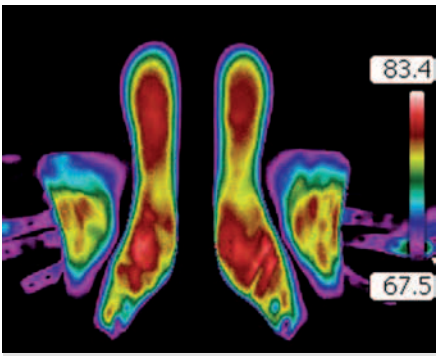
THE NINE POINTS OF SADDLE FIT

PART II OF III

BY JOCHEN SCHLEESE, CMS, CSFT, CSE.
Courtesy of Saddlefit 4 Life®

4 FULL PANEL CONTACT

Ensure that your saddle's panels make even contact with your horse's back all the way down to distribute the rider's weight over an area that equals approximately 220 square inches and ends at the last rib.



This thermographic image shows a saddle with panels that bridge front to back, resulting in greater pressure at the pommel and cantle areas.

Test for even contact by sliding a pen or pencil (or your hand) in between the panel and their horse's back.

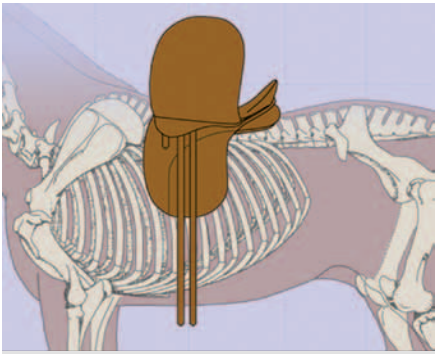
When rocking occurs, the panels at the front and/or back of the saddle do not make even contact with the horse's back. Note that sometimes your saddle may be made with panels that deliberately flare up at the very back, so the last inch or so of the panels don't make contact with your horse's back. This is done for instance, when there is a need to accommodate a tall or large rider on a horse with a short saddle-support area. If fitted correctly, this saddle will not rock. This extra room is also important for the back to come up when the horse engages during movement.

Sometimes we hear that slight bridging is a good thing, because when the horse lifts his back as he is being ridden, his back will come up into and fill in the space left by the bridge. While this may seem logical at first, it doesn't work. Even when your horse lifts his back while being ridden, his saddle will still bridge.

The goal of saddle fitting is to have the saddle distribute the riders' weight evenly over the saddle support area, and it is important that the saddle neither bridge nor rock.

5 BILLET ALIGNMENT

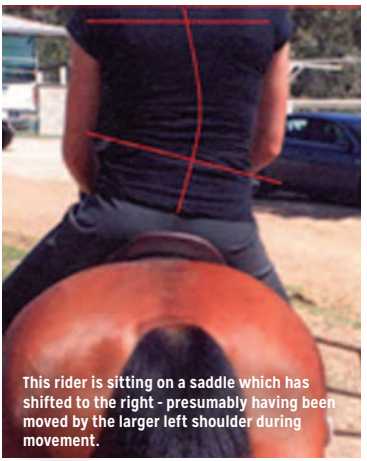
Have you ever had to stop in the middle of your ride and reset your saddle because it has moved forward onto your horse's shoulders? This is a common problem, and it is often caused by improper billet alignment. Unless the billets on your saddle are positioned correctly, your saddle will not stay in its proper place on your horse's back.



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

Billets should hang perpendicular to the ground in the girth area. If the billets hang too far back, gravity will pull the billets (and the saddle) forward into the girth area. The girth will always find its position at the narrowest point of the rib cage, driving the saddle forward onto your horse's shoulders.

If the billets hang too far forward into your horse's elbow area, they may make him sore in the elbows. Gravity will drag them (and the girth and saddle along with them) back into the girth area. There will now be too much pressure on the panels at the rear of the saddle.



This rider is sitting on a saddle which has shifted to the right - presumably having been moved by the larger left shoulder during movement.

6 SADDLE STRAIGHTNESS

Straightness means that the center of the saddle is in alignment with your horse's spine. Sometimes, a saddle that appears straight when the horse is standing in the crossties will shift to the right or left when the horse is being ridden, leading to problems with your horse's SI (sacroiliac) joint.

Horses are by nature uneven. Most horses have a left shoulder that is larger and more developed than their right shoulder. The larger shoulder kicks the saddle over to the other side during motion.

A rider who sits unevenly can compress the stuffing more on one side of the saddle, and drag it over to that side.

THE FINAL THREE POINTS OF SADDLE FIT TO BE CONTINUED IN THE SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 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 LifeÔ 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**