

Schleese Saddlery Service and Saddlefit 4 Life®

By Margaret Evans

Dedicated to Improving the Comfort and Well-Being of Horse and Rider



LEFT: Jochen Schleese and friend.

BELOW: These blue and red saddles were part of a 1987 contract to build 100 saddles, one of which was purchased by Ralph Lauren. These saddles were made from dies that were later the basis of the Schleese Samantha model saddle.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCHLEESE SADDLERY

"In 1984 after qualifying for the European Championships I had to retire my beautiful Hanoverian gelding for lameness and my riding career came abruptly to an end," says Jochen Scheese owner, with wife Sabine, of Schleese Saddlery Service Ltd. in Holland Landing, Ontario. "I wish I knew then what I have learned in the past 30 plus years as a Certified Master Saddler consulting with equine professionals around the world. At the very least, I know Pirat would have been sound a lot longer. At best my riding career would have gone much farther.

"At the time I was riding with

the likes of Bettina Overesch-Hoy and other very talented German young riders. After placing in the German nationals in 1982, Pirat began showing signs of lameness which at the time I did not attribute to the saddle since I was surrounded by experts – vets, trainers, farriers who all had the 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, including blocking, blistering, re-shoeing, and all sorts of pharmaceuticals, I get very sad. I know now it was simply the fact 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 the 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 the experts, but the result was a 'textbook case' of torture for my poor horse. Since I know now my horse suffered from an ill-fitting saddle, I am very determined to alleviate this consequence for other horses. It is my life goal and my passion

to make a difference by educating riders to help them find optimal saddle solutions for comfort, performance and equine development."

So often, the least understood and the most overlooked when analyzing a horse's performance and behaviour is the saddle. How does it sit on the horse's back? How does it sit when the horse is moving? How does it load the weight of the rider? Where are the flashpoints for pinching or rubbing? Is the horse hollow, resistant, lacking engagement? Does he have gait abnormalities, a four-beat canter, a sore back, or a poor attitude? Do riders struggle with poor

position and balance, or have back, hip, or pelvic discomfort? All these issues can be traced back to a poorly fitting saddle.

A former member of the German young rider's Three-day Event team, Jochen Schleese graduated from Passier Saddlery in 1985 as the youngest-ever Certified Master Saddler in Germany at age 22. He came to Canada in 1986 as the Official Saddler for the World Dressage Championships. Realizing that saddlery was not an established trade in North America, Schleese registered the trade and now operates the only authorized training facility for saddlery in Ontario.

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) Schleese developed and now specializes in saddle design for women.

The stressful and unhappy experience with Pirat drove Schleese to launch Saddlefit4Life® in 2005 as a global network to include top trainers, physiotherapists, veterinarians, chiropractors, massage therapists, farriers, and saddle fitters. His goal was to share expertise and knowledge with clients on products, systems, and training methods, and protect horses and riders from long term damage caused by ill-fitting saddles. Saddlefit 4 Life® Certified Saddle Ergonomists and Independent Saddle Fitters provide onsite diagnostic saddle fit analysis, solving horse and rider issues for clients worldwide.

"Most of the realizations [with Pirat] came much later as Jochen began to confer with other equine professionals and work with specifically equine vets who were concerned about the cause of symptomatic lamenesses rather than just wanting to treat them with pharmaceuticals," says Sabine. "It was the recognition of how much of what happened to

Pirat [and] not knowing better [the importance of] the fit of the saddle that let Jochen develop the passion to protect horse and rider from long term damage."

Unfortunately, the husband and wife team see the problem far more often than they would like. But on the plus side, it gives them the opportunity to educate clients and let them feel the difference that a properly fitted saddle can make almost instantly. Sabine cautioned that a horse might appear lame a few days later simply because its muscular system needs to adjust to the new saddle fit. It is similar to when people are starting an exercise regime in a whole new way and the body aches until it gets used to the new movements.

The whole philosophy behind properly fitting saddles and Saddlefit4Life® is taught in lectures, seminars, demonstrations, symposiums, and private client sessions in North America, Asia, Germany, Australia, Holland, and other parts of Europe. It is also taught at the German National Riding School and the Berufsreiterverband (Association of Professional Trainers) as part of the certification program, so that trainers recognize and diagnose suspected saddle fit issues and then work with qualified fitters or saddle ergonomists to fix them. Saddlefit 4 Life® has accreditation with the United States Dressage Federation, the Certified Horsemanship Association, and various other equine associations with whom they partner through education.

Yet despite the expanding knowledge of correct saddle fitting, many saddles are still manufactured the way they have always been.

"There are still way too many saddles out there with forward facing tree points and narrow gullets," says Sabine. "These are easy fixes to make for the good of the horse. Why don't more manufacturers make these changes? Because it would cost money [for manufacturers] to change the patterns and



PHOTO: DAZZLE BY DESIGN, COURTESY OF SCHLEESE SADDLERY

Denise Lenz from Newmarket, ON riding Viva in the Schleese Heike Kemmer saddle, competing at Prix St Georges level.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SCHLEESE SADDLERY

Tina Irwin and Laurencio schooling in the Schleese Obrigado saddle at their Stoney Lake Equestrian farm in Stouffville, ON. They compete successfully at the Prix St Georges level.

designs. We have taken many of our design features from other disciplines like endurance, military, and western saddles. These are saddles built for horses that need to work – they generally have wide enough gullets and large weight bearing surfaces (the panels). The improvement in the Western saddle would include adjustable panels and eventually adjustable trees, but they're not there just quite yet."

For riders in a quandary about their saddle and whether

it fits properly, Schleese advises that they need to listen to their horse by tracking their movement responses and behaviour, and consider having a saddle fitting expert diagnose the issues to at least eliminate the possibility of the saddle not fitting properly.

"New saddles should sit balanced behind the shoulder blade and no further back than the 18th thoracic vertebra," says Sabine. "They should have at least three to four fingers-width in the gullet and two to three

Jochen Schleese Professional Curriculum Vitae

Jochen Schleese CMS CSE CSFT Certified Master Saddler and Saddle Ergonomist, Certified Saddle Fit Technician

Awards and Achievements

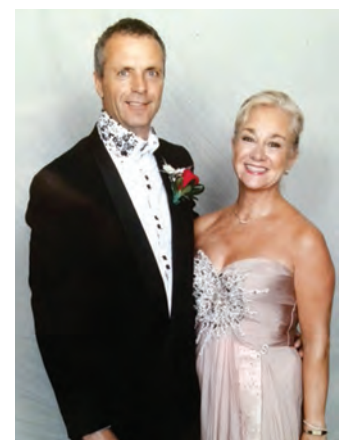
- **2014** Chamber of Commerce Entrepreneur of the Year – Business Excellence Awards.
- **2013** Published “Suffering in Silence – The Saddle Fit Link to Physical and Psychological Trauma in Horses.”
- **2012** Published “The Silent Killer- the painful truth of saddle fitting and why it doesn’t work.”
- **2010 Saddlefit 4 Life Professionals’ Curriculum and Education** (ongoing) taught to equine professionals throughout North America and Europe.
- **2009** Official Saddler FEI World Cup Finals, Las Vegas.
- **2008** Tack’nTogs magazine names Schleese “English Manufacturer of the Year” in its “Best of the Best” Awards.
- **2008** Short-listed on “Canada’s Top 100 Employers” ranking (top 250)
- **2007** Official Saddler FEI World Cup Finals, Las Vegas NV, and Dressage at Devon 2007.
- **2006** Featured on the Discovery Channel “How it’s Made”; Online instructor for the University of Guelph’s Equine Studies diploma.
- **2005** Official Saddler FEI World Cup Finals, Las Vegas NV; nominated for Equine Industry Vision Award.
- **2004** Jochen serves on the panel and board for Eckart Meyners and Equestrian Education Systems.
- **2003** One of Top 25 Finalists for Canada Export Award.
- **1999** Ontario Global Traders Award (Central Region) for Market Expansion; Newmarket Chamber of Commerce Business Achievement Award.
- **1998** Finalist in Canadian Airlines International Business Expansion Award.
- **1997** Short-listed for Ernst & Young’s Ontario Entrepreneur of the Year; Entrepreneur of the Year Award from Newmarket Chamber of Commerce.
- **1996** Awarded US patent for innovative saddle tree design; Entrepreneur of the Year Award from Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce.
- **1994-95** Jochen Schleese recognized as one of Ontario’s Top 100 Entrepreneurs (Ontario Business Journal); featured on front page of Wall Street Journal Marketplace section; Business Achievement Award from Whitchurch-Stouffville Chamber of Commerce.
- **1990** Registered the trade of Saddlery as a certifiable three-year apprenticeship in Ontario together with the Ministry of Skills Development.
- **1988** CBC’s “On the Road Again” featuring Jochen Schleese.
- **1986** Official Saddler for the World Dressage Championships.
- **1985** Received Master’s Certification in Saddlery with distinction (youngest Master Saddler in Europe - age 22).



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SCHLEESE SADDLERY



Jochen and Sabine Schleese were married on May 17, 1985 and this photo was taken in Jochen’s parent’s front yard just outside of Hanover, Germany.



Jochen and Sabine Schleese at the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards ceremony in October, 2014, when Jochen was named Entrepreneur of the Year.

Jochen and Sabine Schleese strive to improve the health and well-being of horses and riders through saddle fitting education, comprehensive saddle fit diagnostic analysis, and by providing opportunities for professional training.

fingers-width *all around the wither area* — not just at the top. These are the basic ‘to do’s’ but there are many more, obviously. The saddle should always fit the rider as well as the horse. If it doesn’t, the rider’s discomfort will translate down through the saddle and impede the horse in achieving optimum performance.”

The saddle has to work with the biomechanics of the horse in motion for complete back freedom. “Never again should any horse have to suffer for the ignorance of his rider, nor 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,” says Jochen who helps over 6,000 horses and riders every year.

Nor should it be a painful experience for the rider. “For years, riders have come to me seeking expertise about ongoing back, hip, and pelvic issues attributed to riding. From my knowledge of human anatomy, ongoing research, and rider case studies, I know with conviction that riding shouldn’t hurt or be the cause of rider health issues.”

For more information, please visit:
www.schleese.com
www.saddlefit4life.com