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The show season is about to start in earnest for many riders, which means that you might be thinking about getting a new saddle for yourself and your horse. Maybe a brand-new saddle (hopefully one that fits you and can be adjusted to ensure optimum fit for your horse), but there are also 'previously loved' options out there that could be just as good. Used saddles can be on the market for a number of reasons, some of which could be:

- they no longer or never fit either horse or rider and are non-adjustable (which unfortunately is the case with many English saddles that have been built on a traditional English spring tree with a traditional English gullet plate); or
- they have been put aside for the next latest greatest fad or model; or
- the rider no longer rides or has changed disciplines.

In any case, with a used saddle, it is usually a case of caveat emptor, especially if buying privately. If you purchase a used saddle from a reputable dealer, generally it will have been tested for soundness (i.e., tree is not broken or twisted), the billets are stitched on properly and the threads are not fraying, and the leather is not ripped or torn or wrinkled and has been conditioned regularly. These are all cosmetic points; key is whether or not the saddle fits the rider and whether or not it will fit the horse or can be adjusted to fit the horse. In this consideration, the saddle support area is crucial, since the length of the saddle is one thing that can never be adjusted after the fact unless the panel is changed. The 18th thoracic vertebra is the furthest back the saddle should lie – which is simple to determine by feeling where the last floating rib ends. The saddle must never lie on the lumbar vertebrae, as this is where several reflex points will result in negative behaviour such as bucking or stumbling.

Used saddles from renowned manufacturers will generally keep their value; determine whether the saddle is right for you and your horse and make sure you have it fitted properly before riding.

The 9 main points of saddle fit (see chart at end of article) are common to all saddles and all horses – if you want to determine whether and how well a saddle fits (new, used, or yours!) these points should be considered. Remember that the saddle not only has to fit when your horse is standing still – but especially, and more important – when you start to ride! You can find videos to accompany each of these points at our website at www.saddlesforwomen.com which will give you exact instructions per YouTube educational videos how to determine fit. You may find variations of these key areas of fit – we have seen 5, 7, 8 points posted at various times, but at the end of the day these are the most critical areas to consider.

May 2019 - What to Watch for When Buying a Saddle (new or used)

Written by By Jochen Schleese, CMS, CSFT, CSE
Tuesday, 30 April 2019 00:00

The art of fitting a saddle to both horse and rider is something which is not explained in a few sentences; indeed, something new can be learned as each client brings with him or herself something different to consider. It's not rocket science, but it is a science, combined with the artistry of building the saddle. It is important to work closely with veterinarians and physiotherapists and other equine professionals to constantly ensure the most optimal combination of horse, rider and saddle.

The proper way to measure the seat size of an English saddle is diagonally from either saddle nail, on the side of the pommel, to the centre of the cantle. Adult seat sizes vary from 16" to 19", with 17" to 17 1/2" being the most common. The rider should try out several makes to see which feels most comfortable, because even half an inch can make a difference. Different makes of the same size can also feel differently. In addition, the saddle trees vary in width at the twist (the part of the tree you feel between your upper inner thighs), the deepest point, and in the amount and placement of seat foam. There are of course different "fads" and popular riders which influence choices in forward or rear seat, deepest points, etc. When you have found a model, which feels comfortable to you, it must be taken to the horse to see how it fits on its back. One small caveat here – it is important that the saddle feel comfortable and fit the rider correctly, because if this is not the case, the rider's discomfort will translate down to the horse, no matter how well the saddle fits the horse! Saddle size must take into consideration not only the size for the rider, but also the length of the horse's back. Much can be done with panels to ensure the comfort of the horse – for instance, if you have a smaller person (with a 17" saddle) and a very long-backed horse, the panels may be lengthened to ensure the saddle distributes weight far enough back on the horse to ensure balance and comfort – otherwise, the rider may be sitting too far forward if only her seat size is taken into consideration. Unfortunately, the reverse is often an issue: a larger rider sitting on a horse with a relatively short saddle support area.

Flap size and location must also be considered – therefore certain anatomical measurements on the rider are important to ensure that the leg is properly positioned on the flap.

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The correct positioning on the horse is vital. The saddle should be placed on the horse's back at the withers and then pushed back (to make sure the hairs are smoothed down). The tree points (where the tree is put into the flaps) should be directly behind the shoulder blades. The centre of the saddle should lie horizontally to the ground to ensure proper positioning of the deepest point.

The rider should then get on to see if his or her seated position is correct - for instance, for dressage the shoulders, hips and heels should be in one straight vertical line. One frequent problem is that (due to insufficient or improper stuffing) many riders find themselves sitting too far back in the saddle. An attempt to alleviate this is usually done with a keyhole (or other) pad, which in effect does nothing, because the rubber compresses so tightly as to have an almost non-existent effect. In addition, the rubber gives one the feeling of "swimming" on the horse's back. This situation can be remedied with proper re-stuffing or a panel wedge in the event that greater height is required to bring the rider more forward in the position. Proper stuffing does not always mean more stuffing. With a properly fitting saddle you should only need a thin, quilted cotton pad – to protect the leather, nothing more!

Most new saddles are filled fairly loosely with a wool/synthetic mix, which takes about six months of regular riding to settle onto the shape of the horse's back. At this time the first re-stuffing should be done, with check-ups about every two years after.

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In short – whenever possible – try out a saddle before buying it. Both you and your horse need to feel comfortable, be positioned correctly, and perform optimally with the choice you make. It boils down to personal preference of what feels good for you and works for your horse while keeping the anatomical requirements of both in mind – nothing more scientific than that!

#	9 Points of Saddle Fit	Description
1	Balance	The billets should hang perpendicular to the ground
2	Wither Clearance	Clearance at the withers should be 2-3 fingers for
3	Gullet Channel Width	The gullet should be wide enough not to interfere v
4	Full Panel Contact	The panel should touch the horse's back evenly al
5	Billet Alignment	The billets should hang perpendicular to the ground
6	Saddle Length	The shoulder and loin areas should not carry any v
7	Saddle Straightness	The saddle should not fall off to one side when vie
8	Saddle Tree Angle	The panel tree points should be parallel to the sho
9	Saddle Tree Width	The tree width should be wide enough for saddle t