

ASSESS YOUR SADDLE

Do you wonder if your saddle is OK? Run through Lavinia Mitchell's potential problems to see what you can discuss with your saddle fitter.

A good example of width, length and levelness



1 Is your saddle well balanced front to back?

The centre of the seat should be level.
Note: The pommel and cantle may correctly be at different heights when the seat is level.



6 Is your saddle in the centre of your horse's back?
Look down the spine. It should not sit or swing to one side.
(check this during and after riding too)
Causes can be saddle, rider or horse.



2 Is your saddle stable front to back?
Before girthing check by pressing forward and down on the pommel; it should not lift at the back. Then press alternately on the pommel and cantle; it should not rock front to back.



7 Before girthing, and when sitting on your horse, how much wither clearance does your saddle have?
2-3 fingers = generally suitable
2 finger or less = too low
Traditional 4 fingers or more = too high



3 Look for broad, wide, flat panels that are springy when pressed, and a gullet no less than 2" wide for clearance of the spine and ligaments.

The panels give comfort to your horse by spreading your weight over a larger surface area of his back

Note: Many panels are narrow and look like rolling pins; they can be lumpy and/or banana shaped. These bad shapes can press uncomfortably into the back muscles. Look to see if yours has uneven, lumpy panels.



8 Does your saddle stay in contact with the back along the length of the panels?
Ask a friend to watch when you ride. It should not swing or lift at the back.



9 Often over looked; does the style and size of the saddle suit and support you as a rider?
It should compliment your riding style and/or purpose, and be the correct shape and size for your height and build.
Note: Your leg position on the flap, and your seat within the seat.



4 Panel length is important too as it contributes to the weight bearing surface.

Ideally the panels should not extend beyond the last rib, and should not dig into your horse's back at the cantle end.

The black saddle mirrors correct anatomical shape

The brown saddle mirrors incorrect anatomical shape



10 Finally, if I was pressed to only pick the one most important factor for horse comfort it would be the correct width tree. This is the area where most people need help to broaden their current view and understanding. The tree is the biggest factor in constraining movement, muscle development and comfort.

The tree width should follow the contour (or if remedial saddling, the potential contour) of your horse's back width. By recognising the difference between poor muscle development, or good muscle development and correct anatomical shape, you can make a big difference to your horse by the way you choose to saddle.



5 Check for shoulder clearance. Does your saddle allow for movement of the shoulder? Often saddles are fitted too far forward, or are poorly shaped. It should not clamp into, or cover the scapula either standing still, or when the horse moves.

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