



New Horse, New Saddle

Janis Cook

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Purchasing a horse often means you need to include the cost of a saddle in the overall spending. Hoping that your saddle from the previous horse will fit and asking everyone around you what they think won't lead to the most informed decision. If you are thinking about purchasing the previous rider's saddle, don't assume it's your best option without having the fit evaluated for yourself and the horse.

Here are your options:

1. Ask a qualified saddle fitter to come out and assess your saddle.
2. Pad your previous saddle and hope for the best, until your horse tells you differently (painful process for the horse to go through)

When a qualified saddle fitter comes to assess the fit, you can expect a few things.

The horse needs to be measured for width and topline features. These measurements should be discussed and compared to the width of your saddle and the style of topline your saddle would best suit.

Your saddle should be placed on the horse without any pads and girthed up. At this point you and your saddle fitter should note that the billets are hanging vertically and in the correct place to do up the girth – this doesn't mean under the elbow or in the middle of the belly. This is often the simplest way to fail a saddle fit, as it is the tree that doesn't fit; changing panels or adding or taking out wool will not make a difference as to where the billets hang.

Once girthed up, if the cantle is much higher than the front of the saddle and the pommel sits low and tight on the withers, the tree is too wide. Trying to stuff the front to compensate is not the best solution. If the tree isn't adjustable for width, then the saddle fails to fit the horse. At this point your saddle fitter may evaluate the Body Conditioning Score of the horse and suggest a program to further assess the horse after either gaining weight or losing it.

If the pommel sits higher than the cantle then it is likely a tree design failure for your horse. Trying to lift the back of the saddle with risers or thicker panels is not the solution. A saddle with a different tree design will solve the fit.