

Just 4 Saddles

Saddle Fitting Guide

To help you fit your saddle correctly, you need to assess the saddle in 3 stages, use this step by step method and checklist to guide you through. If you have not yet assessed the width you require, we recommend using a Gullet Gauge or Measuring Device to give you an approximate guide, position this 2" behind the back of the shoulder blade to gain the most accurate reading. Please bear in mind all saddle brands work to their own measurements so widths can vary.

Stage 1 - Assessing the Saddle Placed on the Horses Back. Firstly stand your horse square on a flat surface, place the saddle on and go through the Checklist 1 - 8, once happy you can then proceed.

Stage 2 - Girthing the Saddle Up, we recommend at this stage you use a thin saddlecloth or numnah, run through your checklist again then if you are satisfied proceed.

Stage 3 - Ridden Test, when you are ready to ride, please ensure that your girth is secure and wherever possible use a mounting block as it is kinder to your horses back. Allow your horse to settle for a few minutes and adjust to the different feel, then test ride the saddle in walk, troy and canter and over a jump if necessary. With the help of a friend run through the Checklist 2 – 8 again but also assess how you feel, how your position is affected and how your horse feels.

Saddle Fitting Checklist

1. Position the Saddle Correctly

Run your hand over your horses shoulder and you should be able to feel the back of the shoulder blade, ideally the saddle should cusp behind this area in order to allow maximum freedom. Place the saddle on and slide it back into its natural position behind the shoulder.



2. Look for Balance

A saddle should sit level so the rider is able to sit in an upright position aligning the shoulder, hip and heel, the lowest point of the saddle being above the horses centre. A flatter seat/tree or some jump saddles will see the pommel and cantle level in a straight line across but for A saddle with a deeper seat/tree most GP's/Dressage the cantle will sit 1 – 2 cms higher.



A saddle that is too low at the front and high at the back will pitch the rider forward encouraging a more hunched position and a tendency for the lower leg to go too far back and potentially increasing tightness behind the horse's shoulder. Pressing on the pommel and cantle in a 'see saw' motion will highlight potential movement.

A saddle that is too high at the front and too low at the back will pitch the rider backwards and behind the horses movement encouraging a chair position encouraging the rider to collapse through the middle in order to keep with the movement, sitting on their bottom not seat bones with their lower leg too far forward. Potentially this will exert more pressure around the horse's loin area.

3. Check for Clearance

Adequate clearance along the spine is our general rule. 3 – 4 fingers held vertically between the horses wither and saddle pommel/front arch is often advised but it is not always achievable especially on some high withered horses. The saddle should not touch the horse's spine above, at the sides or along its whole length. Look from the front and back and feel for this down the gullet.



4. Check the Width

The saddle tree points should run parallel to the horse's body shape, giving a nice even contact at the front underneath the tree points. If too narrow the saddle will feel tight lower down and will lift up at the front, causing the saddle to bridge and lose contact in the middle, if too wide the saddle will drop down and be tighter at the top losing contact lower down and the back will start to lift.



5. Check the Panel Contact

The panel of the saddle should contact along the horses back in its entirety. Whilst the saddle is un-girthed run your hand under the panel at both sides so you can feel a nice even contact. A saddle that loses contact in the middle of its panel could be too narrow causing the saddle to bridge and creating 4 point pressure. A saddle lifting off significantly at the back could be too wide and increase tightness around the horse's shoulder and may lift and catch the rider behind. Some panel designs however are more curved to avoid pressure in the loin area particularly useful for short backed horses or big movers, the panel should still remain in 90% contact.



6. Check the Saddle Length

The saddle panel ideally should not exceed the horse's last rib. To assess this find your horse's last rib and run your hand upwards towards his spine when the saddle is in position. For some very short backed horses a panel design with more curved maybe required, these sweep over and away from the last rib to reduce pressure.

7. Check the Symmetry

The saddle should sit evenly across the horses back. Look from both sides, behind and from the front to establish whether it sits in a balanced position. Once Girthed you may want to ask your friend to walk the horse away and recheck its symmetry.



8. Check the Girth Position

The girth position is often forgotten when assessing a saddle but it is imperative to achieve a good fit. When the saddle is positioned correctly fasten the girth on to one side and let it hang down by the horses side, then compare this to the horse's natural girth groove, we are looking for this the hang in line.

A fitter horse will have a girth line further back than that of an unfit horse. Those with a tummy that drops down and a sprung rib cage tend to have a more forward girth line which means the girth sits directly behind the horses elbow, often in this case a point strap girth fixing is required to help line the girth up with the girth groove.

Once mounted the horses body takes on a different form and therefore can have an effect on the girth position. We recommend trying a saddle firstly off the point strap as this can engage extra pressure behind the shoulder, however if the saddle starts to creep forward once ridden engaging the point strap will be the next step.

This guide is for information and guidance purposes only and in no way guarantees the correct fitting of your saddle. If in any doubts Contact your Master Saddler Qualified Saddle Fitter for further assistance.