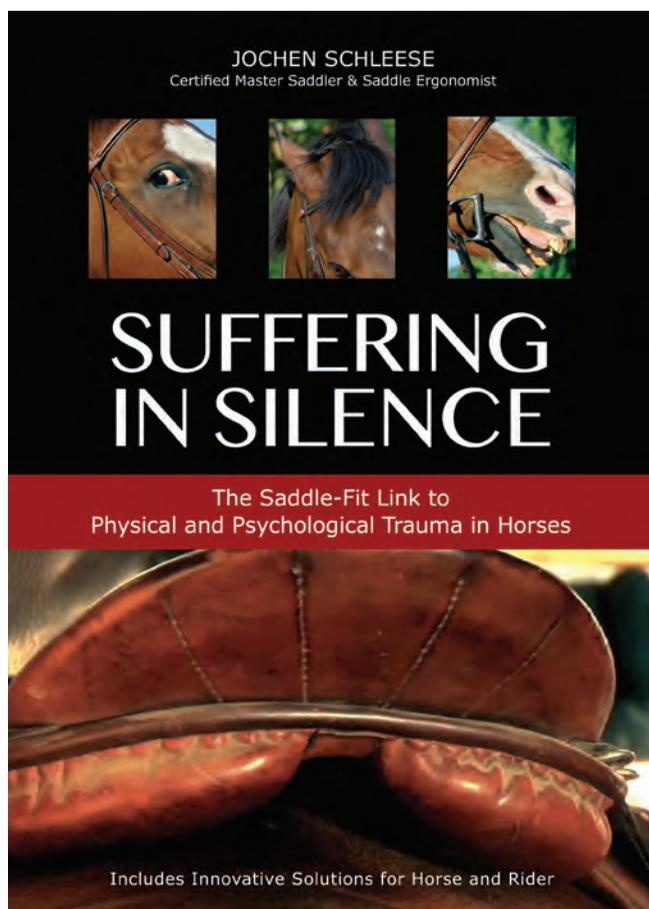




## SADDLE FIT AND SADDLES MADE FOR WOMEN

By Jochen Schleese, CMS, CEE, CSFT. Copyright 2013 Saddleftit 4 Life®.



**Suffering In Silence** the new book by Jochen Schleese

|                         | FEMALE          | MALE  |
|-------------------------|-----------------|---|
| <b>Birth Channel</b>    | Yes<br>         | No<br>  |
| <b>Pelvic Structure</b> | Wide<br>        | Narrow<br>  |
| <b>Spinal Column</b>    | Hollow back<br> | Relatively straight (with respect to lumbar area)<br> |

**R**iding should not hurt. Unfortunately, many women are still riding in saddles that have been made for men; are 'suffering in silence' and simply tolerating the pain because that's what they're used to; that's what their trainers tell them works, and they just may not know what they don't know. There are several key points which need to be addressed in detail as important in determining proper saddle fit especially for women.

Saddle fitters should have at least a basic understanding of equine biomechanics and how saddles need to fit to prevent longterm back damage in the horse, but also need to realize that female anatomy can impact saddle fit.

1. The width between the upper inner thighs affects the width of the twist of the saddle. The twist is that part of the saddle which touches the upper inner thighs. Because of a phenomenon called "Qflexion" (whereby female thighs tend to angle outwards at the hip and back inwards at the knee), women will carry more weight

|                                 | FEMALE  | MALE  |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Balance Point* of Pelvis</b> | Farther forward<br>Shorter pubic symphysis<br>              | Middle of pelvis (on seat bones)<br>Higher pubic symphysis<br>  |
| <b>Pubic Symphysis</b>          | Fairly flat and low—will hit the pommel area<br>            | Relatively higher than female pubic symphysis with steeper angles<br>Will sit far away from pommel area<br> |
| <b>Hip Joints</b>               | Articulation is angled to the side<br>Shorter tail bone<br> | Articulation straight, allowing the leg to hang straight<br>Longer tail bone<br>                            |

|                                  | FEMALE   | MALE  |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Upper Leg</b>                 | Femur is bigger on top and gets narrower down the knee<br>Articulation at joint has wider angle, which makes it difficult for the leg to hang straight<br> | Femur remains pretty much same thickness from top to bottom<br>Articulation angle relatively smaller, allowing leg to hang straight<br> |
| <b>Quadriceps and Hamstrings</b> | Muscle looks rounder when viewed from front—not much "space" visible between legs  | Quadriceps and hamstrings more defined on front and back of leg (less on sides), which leaves more room between the legs at the top     |
| <b>Seat Bones</b>                | Farther apart to accommodate birth canal<br>   | Closer together<br>   |

on their upper inner thigh than a man. The leg is pushed forward, and the knee and toes are out at 45 degree

angle when a woman sits on a male saddle that is too wide between her upper inner thighs. The position results in a leg that goes out and forward, and it is difficult to achieve the 'shoulder-hips-heels' straight line. This is different when a woman sits on a female saddle, allowing the toes to point forward while leaving more upper leg on the barrel or sides of the horse.

2. The ratio of the length of the upper leg to the length of the lower leg will determine the position and/or length of the stirrup bar. Most women have a longer upper leg than a lower leg. The analogy here is that the stirrup bar acts like the fulcrum and the stirrup leather is the pendulum. With a regular stirrup bar positioned normally, the female's leg will usually end up being too far forward ("get your leg back!" – does this sound familiar?) because the leg will fall according to its centre of gravity. Therefore, for women an extended stirrup bar (or sometimes even an extra-extended stirrup bar!) which allows the stirrup leathers to be positioned further back will ensure that the leg hangs in the correct position. Most men have pretty equal leg lengths so that they do fine with the normal stirrup bar length and position.

3. Women's hip bones are articulated onto the pelvis at the joint differently. Especially female adult amateur riders, who started riding later in life or who don't ride regularly, are challenged to have their legs hang straight, because



the articulation causes the legs to naturally angle out. Men's legs hang straight naturally, but changing the angle of the flap and possibly also the position of the thigh roll can address this with a female saddle. If the flap is too straight, the knee comes too close to the front of the flap, and in motion the leg will actually go over the flap. Forcing this ("get your leg back!" – again!) can move the pelvis forward, resulting in back pain and discomfort. Proper flap positioning is another small point in accommodating the female anatomy in saddle design!

4. One of the areas in saddle where the most mistakes occur during measurement is the width of the twist (as previously discussed) and the width of the seat. Whereas the twist is that area of the saddle which is actually located between your thighs, the width of the seat is determined by the space between the seam running along the edge of the seat. In the male pelvis, the seat bones are much closer together

and the distance between the two seat bones is much smaller, therefore he fits into the padded part of pretty much most saddles very comfortably.

The female pelvis has the seat bones much further apart, which means that if she is riding in a 'male' saddle, she will likely be sitting on the seat seaming, which is generally pretty uncomfortable. Often this seat twist and seat width are mixed up, and she will end up buying a saddle with a wide twist rather than the wide seat she needs to accommodate her pelvic shape. As a result, the knees and hips will angle out instead of being able to hang straight down and she will not sit comfortably for both reasons – the twist is too wide, and the seat is too narrow. You need to look at the distance between the seams on the seat, which should be wide enough to allow the female seat bones to sit on the padding – if this is too narrow, it feels like you're sitting on a ridge, or that your seat bones are falling off the edge

of the seat.

5. Another area of consideration is the position of the pelvis itself. The male pelvis has a relatively higher pubic symphysis (ps) – when he sits in a balanced position with his spine perpendicular to the ground on the saddle, his ps will be tipped upwards and not in contact with anything. In contrast, when the female sits on the saddle with her spine perpendicular to the ground, her ps is much lower and closer to front of saddle – to the point of contact and rubbing. This can result in recurring bladder infections even to the point of bleeding. The pelvic tilt is also affected by the saddle model and the saddle balance.

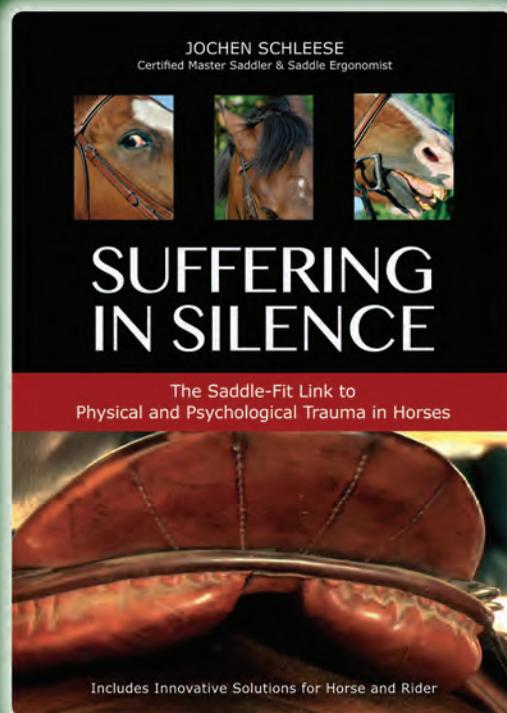
When a male rider sits on a male saddle, he can balance on his seat bones as on a bipod, whereas the female finds her balance on a male saddle in a tripod position – which means her ps will be in contact with the front of a saddle.

6. The last area of consideration are the gluteus maximus muscles. The female's 'butt cheeks' are generally higher placed than those of a male, and will benefit from added support or 'push' from behind. This can be accomplished with the use of additional padding in the seat foam to allow the woman to maintain a proper seat without collapsing at the hip and resulting in a chair seat.

Certified Master Saddler and Equine Ergonomist Jochen Schleese has been profiled in the Wall Street Journal and Discovery Channel. He has won many industry and business awards and now teaches the Saddlefit 4 Life philosophy all over the world, including the German National Riding School and for USDF University accreditation. Specializing in saddles made for women, Schleese is used by Olympians and amateur riders alike.

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