fine for some weeks, and then the little hitch in his step would show up again. In 1984 after qualifying for the European Championships I had to retire my partner for good, and my riding career came abruptly to an end. I wish I knew then what I have learned in the past 34 years working in the industry and consulting with equine professionals around the world.

At the time I did not attribute his lameness to the saddle, since I was surrounded by experts – vets, trainers, farriers who all had a job of keeping us fit for the team. When I think of the remedial applications we used in an attempt to ward off the lameness with, including blocking, blistering, re-shoeing and all sorts of pharmaceuticals, I could cry. I know now it was simply the fact



Jochen works with a client's horse to ensure proper saddle fit.

that the construction of my saddle was not in keeping with the requirements of the horse – with every step his shoulders were hit by forward facing tree points, the too narrow gullet impacted his spinal processes, ligaments and nerves along his back, and the gullet plate likely pinched him and impeded his wither muscle as he tried to jump and move. I had followed the advice of experts, but the result was a textbook case of torture for my poor horse. Knowing that my horse had suffered from an ill-fitting saddle, I became determined to alleviate this consequence for other horses. My life long study of the detrimental effects of poor saddle fit, the horse in motion and equine development, led me to develop



Jochen at the 1982 German Nationals

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Jochen taking part in Pony Club as a 16-year-old.

Saddlefit 4 Life® in 2005 - a global network of equine professionals dedicated to protecting horse and rider from long term damage. I teach Saddlefit 4 Life® principles and system so that suspected saddle fit issues can be recognized and diagnosed.

Never again should any horse have to suffer for the ignorance of his rider, nor will a once sound horse have to be farmed out, or put down because the damage is so severe that nothing more can be done to help or change the situation. It's all about helping the horse by improving back health and comfort. For me – the biggest thank you is when a horse begins to move freely, happily and well in a properly fitted saddle! This is my calling – teaching riders around the world so together we can improve the well-being of horses and riders worldwide.”

Photos courtesy of Jochen Schleese



Always a horse person, Jochen and his wife Sabine on their wedding day in 1985.



Jochen Schleese

About the Writer

Jochen Schleese graduated from Passier Saddlery in 1985 as a Certified Master Saddler at age 22. He moved to Canada in 1986 as the Official Saddler for the World Dressage Championships. Jochen worked with the Ministry of Skills Development to register the trade of saddlery in Ontario in 1990. Recognizing that many female riders are plagued with pain and health issues simply from riding in a male saddle (due to anatomical differences between women and men) Jochen developed and specializes in saddle design for women.

Jochen is a guest speaker at horse shows, trade shows and veterinary colleges. He is the recipient of numerous business and trade achievement awards and has been profiled in prestigious media including the *Wall Street Journal* and the Discovery Channel (“How it’s Made.”) In 2005, 2007 and 2009 Jochen was the Official Saddler to the World Cup Finals in Las Vegas and is on the Advisory Board of the Equine Sciences Academy.

Jochen now focuses his efforts teaching Saddlefit 4 Life® principles to educate and certify equine professionals around the world. Jochen is presently working on his first book entitled “Suffering in Silence – Exploring the Painful Truth: The Saddle Fit link to Physical and Psychological Trauma in Horses” to be published later this year by Trafalgar Square. For more information on Jochen, visit www.schleese.com.