12 STEPS OF STATIC SADDLE FITTING

1 Horse Standing Square

2 Saddle Position

Place the saddle slightly forward on the withers. Then, in one continuous movement, press the pommel slightly down and slide briskly rearward until you feel the saddle fall into a slot/depression near the base of the withers, about 3 or 4 fingers behind the very back edge of the scapula. With the saddle in this position and properly fitted, the riders weight will be dispersed evenly throughout the entire length of the saddle tree and panel.

The old practice of placing the saddle too far forward on the withers with the idea of freeing up the back, which most of us have been guilty of, does exactly the opposite. In fact, pressure test clearly prove that it interferes with the shoulder and puts excessive pressure on the T-16 region of the back with little contact through the center of the panels, a condition called "bridging".

3 Horse Response

Observe your horse's response to being approached with or placing the saddle on the back, such as; nervousness, moving away, pinning ears, swishing tail, hollowing back or bitting. He is not being bad, he is telling you in no uncertain terms that he dreads the saddle. This behavior normally disappears when the saddle is properly designed and fitted and the horse is no longer in pain.

4 Adequate Static and Dynamic Wither Clearance

The Boy Scout Rule of thumb for static fit is approximately 3 large or 4 small fingers clearance under the pommel with the saddle in the correct position.

If your horse has an X Wide wither you will have more clearance both statically and dynamically because the wither doesn't go up into the pommel as much as a narrower wither does. If your horse has an X Wide wither, a "level seat" can be an even more important indicator of proper fit than the Boy Scout rule for wither clearance.

All saddles will lose some clearance under the riders weight. Narrower withers will lose more clearance during dynamic fitting (run down) because more pressure is being concentrated on a smaller, more angular bearing surface of the panel.

Clearance with the saddle loaded should be evaluated with and without a pad. Here, adequate clearance is the key, but no less than approximately 2 or 2 1/2 fingers of sustainable clearance with a level seat.

5 Seat Level

6 Pommel to Cantle Relationship

7 Parallel Points

8 Even "Point Panel" Pressure

The point panel is the front part of the panel running vertically down both the sides of the withers.

If the tree is too wide it will sit low in front, and have less clearence. There will be more pressure on the top of the point panel and less contact towards the rear of the panel.

If the tree is too narrow it will sit too high in front and have more panel pressure at the the bottom of the tree points and rear of the panel.

9 Even Pressure/Contact Throughout the Entire Length of the Panel.

10 Saddle Stability

The Saddle shouldn't rock excessively from front to back, or roll side to side. Rolling side to side is very often a result of excess adipose tissue, (fat layer under the skin) which is also a major cause of saddles slipping forward. Trying to the tighten the girth when the horse is too fat, is like trying to "Girth Jello". Consult your nutritionist or vet.

11 Saddle Length

The old rule was that the saddle panel should not extend behind T-18. That remains true if the panel is stiff or rigid. However, new guidelines from both the Masters Saddlers Assoc. and the Socienty of Master Saddlers, state that it's more important that the flat length of the tree where it meets the cantle, should not extend behind T-18. If the panel is wool flocked and pliable where it extends past the end of the flat part of the tree and even slightly behind T-18, it acts as a diffuser to relieve or transfer excessive pressure at the end of the tree. The horse is the final arbiter. Is he moving better than with the old saddle ?

12 Adequate Gullet Width

Rule of Thumb: The saddle gullet should be centered on the spine. If the spine deviates it obviously will not precisely bisect the gullet. The gullet should be wide enough to provide adequate clearance for the dorsal spinous processes of the spine and approximately 1/2" additional on either side of the dorsal spinous processes to compensate for connective tissue.

No one gullet width is right for all horses. Horses with wide flat backs need a wider gullet than a horse with narrower withers and a more angled back. The panels should sit primarily on the Longisimus group of muscles. A gullet too wide is as bad as a gullet too narrow.

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