

# My saddle fits...doesn't it?

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The world of saddle fitting is really beginning to change, and this change is happening none too quickly in the opinions of the horses we ride. Saddle fitting has had little research documented until very recently. As professionals in the horse industry, we absolutely know that saddle fitting is an on-going issue. Research is being done at the major universities to determine what truly is best for the horse. The old adage of "I've used this saddle for 30 years, is no longer an acceptable reason to choose a saddle.



There are a few stationary evaluations that can be made at home to help determine the suitability of your saddle, and help promote awareness of the effects of your tack and equipment on your horse. These evaluations must be done with the horse standing square, on a flat surface, with their neck straight in line with the body.

I rarely see a new client's horse without asking to see the saddle that is being regularly used on that horse. This practice of incorporating saddle fitting with every new horse assessment has answered many questions directly related to what I find in the soft tissue of the horse's back. The most interesting part of saddle fitting is that it is now being linked to lameness that people never believed a saddle could cause. Foreleg lameness, suspensory lameness, neck problems, respiratory problems, collection problems, and of course sore backs are all noted as saddle fit related problems. I have a firm belief that there is only one saddle fitting opinion that matters and it is the opinion of your horse.

When fitting a static object to a dynamic surface there are bound to be some complications.

Often times I am called out to see a horse that is 'just not right, not lame, but not right, doesn't bend the same, seems tired, refuses to do things that before seemed so easy for him or her before.' Often the horse has developed behavioral problems that seem out of character.

November/December 2017 Photo Credit Grayt Designs

## My Horse's Attitude

Does your horse try to talk to you when you are grooming or tacking him or her up? Does he drop his back, fall to his knees, or look weak in the hind end when the girth is being done up? Does he throw his head into the air? Does he walk away stiff and reluctant to move after the tack is on? All of these are ways your horse is trying to communicate that the tack is uncomfortable and should be further checked.

## Saddle 'Square-ness'

A. Off the horse

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Prior to tacking, an evaluation should be made of the soundness of the saddle. Hold the saddle first pommel down, and then cantle down, to check the symmetry of the panels. Secondly, check the flocking is the same from side to side. Run your hands down the flocking and look for any holes or deviations that would cause a pressure point on your horse's back.

**Balance Point**

The saddle must sit balanced so that the place where your seat bones rest in the saddle is level with the ground. The balance on the horse's back is important because it will dictate the rider's hip angle, and it will also affect the rider's weight distribution onto the horse's back tissue.

**Rock**

Lateral or longitudinal rock will create friction and pressure points in your horse's back. To check for rock, set your saddle on with no pad on the spot on your horse's back where you would normally ride. Press on the pommel and cantle and determine if when one is pressed down, the other bumps up. Next, gently pull from side to side to determine if the saddle is willing to roll very easily side-to-side. The saddle should not move, rather it should rest securely with minimal rock.

**Gullet Width and Height**


The gullet is the channel that runs down the middle of the saddle between the two panels. The gullet must span the horse's spine the whole way down the saddle. In many older saddles the gullet gets very narrow toward the back of the saddle.


**Tree and Twist Size**

Place the saddle on its sweet spot on the horse and evaluate how the tree points fit in the horse's wither pocket. Your horse's wither pocket is the soft tissue under the wither and behind the scapula. Take your flat hand and run it under the saddle from the pommel to the front flap. Your hand should pass through easily, not being halted by a pressure point; it should feel snug and even in pressure.


**Panel Shape**

The last thing you should check is if the saddle's panel shape matches that of the horse's back. This will affect the weight distribution of the panels and potentially create pressure points.


Even with a perfect fitting saddle the rider's postural or weight imbalance can create a deviation in the saddle that will affect your horse's back. Your trainer will be your greatest asset in evaluating your personal posture. 



*'Dare to Compare'*  
 Try our adjustable, fully customizable, air paneled saddle in a 'Dare to Compare' appointment, and let your horse tell you which saddle he likes better!



*'The difference I feel in my horse is obvious, I can't believe we didn't try this sooner' -Alex Grayton*



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