



Saddle Fitting Donna-Maria Bassett

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Saddle Fitting - Confluence of Art and Science!

The idea is that a Saddle Fitter combines the science of fit with the artist's eye when looking at a horse and can determine the type of panel, tree, and style that will provide optimum fit and comfort while allowing for the greatest athleticism.

A saddle fitter's job is to understand the construction of saddles - their shape as it relates to the shape of the horse. Appreciate that a panel is meant to give the horse a large footprint and weight bearing surface. Be familiar with how a tree is supposed to fit along the wither, through the rail of the tree, and across the seat; giving the horse the greatest comfort and the rider the best ride.

Saddle fitters should have experience in riding and understand the problems a rider faces in the sport specific to the tack. For example, to properly address the needs of a Jumper, the saddle fitter should have a basic understanding of jumping, the rules, what it entails, why a saddle should be designed a specific way, what the rider needs in terms of seat, knee support, and ability to move in the saddle. Each discipline, not to mention each horse presents different requirements in a saddle.

Big moving horses need a saddle that offers more support to the rider; lower level riders also need a lot of support. Horses that aren't big movers, but are very athletic through their back, require a saddle that allows the rider to move a little. Saddlers should understand this about saddle fitting and provide the right ride for the rider. Show saddles, specialist saddles for ponies, and adjustable tree saddles need to be understood by the saddle fitter as well so that they may fit any situation.

Being able to match a manufacturer with a particular shape or conformation is another important aspect of a saddle fitter's job. A qualified saddle fitter must have precision in assessment and in-depth knowledge of how a saddle affects a horse's movement; product knowledge and sport specific experience is also critical to a successful fitting. A correct fit for horse and rider will ensure comfortable rides and optimum performance.

by Donna-Maria Bassett, SMS Qualified Saddle Fitter, Precision Saddle fitting & Annette Gavin, Hastilow USA, SMS Qualified Saddle Fitter

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