

Historical saddle styles gaining new interest thanks to their place in revered horsemanship traditions.



American equestrians have been importing horses and apparel trends from Europe for some time, so it's no surprise that saddles should join that list. DP Saddlery's diverse line of finely-crafted saddles, engineered by master saddle makers in Germany, is making rapid inroads in the U.S., says President Barbara Caiado. Saddle styles loosely categorized as "baroque" and familiar in the Iberian breeds and Vaquero horsemanship worlds are among DP's most popular models. Because of USEF and FEI tack restrictions, they are not seen in competitive dressage, but they are standard issue at many of Europe's best known sources of classical dressage – "the kind that goes back thousands of years," clarifies Barbara.

There are a lot of people interested in going back to the original teachings and the equipment that went with it. "So many people are realizing the wonderful way of creating lightness, softness and correctness in any horse," she explains of the saddles' connection to these revered methods of classical dressage masters. "An art form that is being revived by thousands all across the world, in their unique search of always bettering themselves for their horses, and we couldn't be happier to see it being revived." Barbara adds.

All DP saddles are built on the company's own trees, which are lightweight and flexible, yet strong and sculpted to provide proper clearance for the horse's spine. They are also adjustable by a patented adjustable gullet plate (adjustable tree width with Allen wrench), which is how the saddles accommodate a horse's changing back musculature, or an entirely different horse. Saddle leathers are carefully chosen and only high-quality vegetable-tanned leather is used.

DP saddles have been a revelation for riders in all disciplines. "People don't want to constantly fight against their saddle to ride in balance, that's exhausting and creates negative tension in riders," explains Barbara. "The DP Saddles keep your center of weight balanced and allow a long upper leg, a traditional seat and close contact." Most of DP's baroque saddles have the upside down "U" shaped panels, which can be wool-flocked to properly fit the panels to the horse's back. There is also an option to order them with a Velcro-panel system, which is

available in various shapes and sizes. A knee-roll, attached with Velcro, is available on several models.



DP saddles, bridles and other equipment are embraced by prestigious riding centers throughout Europe, Barbara says. For example, in cooperation with the Germany based Bueckeburger Riding School, DP developed a saddle with a look perfectly derived from the school's historical model, which allows a perfect riding position: a deep seat, close contact and an ideal weight distribution with the latest technology built inside. In other words, when schools renowned for master horsemanship want a special saddle, DP Saddlery is their competent partner of choice to create the extraordinary, high quality saddle they have in mind, she adds.

A Receptive Audience

Barbara first came upon DP Saddlery when she was a trainer in her native Germany. Too often, she had clients bring horses who could not progress because of ill-fitting saddles. "The poor horses simply could not accomplish the lightness and relaxation I wanted them to be able to have, so they could properly begin their career as riding horses. If a trainer cares about the horses they are working with, they will want to accommodate that. Horses are dynamic, they are constantly undergoing muscular changes as they progress through training. A saddle that can grow with the horse is my ideal saddle!" She reached out to a DP saddle fitter to address those problems and she and her clients were initially very pleased. "I kept turning to them for help, and it was clear to me that the versatility, the adjustability, the quality and the innovative technology was exactly what we've hoped for!" This is how Barbara found DP Saddlery, to whom she was intensely loyal through her remaining years in Germany.

When Barbara's husband, an active duty military soldier, was transferred to the United States, DP asked her about helping to introduce the saddles here. She began doing that just last fall and has already found a receptive and fast growing audience. "At first we weren't sure how we would be received," she acknowledges of these saddles that look "different" to those outside the classical dressage, Iberian horse and Vaquero spheres of influence. "It feels like we are attracting a large crowd of horse lovers, in many cases, people who thought they were alone in their opinions and views on saddles. And, I'm here to tell them, 'No, you're not alone! Our saddles complement any type of horse, from Belgium Draft Horse to Arabian and anything

between.”



Newcomers to DP saddles are also struck by the craftsmanship and extravagant design, as well as the quality of leather they're made with. Barbara recently displayed at the Equine Affaire exhibition in Ohio and reports that many attendees circled back to her booth repeatedly to admire the quality and workmanship of DP's designs. "People wanted to touch and feel all of our saddles and tack, and were amazed at how amazing they felt!" Barbara says.

In addition to the adjustable Baroque saddles, DP makes fully adjustable saddles to suit every riding style, including conventional dressage, jumping and all-purpose saddles, a large variety of trail riding saddles and endurance saddles. Also available are treeless saddles and traditional western saddles with wooden trees such as Vaquero style ranch roping saddles, reining and barrel racing saddles, and trail riding western saddles. "Matching tack and accessories can round off the gorgeous saddles," she says.

The process of ordering a DP saddle begins with a careful analysis of the horse and rider's conformation and preferences. "We ask a lot of questions, gather sizing information, request photos, etc.," Barbara explains. When necessary, Barbara can send a saddle fitting grid to the client. This adjustable metal grid comes with clear instructions to make it conform to the horse's back. When it is returned to Barbara, "That gives me one perfect print of where the saddle should be, where the shoulders, withers, spine, angle of the horses back, how much rock, etc., are."

Clients are also asked to provide details on anything they feel may affect their saddle fit--from an unbalanced trot to hoof and other health related issues. "If the client likes to share their own health problems, we can try to look out for those as well," she adds.

Barbara compares all of that information to what is available in DP's extensive inventory in Alabama, where she is based. If it turns out that a model the customer had in mind is not available in a good fit for them, Barbara may have another model as an option or be able to make flocking adjustments at the shop. And there is the option of having a completely custom

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made saddle that “you basically design it the way you like,” she notes. “In an ideal world, a client will have a saddle fitter out to finish off the process by flocking and fitting the saddle directly to the horse and rider, and we always recommend that,” adds Barbara.

DP saddles are currently available per online order or telephone, and there’s a fast growing number of dealers and representatives throughout the country. The West Coast is an area very dear to Barbara. “The West Coast customers were among the first to order our saddles and helped us establish this business in the U.S. Without them, none of this would have been possible, and so they will always have a special place in our hearts,” Barbara says.

For more information on DP Saddlery call Barbara Caiado at 334-614-7360 or visit www.dp-saddlery.com