

THE NINE POINTS OF SADDLE FIT

PART I OF III

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Courtesy of Saddleft 4 Life

As we head into spring, it's time to put our thoughts into ensuring that all of our tack and equipment will work for the upcoming training months, and for the shows we intend to compete in. Especially if your horse has been 'laid off' for the winter months you will need to ensure that the saddle is fitted properly to allow him comfort and freedom to muscle up again when you begin training in earnest. While it can take four weeks for a muscle to build up with consistent training, it takes only one week for the muscle to regain its original shape (which is negative development). Thus, even if you have given your horse just a week off from training, you will find that your saddle may not fit the way it did and the way it should, so that you should have a diagnostic evaluation done and the saddle adjusted by a certified fitter before you begin training again.

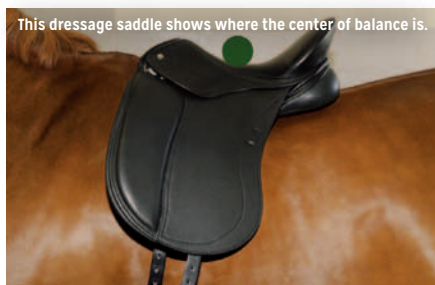
A quick diagnostic can be done using our 9 points of saddle fit evaluation (with videos available to show you how at our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/mjpschleese)

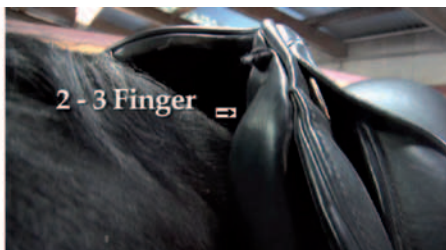
1 SADDLE BALANCE

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

If your saddle is too low in the front it will pinch into the horse's shoulder - which is very restrictive for your horse. Your saddle is too high in the back so your leg goes forward and you fall into a chair seat to balance which can strain the discs in your lower back.

With correct balance the rider will be able to use the 4 curves in her back as natural 'shock absorbers', and she will be positioned comfortably.





2 WITHER CLEARANCE

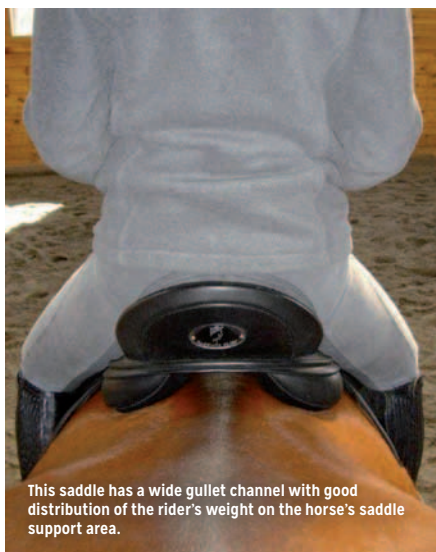
The saddle should have 2-3 fingers clearance on the top and around the side of the withers. The saddle must have an opening (clearance) on the sides of his withers to accommodate the shoulder rotation upwards and backwards during movement.

A horse whose saddle pinches his withers may be reluctant to go forward. Other more extreme signs of insufficient wither clearance are patches of white hairs (not scattered individual white hairs) or sores on the top or on one or both sides of the withers.

3 CHANNEL/GULLET WIDTH

A saddle with a channel or gullet that is too narrow can cause permanent damage to your horse's back (but also, if it's too wide that's not great either). There is no such thing as "one size fits all" where the channel or gullet of your horse's saddle is concerned. Instead, the width of each horse's spine will determine how wide his saddle's gullet must be.

It is very important that the width of the gullet be the same throughout the entire length of the saddle. It is only infrequently that we find a saddle that is too wide through the gullet for a particular horse. But such a saddle will have inadequate weight-bearing surface, may start to strip muscle away from the top of the ribs, and the back of the tree may actually rest on the spine.



TO BE CONTINUED...IN THE JULY/AUGUST 2016 ISSUE OF ON THE HORSE

Jochen Schleese is a Certified Master Saddler, Saddle Ergonomist and former German Event Rider. In 1990, he founded Schleese Saddlery Service - the Female Saddle Specialist. Jochen's lifelong study of equine development, the bio-mechanics of horse and rider and the effects of ill-fitting saddles, led him to establish Saddlefit 4 Life in 2006, the global network of equine professionals dedicated to protecting horse and rider from long term damage. Author of 'Suffering in Silence - The Saddle Fit Link to Physical and Psychological trauma in Horses', Jochen holds certification courses for equine professionals throughout Europe and North America. www.saddlesforwomen.com | www.saddlefit4life.com