



Experts in what we do

Saddle Fitting Guide

uvex



INDICATIONS OF A WELL FITTED SADDLE

- The points of the tree run parallel to the horse's scapula
- The points of the tree sit behind the horse's scapula, not on top of it.
- With the rider mounted and without a numnah or pad, there is a minimum of 3 to 4 cm clearance between the underside of the pommel and the top of the horse's spine.
- The saddle tree does not extend past the horse's last rib (T18) onto the lumbar region. Some panels will protrude beyond the tree which can be acceptable depending on conformation.
- The gullet is wide enough so that the panels sit on either side of the spine, not on it.
- The panels should be smooth and symmetrical and follow the contours of the horse's back to spread the rider's weight evenly.
- When ridden the saddle should sit evenly either side of the spine with the rider's weight centred.
- The saddle is stable. It does not bounce excessively or slip to one side.

With a stock of nearly 300 saddles...

and the benefit of being able to try our saddles before you buy then it really is the perfect opportunity for you to contact a saddler to make sure this really important purchase is the right one!



INDICATIONS OF A POORLY FITTING SADDLE

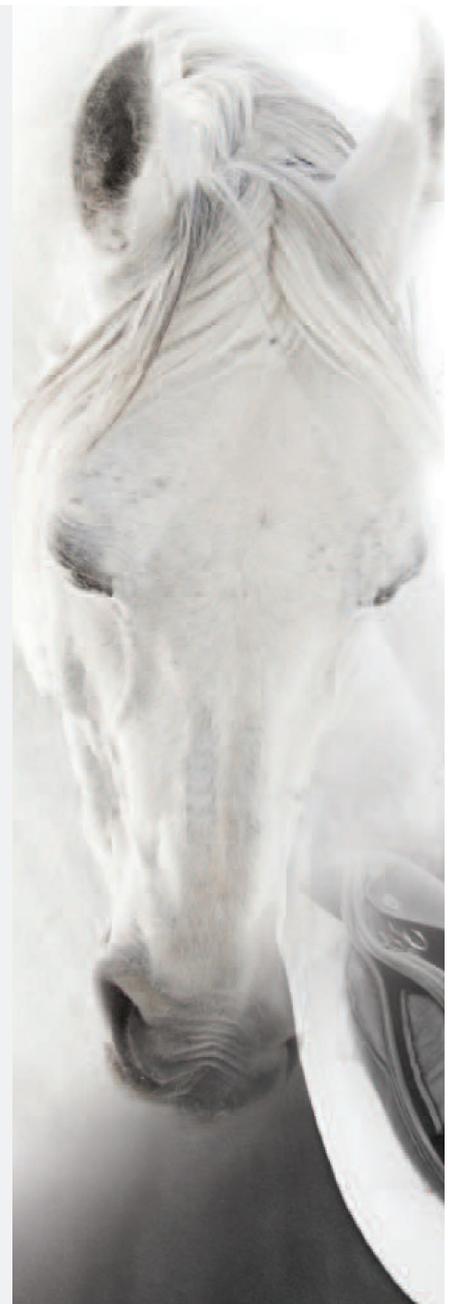
- Your horse may react when approached with a saddle, or try to nip as he is tacked up.
- Some horses become agitated when mounting, refuse to stand by mounting block.
- His back may sink suddenly when mounted or rush away from the mounting block.
- Your horse may start rushing over jumps, become strong in the mouth, be reluctant to jump or canter.
- Bucking is often a sign of pain caused by a badly fitting saddle, as is tail swishing.
- Normally easy to catch horses may become difficult or evasive in the field.
- His gait may feel slightly uneven, potterly or obviously worse on one of his leads.
- The saddle moves excessively or feels unbalanced when ridden.

How often should a saddle fit be checked?

We recommend that a professional assessment of the fit is carried out at least twice a year, more so for young horses or competition horses in hard work. This allows for seasonal condition, diet and work changes in your horse's life, which can result in changes to the fit of the saddle. It is recommended that flocked panels should have a complete change of wool at least every two years to maintain an even and absorbing contact. For horses in competition this may well be reduced to eighteen months. This is outside of normal adjustment and management of the fit of the saddle.

It is particularly important to have the fit of the saddle checked if there is a major change in how you use your horse, if you progress from light hacking to competition, your horse will increase fitness his muscle structure will alter accordingly, thus altering his shape.

The opposite also applies, a competition horse that is changed to light hacking, or a stabled horse that is turned out, will lose condition which will change the fit of his saddle. This is also important for a newly purchased horse as his entire routine and workload will change in his new home.



FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE FIT OF THE SADDLE

- Repeated mounting from the ground, on the same side can cause the saddle to sit unevenly over time, it may distort the flocking or even twist the tree over time. It is always preferable to use a mounting block.
- Asymmetrical riders or riders with historical injuries may sit more heavily to one side or collapse a hip putting more weight on one side of the saddle. This can cause the saddle to settle unevenly.
- Changes in type, frequency and amount of work the horse is doing.
- Changes in diet, grazing and turnout.
- Changes in weight and size of the rider, the type of rider, the experience of the rider.
- Seasonal weather changes, horses gain condition in the spring and early summer and lose condition in winter.
- Numnahs and pads need to be large enough so that the edging is clear of the saddle at all times, to avoid rubbing or chaffing on the bindings.
- When girthing your saddle it is important to use the best straps for the horse's girthline and conformation in order to maintain the balance of the saddle
- Anatomical girths can help when the horse has a particularly forward girth line.
- If you are using an elastic girth, make sure the elastic has 3 layers of elastic thickness, 2 layers rarely provides enough tension when the girth is tightened. Weak or insufficient elastic can pull saddles off centre and such girths are best avoided.
- Uneven stirrup leathers can cause the saddle to pull off to one side, always ensure that stirrup leathers are level and in good repair.

COMMON SADDLE FITTING PROBLEMS

*The following recommendations assume a basically correct saddle fit in terms of design, size and width for both horse and rider and the discipline being undertaken. **If the overall fit is wrong, no amount of adjustment will make it right.***

01. SADDLE SLIPPING

The most common reason for saddles slipping is uneven saddle panels. Turn your saddle over and look along the length of the panel from the front and the rear, ensure each side is level and even in comparison to the other side. Feel along the length of each side to make sure the composition is even, panels can often look even but one side may be flocked softer than the other causing the saddle to tilt to one side when weight is applied. Badly and/or over flocked panels may cause bruising, soft tissue damage, soft lumps, hair loss from rubbing and other skin related problems for your horse.

02. SLIPPING SIDEWAYS

- Make sure your stirrup leathers are even – being on the same hole does not mean they are level. It is a good idea to swap sides with your stirrup leathers regularly to minimise difference in length caused by stretch.
- Make sure the tension on the girth straps is even both sides, even if they are on different holes.
- Make sure you have sensible tension on your girth, a saddle slipping sideways is often caused by having the girth too loose, many horses expand the chest when the girth is first tightened, once mounted circle a couple of times then retighten the girth.
- Elastic on one end of your girth may cause the saddle to slip sideways, especially on broad horses, always use a girth with elastic both ends or no elastic.
- Some saddles are supplied with a 'Balance Strap' (an extra strap behind the conventional centre straps that attaches to the rear of the saddle and comes under the flap at a forward angle). These can be very useful on horses with an uneven gait or conformation. If your saddle does not have balance straps, ask your saddler to assess the saddle for conversion.
- A horse with asymmetrical development or gait may cause the saddle to slip to the side. If all of the above criteria have been met then you may need to further analyse your horses' musculature and action. Often a horse with mild hindlimb lameness will cause the saddle to drop to that side.
- A rider that weights one stirrup more than the other will always cause uneven forces on the saddle and over time will cause the flocking to become uneven. Have somebody watch you ride from the ground to advise whether your posture is correct.
- In the instance of an asymmetrical horse it may be beneficial to use a remedial saddlepad and a combination of shims to correct the balance of the saddle and enable the horse to use his muscles in the correct way.

03. SLIPPING FORWARDS

- Some horse's conformation is such that they push the saddle forwards even when it is a good fit. This may be because they have a particularly forward girthline and round barrel. In order to prevent your saddle slipping forwards on to the horses shoulder it may be necessary to use point straps. Point straps are girth straps that are attached to the point (front) of the saddle tree at each side This allows a better girth alignment and is a proven method for preventing the forwards movement of the saddle.
- Consider using a gel type pad such as Acavallo Non-slip Gel on their own or with a numnah to give the saddle more grip. It is vitally important that these are cleaned to the manufacturer's instructions each time they are used, any build-up of dust, sweat and grime will seriously affect the performance of the product and may cause health issues for your horse.
- Use quality numnahs and saddle cloths, avoid cheap man-made fabrics, especially those with a shiny, slippery surface. Consider one of the modern designs that incorporate non-slip grip panels built into the surface of the fabric, these are available with a grip surface on the saddle side, the skin side or both.

- Invest in a good quality forward curved girth, for example the SD Anatomical, Ideal Affinity, Fairfax Performance Girth or the Prolite Girth. These are designed to angle the girth further back, give more shoulder freedom and are proven to be effective with forward slipping problems.

04. EXCESSIVE MOVEMENT AT THE BACK OF THE SADDLE

The most common reason for excessive movement and bounce at the back of the saddle is panel related. If, as above, the panel is badly flocked, uneven in fit and consistency or over or under flocked the saddle will not conform to the shape of the horse's back and movement may occur

05. STORING YOUR SADDLE

- Avoid storing your saddle on the common frame type of saddle rack. By sitting your saddle directly onto the frame it will cause the panels to crease which will distort the pressure immediately behind the shoulder, the most important area of contact in the fit of your saddle.
- If you do use this type of rack, make sure you use a thick saddle pad or towel between the saddle and the rack to avoid the panels being damaged over time.
- Saddles are better stored on a saddle horse or pole rack.
- Store your saddle in a dry ventilated area so that the leather stays in top condition, and the tree does not warp due to adverse conditions.
- Clean your saddle regularly with a damp cloth and condition the leather with a natural balm or leather food to keep it supple.



Experts in what we do

SADDLES DIRECT STORE

Crow Wood Equestrian Centre,
Royle Lane Lancashire, BB12 0RT
Monday - Saturday 10am - 5.00pm

ANY QUESTIONS?

saddlefitter@saddlesdirect.co.uk