



Saddlefit 4 Life®

Protecting Horse and Rider from Long-Term Damage

Can the Saddle Fitter Help?

by Jochen Schleese CMS, CSFT, CSE

Saddle fitting is a term with various meanings. As the interface between horse and rider, the saddle should allow the rider to sit and balance comfortably (in a gender correct saddle) in order to give proper aids without clamping the thighs, relying on hands, or being unbalanced on the back. The saddle needs to provide freedom of movement without restriction so the back muscles come up, move freely and accommodate the horse's changing conformation.

Sometimes saddle fitting is analogous to buying shoes – selecting which are comfortable, perhaps adding orthotics or inserts to 'improve' the fit. With a non-adjustable saddle (wood or plastic tree), the saddle fitter assesses whether a narrow, medium or wide tree provides the 'best' (not necessarily optimal) fit. Improvements are made through re-flocking, though the angle and width of the tree cannot be changed. Saddles with rubber panels are not adjustable, so the saddle fitter tries to improve the fit through pads and shims. But similar to a shoe that pinches, extra thick socks (ie pads and shims) will not improve comfort.

Through Saddlefit 4 Life® we train and certify Equine Ergonomists, Saddle Ergonomists and Saddle Fit Technicians. These 'saddle fitters' starts with the requirements of horse and rider to ensure optimal fit and evaluation of the current saddle. They complete an 80 point diagnostic saddle fit evaluation (55 points to horse/ 25 points to rider) followed by riding observations, dust pattern analysis, springer gauge (shoulder angle) and ARC device (back shape) measurements. Taking this all into account, they analyze where there are issues and make recommendations to improve fit, however sometimes the saddle cannot be adjusted.

Saddles which are designed to provide optimal fit have trees that flex with the movement of the horse, gullet plates which can be adjusted to the horse's changing shoulder angle and width, and flocking can be adjusted to the unique and changing back shape. The saddle fitter is able to evaluate and make adjustments to the gullet plate and flocking on site, taking into account any asymmetry and unevenness.

Watch the video ['What Happens in a Saddle Fit Session'](#)

Ill-fitting saddles have a negative impact on horse and rider comfort and back health, and often cause training and behavioral issues. In order to ensure optimal fit and comfort, we recommend an annual saddle fit evaluation to horse and rider.

We help you find answers in your personal 80 point Saddle Fit Evaluation.

Author of 'Suffering in Silence - The Saddle fit Link to Physical and Psychological Trauma in Horses' (2013) Jochen Schleese established Saddlefit 4 Life® in 2006 to teach riders and professionals to recognize and find solutions for saddle fit issues through lectures and seminars worldwide.

