

Saddle Fitting Continued

Problem Saddle = Problem Horse

By Kristen Giglio



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In my day to day practice about half of my clients have problem saddles, without even realizing it. A saddle, which may initially fit could become ill fitting after only a few months of training. With a young horse just maturing, their growing bodies can change how their saddles contour their back this limits muscle growth and can cause other related problems. This process may often be overlooked, as subtle changes are hard to notice.

There are major problems, which arise can from an incorrectly fit saddle.

Pain, caused by muscle stress, which in return limits your horse's range of motion. This causes shortened strides and hitched and uneven movement.

Muscle Atrophy, which is wastage of your horse's mus-

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cle. This is caused by lack of circulation and blood flow to the muscle under stress. Bumper pads are a major contributor of muscle atrophy (see figure I). Although the rider's center of balance has been corrected, it causes an excess of pressure over the



Figure 1

horse's shoulder, sometimes causing irreversible damage. This horse shown in figure I has been using a bumper pad for

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years. The muscle atrophy which is present was not fixable due to permanent damage to the nerve and circulation of the horse over its shoulder and wither area.

Nerve blockage, because the blood flow is reduced the nerve cannot function properly. A major symptom of this problem is tripping. In most cases your horse's shoulder and down its leg becomes numb and tingly causing inconsistent strides. If your leg has ever fallen asleep that is comparable to what your horse will feel.

Knocking rails, if the saddle is too tight over the shoulders, your horse cannot lift and complete its full range of motion. As the fences get higher your horse will be limited as to how it can move its shoulder comfortably and without pain.

Lower back pain, if a saddle doesn't have an ideal con-

tact over your horse's loin, it will bounce with every stride causing knotted, irritated and swollen muscles.

Saddle anger, your horse will have ways of trying to tell you that it is not happy with the saddle. I have seen horse pin their ears back, kick at the wall aggressively and try with great determination to loose their riders. These are usually indications that your horse is not comfortable with the saddle. Unfortunately, many horses withstand the pain and discomfort until they can no longer perform sound.

Long term usage of an ill-fitting saddle can take months to fix and even cause long term damage. An Equine Therapist will assess your saddle's fit and promote regeneration of your horse's muscle by helping to increase the circulation and break down muscle imbalances which will be present on your horse. Stretching exercises will also help to regenerate your horse's range of motion and strengthen the tired, weakened muscles.

Why wait for your saddle to become an issue? If your horse exhibits any of these symptoms, rechecking your saddle and having an Equine Therapist out is the best step to take.

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