

Why a properly fit saddle?

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The short answer to this important question is because a properly fit saddle unequivocally leads to enhanced performance.

First and foremost we must understand that all horses are asymmetrical, just like people. They are left- or right-handed; they have a strong and a weak side. Our saddles must be adjustable to accommodate this and have the ability to be readjusted as our horses develop and change.

Horses are dynamic animals, and their bodies change over time. Feed, work, age, and metabolism can change a horse's shape throughout its life, just like with us humans. Our saddle must allow for these changes and not impede the horse's free movement.

Roughly 95% of all saddles on the market today are made with a wooden or plastic tree – two materials that are known for their relative rigidity. How can it be said that a wooden or plastic tree allows for body changes? These trees restrict movement and can cause daily pain and long-term degeneration of muscles, nerves, and bones. Kissing spine is associated with the use of ill-fitting saddles.

Saddles that are not fit correctly to account for asymmetries will fall to one side. This pinches the withers and traps the scapula causing restriction in the shoulders. Restricting shoulder movement blocks the hind legs, leading to shorter strides, tighter backs, less fluid movement through the whole body, and less jump!

The balance of the saddle from front to back must be correct, regardless of saddle brand. A general rule of thumb is that the pommel should follow an imaginary straight line parallel to the ground across



the saddle and intersect at roughly the middle of the cantle. If the pommel is higher than halfway up the cantle, the tree is too narrow which again causes pinching and restriction of the shoulder. Even worse, the majority of the rider's weight is distributed on the horse's lumbar, which can lead to pain and several other performance defects.

Fit ability is only made possible only through adjustability. In order to increase your horse's performance, ensure you look after your horse with a correct and pain-free saddle fit. ■



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