

# Saddle Fitting eGuide



*Est. 1986*

The *female* Saddle Specialist  
Infinitely Adjustable for  
Optimal Comfort

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# Saddlefit 4 Life®

*Protecting Horse and Rider from Long-Term Damage*

## Signs of Poor Saddle Fit to Rider

- feeling 'pulled apart' at the hips
- back pain
- neck pain
- knee pain
- slipped disc
- urinary tract infections
- pelvic discomfort
- poor position
- behind or in front of the motion
- knees and toes out
- fighting the saddle
- chair seat
- legs swinging
- out of balance
- feeling 'jarred' during sitting trot

## Signs of Poor Saddle Fit to Horse

- resistance
- 'girthingness'
- lack of engagement
- stumbling, tripping
- rearing, bucking
- tight hollow back
- sore sensitive back
- irregular gaits
- 4 beat canter
- tongue faults
- poor work attitude
- pinned back ears
- blisters
- tail swishing
- swelling
- stress lines
- hunter's bump
- muscles atrophy
- lameness



“ If your equipment doesn't fit, you will have huge problems from the get go. You won't get very far with a horse that isn't comfortable, a saddle that doesn't fit, and as a result, a rider that is out of balance because the saddle pushes him too far forward or back. ”

**Christilot Boylen**, Canadian Dressage Team Member, multi-Olympian

# Rider Saddle Fit Checklist



By Jochen Schleese CMS, CSET, CSE

If the saddle doesn't fit the rider well, the rider's pain and discomfort will be translated down to the horse. This checklist will help you determine if the saddle fits you well.

	Yes	No
1. Does your leg hang comfortably and loosely straight down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is the saddle comfortable for you between your upper inner thighs (this is where the twist is) or do you feel 'pulled apart' in this area (soreness in the hips)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Can you feel your seat bones?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Are the stirrup bars in the correct position to allow you to achieve the shoulder-hip-heel straight line?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Is your knee comfortably placed on the flap or is it angled outward?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Is the flap visible behind your leg when you are in the stirrups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Can you perform a pelvic tilt (forwards and backwards movement) comfortably without pain at your pubic symphysis or in the crotch area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Do your thigh/knee rolls impede movement at your hips, knees, or ankles? Are they too long, big or small? Do they support you or are they in the way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Can you post comfortably?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Is there enough room in front and behind your pelvis so that during posting you don't hit your pubic bone and during sitting trot you are not thrown out of the saddle at the cantle area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Is the saddle flap long enough so your boot top doesn't catch on it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Is the seat seam comfortable and unnoticeable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Are you in balance during the walk? Do you have enough support from the saddle to be able to sit properly in position while the horse is walking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Contact [info@saddlefit4life](mailto:info@saddlefit4life) to book your 80 point Saddle Fit Analysis to horse and rider.**

# The 9 Points of Saddle Fitting



By Jochen Schleese CMS, CSET, CSE

Your saddle affects the way you ride and the way your horse performs. The nine points of saddle fitting will help you determine if your saddle fits your horse well.

	Yes	No
<b>1 Balance</b> The center of the saddle (seat area) should be parallel to the ground while on the horse's back.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>2 Withers Clearance</b> Clearance at the withers should be 2-3 fingers for normal withers, whereas, mutton withers will have more clearance and high withers will have less clearance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>3 Gullet Channel Width</b> The gullet should be wide enough not to interfere with the spinal processes or musculature of the horse's back (3-5 fingers).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Full Panel Contact</b> <b>4</b> The panel should touch the horse's back evenly all the way from front to back; some panels may be designed off the back end to allow the back to come up during engagement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>5 Billet Alignment</b> The billets should hang perpendicular to the ground so that the girth is positioned properly and not angled either forwards or backwards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6 Saddle Length</b> The shoulder and loin areas should not carry any weight of the saddle and rider. Rider weight should be on the saddle support area only.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>7 Saddle Straightness</b> The saddle should not fall off to one side when viewed from back or front. The tree points should be behind both scapulae (shoulder blades).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>8 Saddle Tree Angle</b> The panel tree points should be parallel to the shoulder angle to position saddle properly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>9 Saddle Tree Width</b> The tree width should be wide enough for saddle to fit during the dynamic movement of the horse.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Personal Saddle Fitting Evaluations



No rider would consciously hurt their horse. Having a properly fitted saddle contributes to performance, comfort, welfare and enjoyment for horse and rider.

Health issues and damage caused by poor saddle fit are often simply the result of not knowing.

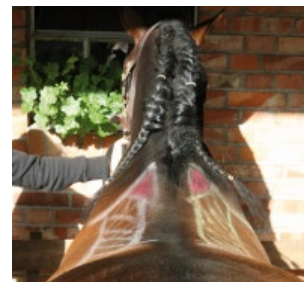
The Saddlefitt 4 Life® 80 point Saddle Fit Diagnostic Evaluation (55 evaluation points to horse, 25 points to rider) is the most comprehensive analysis worldwide.

Saddlefitt 4 Life® 80 point Saddle Fit Diagnostic Evaluation includes:

- Static and Dynamic Fit Evaluation
- Saddle Support Area and Dust Pattern analysis
- Female and Male Sizing Saddles Adjusted to your Horse's Conformation
- On-site Adjustments and Re-flocking

In order to maintain Schleese's high standard for ongoing service and client satisfaction, Jochen Schleese, CMS, CSFT, CSE trains and certifies Schleese Saddle Fit Technicians, affiliated Independent Saddle Fitter and Equine Ergonomists.

**Contact [info@schleese.com](mailto:info@schleese.com) to book your 80 point Saddle Fit Analysis to horse and rider.**



# A Saddle Just for Women



Riders should be comfortably positioned and supported to promote giving of “aids” while promoting movement. Unfortunately, many female riders experience discomfort because they ride in a saddle designed for a man, such as:

- back, hip, knee and pelvic pain
- recurring bladder infections
- ‘fighting the saddle’
- feeling out of balance
- falling into a ‘chair-seat’
- swinging legs
- knees and toes turned out

Ergonomically designed ‘Saddles for Women’ allow female riders to sit properly and comfortably preventing saddle related pain and potential long term back, hip, knee or pelvic issues. Features of the female saddle include:

- extended stirrup bars assist positioning of the typically longer femur in comparison to the length of the lower leg, to prevent swinging of the leg
- narrow twist accommodates hip angle, allowing the inner thigh to be closer to the horse; wider and extra soft seat provides support and comfort for wider female seat bones
- a variety of flap angles accommodate unique thigh and hip angles
- Schleese’s patented “crotch comfort” relieves pressure or rubbing of soft tissue and pubic symphysis of female riders (with advantages for men too).



In a saddle made for a man, the female rider collapses at the hip into a chair-seat position.



Ergonomically designed ‘Saddles for Women’ allow female riders to sit properly and comfortably.

# SADDLE FIT

## for Women

### What you need to know if you're a woman looking to buy a saddle

**R**iding should not hurt. Unfortunately, many women are riding in saddles that have been made for men. They're suffering in silence, tolerating the pain because they simply may not know what they don't know.

Saddle fitters should have a basic understanding of equine biomechanics and how saddles need to fit to prevent long-term back damage in the horse. What many may be lacking is a realization that female anatomy can impact saddle fit. Several key points need to be addressed when determining proper saddle fit for women.

#### TWIST AND THIGH

The twist is the part of the saddle that touches the upper inner thighs. The width between the upper inner thighs affects the width of the twist of the saddle. Because of a phenomenon called

by **Jochen Schleese**







“Qflexion” (female thighs tend to angle outwards at the hip and inwards at the knee), women will carry more weight on







their upper inner thighs than men.

When a woman sits on a male saddle that is too wide between her upper inner thighs, her leg is pushed forward, and her knees and toes are out at a 45-degree angle. The position results in a leg that goes out and forward, and it is difficult to achieve the ‘shoulder-hips-heels’ straight line. This is different when a woman sits on a female saddle, allowing the toes to point forward while leaving more upper leg on the barrel or sides of the horse.

#### LEG LENGTH RATIO

Most women have a longer upper leg than a lower leg. The ratio of the length of the upper leg to the length of the lower leg will determine

	FEMALE	MALE
<b>Birth Channel</b>	Yes 	No 
<b>Pelvic Structure</b>	Wide 	Narrow 
<b>Spinal Column</b>	Hollow back 	Relatively straight (with respect to lumbar area) 

	FEMALE	MALE
<b>Balance Point* of Pelvis</b>	Farther forward Shorter pubic symphysis 	Middle of pelvis (on seat bones) Higher pubic symphysis 
<b>Pubic Symphysis</b>	Fairly flat and low—will hit the pommel area 	Relatively higher than female pubic symphysis with steeper angles Will sit far away from pommel area 
<b>Hip Joints</b>	Articulation is angled to the side Shorter tail bone 	Articulation straight, allowing the leg to hang straight Longer tail bone 



the position and/or length of the stirrup bar. The analogy here is that the stirrup bar acts like the fulcrum and the stirrup leather is the pendulum. With a regular stirrup bar positioned normally, the female's leg will usually end up being too far forward ("Legs back, ladies!") because the leg will fall according to its centre of gravity. Therefore, for women, an extended stirrup bar (or sometimes even an extra-extended stirrup bar) which allows the stirrup leathers to be positioned further back will ensure that the leg hangs in the correct position. Most men have pretty equal leg lengths so they do fine with the normal stirrup bar length and position.

## HIPS AND FLAPS

Women's hip bones are articulated onto the pelvis at the joint differently than those of men. Especially female adult amateur riders, who started riding later in life or who don't ride regularly, are challenged to have their legs hang straight, because the articulation causes the legs to naturally angle out. Changing the angle of the flap and possibly also the position of the thigh roll can address this with a female saddle. If the flap is too straight, the knee comes too close to the front of the flap, and in motion the leg will actually go over the flap. Forcing this ("Legs back!"—again!) can move the pelvis forward, resulting in back pain or discomfort. Proper flap positioning is another small point in accommodating the female anatomy in saddle design.

## SEAT WIDTH

Many saddle fit mistakes occur during measurement of the width of the twist (as previously discussed) and the width of the seat.

Whereas the twist is that area of the saddle which is actually located between your thighs, the width of the seat is determined by the space between the seam running along the outer edge of the seat. In the male pelvis, the seat bones are much closer together and the distance between the two seat bones is much smaller. Therefore, he fits into the padded part of most saddles very comfortably.

In the female pelvis, the seat bones are much further apart, which means that if she is riding in a 'male' saddle, she will likely be sitting on the seat seaming, which is generally pretty uncomfortable. Often, seat twist and seat width are mixed up, and she will end up buying a saddle with a wide twist rather than the wide seat she needs to accommodate her pelvic shape. As a result, the knees and hips will angle out instead of being able to hang straight down and she will not sit comfortably for both reasons—the twist is too wide, and the seat is too narrow.

You need to look at the distance between the seams on the seat, which should be wide enough to allow the female seat bones to sit on the padding. If this is too narrow, it feels like you're sitting on a ridge, or that your seat bones are falling off the edge of the seat.

## PERPENDICULARITY

Another area of consideration is the position of the pelvis itself. The male pelvis has a relatively higher pubic symphysis (ps) — when he sits in a balanced position with his spine perpendicular to the ground on the saddle, his ps will be tipped upward and not in contact with anything. In contrast, when the female sits on the saddle with her spine perpendicular to the ground, her ps is much lower and closer to front of saddle—to the point of contact and rubbing. When a male rider sits on a male saddle, he can balance on his seat bones as on a bipod, whereas the female finds her balance on a male saddle in a tripod position—which means her ps will be in contact with the front of the saddle.

## BUTT HEIGHT

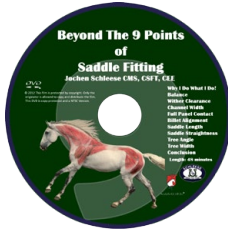
The last area of consideration is the ever-popular gluteus maximus muscles. A female's 'butt cheeks' are generally higher placed than those of a male, and will benefit from added support or 'push' from behind. This can be accomplished with the use of additional padding in the seat foam to allow the woman to maintain a proper seat without collapsing at the hip and resulting in a chair seat.

So, ladies, don't let the 'women's equality' mentality dictate your saddle choice. Settling for a 'male' saddle could translate into potential discomfort for your horse and an uncomfortable ride for you. ♦

*Certified Master Saddler and Equine Ergonomist Jochen Schleese came to Canada as Official Saddler for the 1986 World Dressage Championships. He has won numerous industry and business awards and been profiled twice on Discovery Channel. He teaches saddle fitting all over the world and has recently released his first book, *Suffering in Silence: The saddle fit link to physical and psychological trauma in horses*. Learn more at [www.saddlesforwomen.com](http://www.saddlesforwomen.com) and [www.saddlefit4life.com](http://www.saddlefit4life.com)*

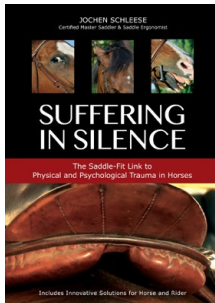


	FEMALE	MALE
<b>Upper Leg</b>	Femur is bigger on top and gets narrower down the knee Articulation at joint has wider angle, which makes it difficult for the leg to hang straight	Femur remains pretty much same thickness from top to bottom Articulation angle relatively smaller, allowing leg to hang straight
<b>Quadriceps and Hamstrings</b>	Muscle looks rounder when viewed from front—not much "space" visible between legs	Quadriceps and hamstrings more defined on front and back of leg (less on sides), which leaves more room between the legs at the top
<b>Seat Bones</b>	Farther apart to accommodate birth canal	Closer together



## Beyond the 9 Points of Saddle Fitting — DVD (48 min.) by Jochen Schleese CMS, CSFT, CSE.

Jochen's DVD shows symptomatic causes of poor saddle fit and discusses common equine concerns, with a step by step system to check saddle fit using effective visuals and riding demonstrations.

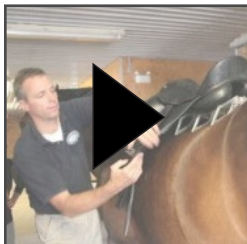


## Suffering in Silence: Exploring the Painful Truth: The Saddle-Fit Link to Physical and Psychological Trauma in Horses Hardcover or Kindle Edition, Nov 1 2013 (208 pages; 224 color photos, 41 color illustrations) by Jochen Schleese.

Revealing common and serious effects of ill-fitting saddles and providing solutions for horse and rider.

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- How to Tell if your Horse is in Pain
- Understanding Rider Pain
- Your Saddle Fit Session
- Forward Facing Tree Points
- Female vs male Saddles

*over 1 million views*

## About Schleese Saddlery Service Ltd.

We specialize in saddles made for women, especially for recreational and amateur riders who care about comfort for themselves and protection for their horses' backs. Primarily known for their high quality line of dressage saddles, we also carry jumping, eventing, endurance, and hunter/pleasure saddles. Our saddles are custom made to each horse and rider's measurements for optimal fit, performance and back protection for both. As your horse develops there will be changes in his 3 dimensional back shape and saddle support area. Our saddle's infinitely adjustable gullet plate can be easily adjusted on-site to accommodate your horse's growth and ongoing development, or re-fit to a new horse.

Our saddles are sold and serviced by a network of highly trained, certified professionals across North America and around the world (most of whom are riders themselves). We enjoy the endorsement of many top international riders and trainers – but more importantly, the trust of recreational riders who care about the health of their horses.

Over the last 30 years, we have helped more than 150,000 horses and riders worldwide.

Schleese Saddlery Service Ltd. was founded by Certified Master Saddler Jochen Schleese in 1986.

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