

### 3. SADDLE FITTING

The purpose of a saddle is:

- **To distribute the rider's weight as comfortably as possible over the horse's back**
- **To help the rider to adopt a correct position**

For a horse to move correctly i.e. to be able to lower his head and engage his hindquarters, he must lift through his back. Moving softly in this frame enables correct development of the top line, the top line being all of the muscles from his ears through to his hocks.

If there is undue pressure from an incorrectly fitting saddle, or an unbalanced rider, this makes it difficult for the horse to move correctly. This is shown by the horse hollowing his back, lifting his head and disengaging his hindquarters.

Before fitting a saddle, first check its structure – is the tree sound? Check it lengthways and sideways. Is the tree twisted? Check the panels for evenness and/or projections. Check the gullet – there should be 3 to 4 fingers width to avoid pinching the spine. Check under all the flaps – are the attachments firmly secured? Look for signs of wear and tear.

To correctly fit a saddle, it should be placed directly onto the horse's back without a saddlecloth or padding. The saddle should fit behind the scapula, placing the girth one hand's width behind the elbow (if the girth is too far forward it restricts the horse's breathing).

Look at the balance of the saddle from the side and behind. Does the saddle sit straight on the horse's back? Do the panels have full contact with the horse's back? Is there any bridging (areas of no contact between the panels and the horse's back)? There should be 3 to 4 fingers height between the pommel and the withers without the weight of the rider.

Now girth up using the correct girth straps (front and either middle or rear strap), fastening the rear strap first. Check the fit again, the shoulders, spine, gullet – does the back of the saddle lift up? Is the saddle still balanced and straight when viewed from the side and the rear? Can you see daylight from the rear, looking down the gullet towards the withers?

Next place the rider in the saddle and check the fit again – balance, panels, gullet shoulders, spine, look from the side and behind. Does the rider sit in the deepest part of the saddle so they are balanced? Is the saddle too large/small for the rider? There should be about one hand's width between the rider's seat and the back of the cantle. The rider will not be able to achieve or maintain the correct position with a saddle that is too large/small. There should still be plenty of clearance over the withers with the weight of the rider added. If in doubt, ask the rider to assume the forward position.

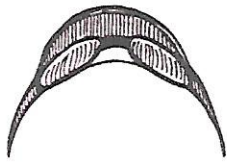
The fit of a saddle should be done regularly as things change – shape of the horse, his age, the time of year, his level of fitness, the weight, height and shape of the rider can all make a difference and affect the comfort of the horse.

A saddle should be re-flocked/restuffed every 12 – 18 months and after 9 – 10 months when new. Recheck fit after re-flocking/restuffing.

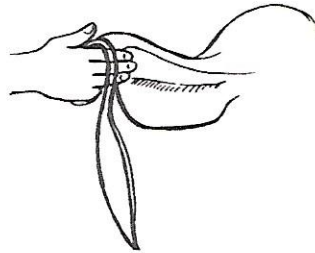
A well fitting saddle is essential in enabling a horse to reach his potential. A horse needs to show freedom, regularity, suppleness and ease of movements. To do this he must be confident and in harmony with his rider.

**To test for a really well fitting saddle, the rider should be able to mount without a girth!**

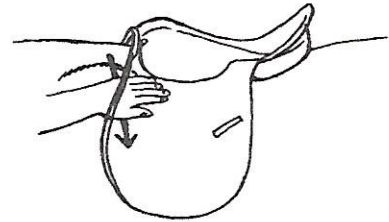
### 4. SADDLE FIT – HOW TO CHECK



Clear Channel over spine

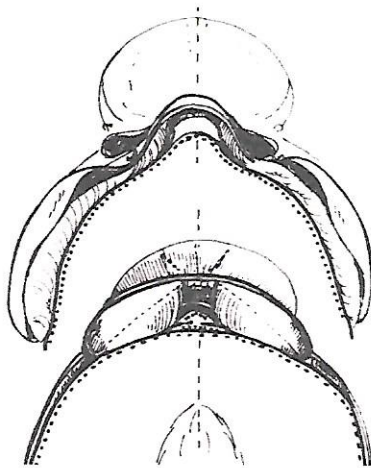


Three fingers between front of saddle and mount's spine when rider is dismounted



Slide hand under front of saddle, behind mount's shoulder blade – no pinching

If there is enough room to put two fingers sideways between the arch of the saddle and the withers when the rider is mounted in the forward position, there is sufficient clearance.

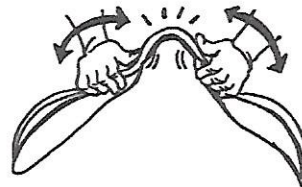


A saddle that fits correctly, seen from front and back

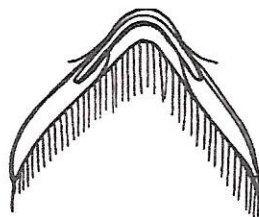


#### CHECKING FOR A BROKEN TREE

Saddle seat should not move or wrinkle when pressed end to end



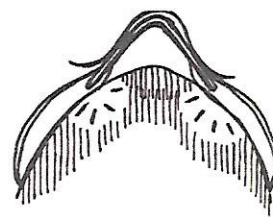
There should be no movement in the gullet when you try to squeeze and pull side to side



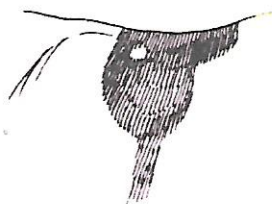
Saddle Tree fits shape of back correctly.



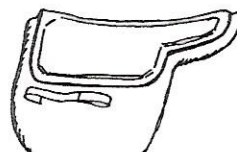
Tree too wide, presses down on withers.



Tree too narrow, digs into Back muscles, pinches shoulder blades



Sweat mark showing pressure point (dry spot)



Back protector pad

(Always use over a regular Saddle Cloth/Numnah)