

SADDLE 'EM UP



Talk about a subject that will start a brew-ha-ha with Horse lovers, this one's it.

Saddle -- let's start out with a plain definition of what a saddle is. According to www.dictionary.com: Saddle, Noun: 1) *a seat for a rider on the back of a horse or other animal*. What is not described in this simple definition is how to choose a saddle or fit a saddle to a particular Horse.

Whether a person rides in a \$10k Dressage saddle or a hand-me-down McClellan saddle, a rider should choose a saddle based on fairly strict guidelines.

Failure to do so could result in a very painful experience for both Horse and rider; if not even death. That's right, folks. Death can occur and sadly does because a rider did not take the time to choose a proper saddle for their style, conditions, event, or conformation of their Horse.

A 200 pound barrel racer should probably not be competing in a 13 inch Hunter/Jumper English saddle strapped to a 16 hand foundation Quarter Horse anymore so than a 90 pound eventer should compete in an 18 inch Western Pleasure saddle cinched down on a 14 hand Arab.

I have never bumped my head hard enough to try and convince others that one style of saddle is better than another (the old and tired Western/English debate). That is not what this article is about. Yes, I do have an opinion on this matter but I figure the smartest thing to do is keep THAT opinion to myself, except to say Aussie Saddles Rule!

Just kidding, I personally like my Aussie for my current Horse, but would never dream of putting it on my previous Horse, RJ. It just would not fit him, or his breed's typical build.

There are hundreds of books written about saddle fitting, some good, some not so good and many that are just plain confusing. Fitting a saddle to a Horse really is not all that complicated if you are willing to pay attention to detail and listen to the Horse. Let me slide off the trail here a second. This is one of those facts in the Horse world that applies to every Horse, a saddle either fits or it doesn't. All the "special neotripolybuteicyclespaceifoam*" pads in the world will not make a



David Qualls
Shoe - Less Farrier Services
678-314-0381
www.davidqualls.net

saddle fit, either it does or it does not.

So how is a person expected to know if a saddle really fits or not? Honestly this is where "common sense" comes in to point, and if you're new to Horses the old adage "if it doesn't look right, it's not" will work just fine. If things do look right but your Horse still shows back pain after a ride, it may be time to hire a professional saddle fitter.

Professional Saddle Fitters are just that. That's what they do -- they fit saddles to Horses. The guy or gal down at your local tack store may be one heck of a Horse person and fantastic saddle seller but probably has little to no knowledge about correct saddle balance or fit.

Just because a saddle costs \$10,000.00 also does not mean it will fit your Horse. It has been my experience, however, saddle sellers will gladly sell you that \$10k saddle for your Horse and a correction pad to ensure a "proper fit". Your money would be more wisely invested in hiring a Saddle Fitter to ensure the saddle fits and then buy a \$10.00 "Navajo Blanket".

Corrector pads will only INCREASE the pressure points of an ill-fitting saddle. These pads cause the "point" to be dispersed over a larger portion of the body, causing more muscle/skeleton fatigue and pain. Again, either a saddle fits or it doesn't. Think of it like this, you've bought a new pair of shoes, they don't fit perfectly. As they "break-in" they become even more uncomfortable, so you run to the five and dime and buy inserts. Now these shoes still don't fit, but they're softer. But at the end of the day, now it's not just your feet that hurt, it's your lower back. The cushion effect has caused the imbalance to be dispersed over a larger area. This same thing happens to your Horse when corrector pads are used with ill-fitting saddles.

A good farrier should be able to tell if your saddle fits or not without ever having to see the saddle. It really is that obvious. However, most farriers are not trained saddle fitters, and if your farrier suggests your saddle doesn't fit and cannot show you why it doesn't, it still may be time to find a saddle fitter. And if one of those professionals are not readily available, a trained sports massage therapist should be able to guide you and your Horse in the right direction.

One last thought about saddles -- if you have one but don't have a Horse, your saddle is lonely and needs a buddy. Adopt a Horse and your saddle will thank you!!!



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Happy Balanced Trails!!!



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