

Every morning when I have my coffee I read. This morning I was reading about English saddles in a catalog. I sympathize with anyone that is trying to buy a saddle using this method. In the retailer's defense they do offer a "test ride." So yes, that is better than nothing however; to truly judge if the saddle meets the needs of the horse and the rider, it must fit both properly. Only then can the rider feel for herself if the saddle is comfortable, allows her to be in the proper riding position and if the horse is performing at his best. One or the other just will not do. Trying saddles this way can get expensive really fast too. It usually costs me \$25-\$60 to ship a saddle.

Anyway, I want to get back to the catalog before I have to head to the barn. The common theme seems to be the adjustable tree and easy change gullet systems. This is a great idea that Wintec came up with years ago. Since our horses dramatically change during their riding years due to training and development, age, health issues and seasons; it is cheaper to change the saddle then it is to buy a new saddle every year or two. Changing the tree angle is a wonderful feature however, there are 8 more areas that the saddle needs to fit besides the tree angle.

Regarding the adjustable tree one manufacturer says "the only adjustable system that gives you virtually any saddle width needed - millimeter by millimeter." This sounds great! But what it really is changing is the angle of the tree. What if one side of your horse is big and one side is small? Dr. Joyce Harman DVM author of [The Horse's Pain Free Back and Saddle Fitting Book](#) says 80% of our horses are built this way. These saddles retail for \$2,000.

Regarding the Easy Change Gullet System, for between \$500- \$1,500 you can have a saddle that allows you to change the angle of the tree by changing the gullet plate. These plates are color coded to match up with a gauge used to measure what they call the gullet width. Some of these saddles are leather and some are synthetic. I actually saw a synthetic saddle at the Expo that was \$2,500. Those saddles are really easy to care for but if I am going to invest thousands of dollars in a saddle I want good quality leather.

Once again the Wintec people are ahead of everyone else, they realize that not all horses fit into that blue, yellow, black or white gullet plate. If your horse gets wider you can buy another saddle and use the purple gullet plates. All the plates are symmetrical so that means this will work for 20% of our horses.

I noticed one company has a high tech panel system that features a polyurethane padding material with memory retention to minimize hot spots. (The panel is the part of the saddle that actually touches the horse's back) I encourage all my clients to use natural materials next to their horse's skin because the vets have advised us that there is much less chance of irritation when we use natural products like leather, wool, horse hair and cotton. I have seen this in my practice and with my own horses as well. I do appreciate the efforts of this company and the saddle pad companies that have developed this high tech material to help absorb the shock and minimize hot spots as I do believe in some cases the horses do benefit. In fact, that is the very

reason that we are now carrying Thin Line saddle pads because some horses can really benefit and in some cases a shimmable saddle pad is an option. The really scary part is the words "memory foam" because I see many saddles improperly stored on funny shaped saddle racks. 23 hours on the rack and 1 hour on the horse's back, which shape do you think the saddle remembers most? That saddle retails for \$1,500-\$2,300.

Always hang your saddle regardless of the flocking material on a narrow rack just down the middle so nothing ever touches the panels except your horse's back.

I also noticed that there is a really nice quality leather saddle made by a very old and popular company. For \$2,500 you can get a nice quality leather saddle with no adjustability. Great if you think you think your horse is going to stay exactly the same or you don't mind buying a new saddle every year or two.

One company said this "Engineered to fit a wide variety of horses." To me that translates to; doesn't fit any one really well. Yes, it is true you have 3 choices regular, medium wide or wide true, that narrows it down a little bit. That would be like the shoe store saying we offer these 3 ladies shoe sizes: 5M, 7M and 10W. If your feet happen to be one of those sizes, you are in luck. That saddle retails for \$3,600.

They saved the best for last. One company went to great length to engineer a saddle that flexes with the horse as he moves. Yes! This sounds wonderful for the horse but, the testing was done by a man that rode in the Olympics. Most riders are woman, beginner to intermediate level. There are some really huge differences there! The catalog said order for your horse's body type because it is not adjustable. That saddle retails for \$5,700.

Now I can help it I have to point out that Schleese saddles are completely adjustable by an authorized Schleese Rep. Honestly, how many riders do you think are really qualified to evaluate fit and adjust their own saddles? Schleese saddles are built on a fully adjustable and flexible polyurethane/carbon fibre patented life time warranty, AdapTree that allows the saddle to be adapted to the shape of the horse any number of times. It also flexes with the movement of the horse and we can make millimeter adjustments; in fact most horses are about 5-10 millimeters larger on the left side than the right. Adapting the saddle asymmetrically is what ensures that the saddle and the rider stay in the middle of the horse's back, so that he can school and develop up evenly without the saddle slipping to one side and possibly damaging the horse's spinal ligament which leads to back pain and hind leg lameness.

And, I saved the best part of last. Schleese saddles are ergonomically designed for the woman's pelvis and leg. Schleese also makes saddles for men. There is a huge

difference there! (We'll save that for another time) The crotch comfort design allows the rider to be in the proper position without discomfort. The rear facing shock absorbing tree points are strategically located to prevent interference with the rotation of the horse's shoulder. The wide channel allows the saddle to bridge the horse's spine without interfering or damaging the spinal ligaments. Schleese customized saddles retail for \$4,000-\$6,000. When the saddle doesn't fit anymore and I guarantee that if your saddle fits your horse today, it will not fit in 3, 6 or 9 months from now. Adjustable saddles no problem, non adjustable saddles-back to saddle shopping.

I ride for fun because I like to be on a horse. It is not fun if my back or seat bones hurt, it is not fun when I get off and have trouble walking because my hip joints are aching. And it is not fun if the horse is not happy. When I ride in my Schleese saddle that was built for me I don't have any of these problems and I just have fun.

One last note before I head to the barn. Please don't think that because your best friend loves her saddle that you will too. And just because Joe Smith rode in the Olympics doesn't mean that his saddle will be good for you. Every horse and rider is different. Find the saddle that is right for you.

Terry Peiper

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