

THE NINE POINTS OF SADDLE FIT

PART III OF III
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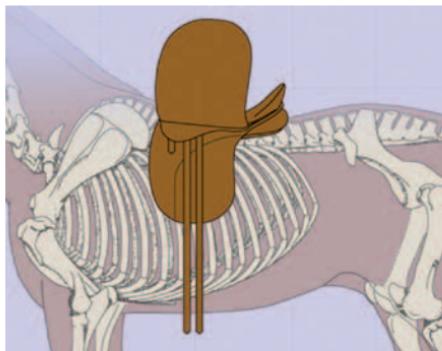
Courtesy of Saddlefit 4 Life®

7 SADDLE LENGTH

Many of us are familiar with the term “short-backed” to describe a horse, but even a horse with a back that appears to be of normal length may actually have a very short saddle support area. The length of the saddle support area will determine how long the panels must be.

Breeds that commonly have a short saddle-support area are Friesians; Baroque type horses such as Andalusians, Lusitanos, PREs, and Lippizaners; Arabians; and more and more frequently, “modern-type” Warmbloods. One common saddle fitting issue here is that the saddle panels are often too long for their backs.

The saddle must sit behind the shoulder. A saddle that is too long often will get driven forward into the shoulder. The saddle cannot extend past the last floating rib at the 18th thoracic vertebra. A horse ridden in a saddle that is too long will often tighten his lower back muscles; in some cases, you can actually see the horse hollow and drop his back in an attempt to get away from the pressure of the saddle.



This saddle is positioned behind the shoulder but a) is too long for the horse's back as it extends past the 18th thoracic vertebra and b) the billets are too far back and will pull the saddle onto the shoulder in motion

8 TREE ANGLE

The angle of the tree (at the tree points for the gullet plate) must be adjusted to match the angle of the horse's shoulder. Think of two sliding doors. If they are properly aligned, one will slide freely past the other. But if they are not, one will jam into the other. It is the same with your horse's shoulders and the angle of his saddle's tree. As the horse moves, his shoulder rotates upward and backwards. If your saddle's tree angle does not match the angle of your horse's shoulder, his shoulders will be unable to rotate freely under the saddle, compromising his movement.

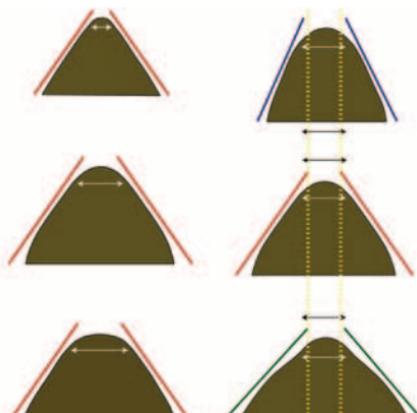
Check if the angle of the piping on the saddle matches the angle of your horse's shoulder. If it does, the angle of your saddle's tree is correctly adjusted for your horse.

9 TREE WIDTH

The tree width at the gullet plate must be wide enough for the horse's shoulders to rotate freely under the tree.

If the tree width is too wide, the entire saddle may rock or slip from side to side when it's being ridden, or the back half of the saddle may twist to one side or the other.

Tree width and tree angle need to be adjusted together. If the width of your saddle's tree is correct for your horse, but the angle is incorrect, the saddle will not fit your horse. Conversely, if the angle is alright, but the width is not, the same will happen. Adding flocking to or removing flocking from the vertical panels of the saddle will not solve the problem - it is the gullet plate that needs to be adjusted. Some of the self-adjustable gullet plates will accommodate angle adjustment, but will not allow width adjustment (over the wither area).



The three diagrams on the left illustrate identical tree angles with different tree widths: the three on the right illustrate identical tree widths with different tree angles (such as can be effected with the 'self-adjusting' trees of various companies - but changing angle without changing width is not always a good thing).

Hopefully these tips will help you get ready for a successful show season while ensuring your horse has the freedom to perform at its potential!

Happy Riding!

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 biomechanics 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

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