



# Show Horse Saddle Fitting And Riding Rugs Supplies By Western World Saddlery Clothing Equipment Caboolture

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Not all horses are created equal as poorly fitted saddles can kill Not all horses are created equal, and neither are saddles a one-size-fits-all. A properly fitted saddle improves a horse's comfort and performance, while an ill-fitting counterpart can lead to behavioural and training problems, or worse, ribbing, bruising, or severely injured and even died as a result. Accredited saddle fitter, quarter horse judge and lifelong enthusiast of all things equestrian, Debby Cameron, co-owner of Western World Saddlery in Caboolture, explains what to look out for, and why, when assessing saddles.

Wearing an uncomfortable, too-small pair of shoes and then being forced to take a daily run in them would no doubt invoke a personal protest. The same applies to horses, Debby explains. "If a normally keen horse shows signs of acting up, or a reluctance to jump or canter, it could be suffering from a sore back." Other signs to look out for are bucking and tail swishing, a reaction when approached with a saddle, a nip as it is tacked up or generally difficult and evasive behaviour.

Fitting the correct saddle to a horse is extremely important as the saddle is the link between the horse and the rider. It must not only fit the horse but also the rider and be suitable for the task and kind of riding to be performed. A correctly fitted saddle improves the way a horse will work, making them more willing.

In an ideal world, every horse and rider combination would have a custom saddle, as no two pairs are the same; the two become one. In reality, one saddle is often used by a number of different horses. In this situation, it's important to take a long hard look at the way the saddle fits the horse, and make adjustments if possible. "If a standard saddle can't be made to fit, investing in a saddle that fits the horse's back properly is most worthwhile," Debby said.

#### Take a good look at the horse

A proper saddle fitting starts with an evaluation of the horse. Is the back straight, and symmetrical from side to side? Are the withers high? Are the muscles of the back well developed, or is this horse new to training and will be filling out with time? The height of the horse's hips and the location of its girth line will be determined, as well as any areas lacking in muscle along the horse's back. The fitter will then feel for sensitive areas, muscle soreness and saddle rubs.

#### Selecting the right saddle

Saddles come in many styles, including English, Western traditional, hunter, dressage and jumper varieties. Western saddles are further divided into endurance, barrel racing and roping, so it's easy to be overwhelmed by the many options available. It is important to choose the right saddle for the kind of riding required.

The saddle length needs to match the horse and rider. A short-coupled horse with a too long saddle can sustain damage in the loin and kidney area, on top of giving the horse saddle sores. This will not end well for either horse or rider, as it makes the ride uncomfortable for both parties. A short saddle on a long-backed horse, on the other hand, will lead to uneven weight distribution.

Evaluate the saddle's lines of symmetry from back to front and on both the topside and upside down, through the gullet. The panels should be equally padded on both sides and the tree should give good resistance with compression. A saddle needs to distribute the weight of the rider correctly over the horse's back so that the rider's centre of gravity becomes one with the horse's.

Now evaluate the saddle on the horse. A professional saddle fitter will start off by placing the saddle on the horse's back without any pads, girths or breastplates and see where it settles in. Walk the horse a few strides and see where the saddle wants to be as all the contraptions in the world won't keep a saddle in place if it's naturally sliding off the horse's hindquarters.

If the saddle ends up on the horse's last ribs, then it's probably too narrow because their shoulders keep shoving the saddle back: it will be lifted at the front and look like it's going 'uphill'. When it is too wide, it will move towards the horse's neck. This will cause the rider to be positioned too far forward on the horse's back and make them lean forward. The saddle will also have the appearance of going 'downhill'. "If the basic shape of the saddle is not right, no amount of padding under it will make it fit comfortably," explains Debby.

Slipping hands under the saddle and feel for tight spots along the panels and gullet is the next step. The panels should evenly contact the horse's back musculature, without pressure points or gaps. 'Bridging' is when the saddle makes good contact at the front and back, but not in the middle of the saddle. A small amount of bridging is okay, but a large amount means that too much pressure is being placed at the front and back of the saddle.

Next is to apply the girth and see how that changes things. Once again, check for pressure points, bridging, and the movement of the balance point. Apply saddle pads and see how those affect the fit of the saddle. Only after all of this, is it time to add the rider.

Check the integrity of the saddle by looking at the middle of the saddle while pushing down to make sure the tree isn't moving. If the tree moves under pressure, its integrity is compromised. Also, check the tree by placing the saddle on its side and place knees on it to see if the tree has any give, particularly important when buying a second-hand saddle. Finally, check the sides of the saddle for any rough spots or sharp edges that could affect

the horse.

Debby stresses that properly evaluating saddle fit takes time and a critical eye. "But once we know where the trouble spots are, we can adjust them accordingly. Some saddles can be reflected in the panels, and pads can sometimes be added to help the saddle fit correctly, but no amount of padding will make a poorly fitting saddle fit well," she says.

"Take the time to get a proper saddle measurement and outfit the horse with the best saddle for its body. It will allow for movement without pinching or pain and is worth it if you can keep your horse's backs happy and healthy."

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