Saddle Fit & Technology: Saddle Fit and Western Saddles

By Jochen Schleese, CMS, CSFT, CSE ©2017 Saddlefit 4 Life ® All Rights Reserved

Over the years I have been asked many times to address the subject of fitting western saddles, and have subsequently done some presentations on this at both the Certified Horsemanship Association Conference and just this past weekend again at the Western States Horse Expo in CA. At each of these events I am constantly surprised at the number of people who attend my lectures and are extremely interested in the information I have to offer. Our specialty at Schleese over the past 30+ years is English saddles – and mainly dressage - but with the launch of our Devin Western Saddle with its many benefits and features it's



The 'Devin' Western/Trail Saddle by Schleese Saddlery.

perhaps time to put some of these thoughts down on paper.

My principle on saddle fitting - any model – is to fit the saddle to both the rider and ensure he/she is sitting correctly, balanced, and comfortably, as well as to the horse's conformation. Regardless which saddle - dressage, jumping, racing, endurance, speciality saddle, or western saddle – it has to fit along the lines of these commonly accepted principles. The saddle must not impact or deform the horse's back in any way (i.e., negatively saddle is 45-50 pounds which is an effort to

influence the conformation). It should fit into the saddle support area, and not sit over the shoulder and damage the cartilage, impinge the spinal processes or ligaments, nor pinch and numb the nerves permanently. This is the philosophy of Saddlefit4life® – to protect horse and rider from long term back damage – regardless of the saddle. For the rider, the basics are that the back shouldn't ache, the hips shouldn't hurt and feel pulled apart, the knees shouldn't bruise, and the rider should sit in proper balance to achieve riding in harmo-

Most western saddles are still built to the principles of the last century where they were working saddles used by cowboys. Most western saddles built in the last 40 to 50 years are still built for the male rider, but it seems that the manufacturers may have forgotten what was done in the old days - when the cowboy came from a cattle drive after being 3-4 months in the countryside, the horse was usually put out to pasture for a few days to rest. It have gotten new shoes, and got a thorwas pulled off and replaced, and the bottom of the tree was reshaped to the horse's back with new sheepskin. He was then ready for the next cattle drive with a newly properly fitted sad-

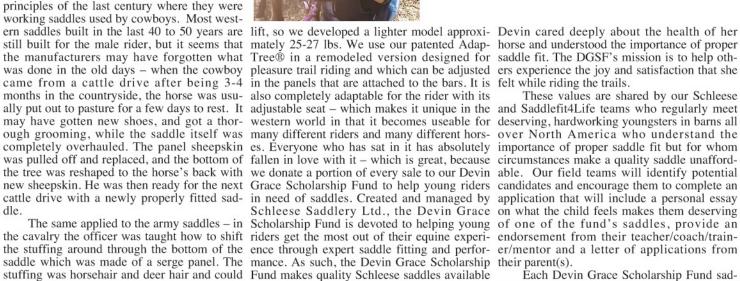
The same applied to the army saddles - in saddle which was made of a serge panel. The stuffing was horsehair and deer hair and could be adjusted as much as 4-5 times per year. I have yet to see a modern western saddle refitted in any way – so they either fit well or they of a proper fitting saddle. really don't.

So what does this mean? Both the working riders - cowboy or soldier - realized proper equipment and properly fitted saddles allowed them to do their jobs while protecting

Today we have mass-produced western saddles (except perhaps those generally deemed 'custom') still made mainly for a traditional male cowboy, (even though statistics show that 75% of western riders are female), and most are made and sold without proper fitting to the horse. This is why we introduced the western and English trail saddles to our line - to bring back old traditions but to fit new clientele (women) who want to enjoy recreational rides in a more secure seat than the English saddle can offer.

The average weight of a 'real' western





of 14 years old and a dear member of the returned to the fund to be put back into circula-Schleese extended family when she lost her tion for yet another child in need. As the life suddenly in a tragic car accident. The fund is set up in memory of her caring spirit, work ethic and passion for western riding in the Ari- made available will include pony, western, zona desert on her beloved horse, Lady Bug. dressage and jumping.

be able to afford the quality and craftsmanship



Helping Deserving Children Ride

These values are shared by our Schleese adjustable seat - which makes it unique in the and Saddlefit4Life teams who regularly meet western world in that it becomes useable for deserving, hardworking youngsters in barns all over North America who understand the es. Everyone who has sat in it has absolutely importance of proper saddle fit but for whom candidates and encourage them to complete an application that will include a personal essay on what the child feels makes them deserving of one of the fund's saddles, provide an endorsement from their teacher/coach/trainer/mentor and a letter of applications from their parent(s).

Each Devin Grace Scholarship Fund sadto deserving children whose families may not dle will be stamped, "On loan to this deserving rider" as recognition of the child's achieve ment. Then, when the child outgrows the sad-Devin Grace Franktze was a young rider dle or stops riding for any reason, it will be scholarship funds accumulate, saddles will be awarded in order of acceptance. Saddles styles



