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About Saddle Fitting

Saddle fitting is the confluence of art and science. The idea is to be able to look at a horse and have an idea about the type of panel, type of tree, and the type and style of saddle that is going to fit the horse while giving the horse the best effort to carry its rider and be comfortable whilst also being able to be athletic. A saddle fitters job is to understand the construction of saddles, the construction of panels-their shape as it is associated with the shape of the horse, what a panel is supposed to do in terms of giving the horse a large footprint and weight bearing surface, and how a tree is supposed to fit along the wither of the horse, through the rail of the tree, and across the seat of the tree; giving the horse the greatest comfort and the rider the best ride.

Saddle fitters should have experience in riding and should be able to understand the problems a rider has in the sport in which they are going to use their tack. So if you have an event rider the saddle fitter should have a basic understanding at least of eventing, understand the rules, what it entails, why a saddle should be designed a specific way, what an event rider needs in terms of space, knee support, and ability to move in the saddle to allow them to be able to jump a variety of fences both cross country and show jumping. A dressage rider should be able to ask a saddle fitter about the ability to ride in a saddle to the level of dressage they wish to ride attain, whether they are only riding at a novice level, they are working their way up the tree of dressage tests, or whether they are riding at the top of that tree. Each place in the realm of competition, not to mention the horse they are riding, gives a rider a different necessity in the saddle.

Big moving horses need a saddle that offers more support to the rider than horses without as big movement. Horses that are doing a lot of piaffe, passage, and have extravagant steps, need to have a saddle with a lot of support for that rider as well. Lower level riders also need a lot of support. Horses that do not move quite as expressively, but are very athletic and move through their back a lot, need to have a saddle that allows the rider to move a little. Saddle Fitters should understand this about saddle fitting and should provide the right saddle for the right ride that the rider is asking for. Trail riding and lower level competition riding are ridden usually in general purpose saddles and a saddle fitter should understand the principles of how a GP helps a rider. It offers the opportunity to be able to jump up to about 3ft, perform dressage tests, ride distances with a long leg, hunting, jump fences at speed, and go over undulated terrain. Endurance saddles are developed for long distance rides, not for pleasure riding. Therefore, these saddles are built with a slightly different tree, with a different support system and slightly different leg position. They usually have surface blocks and the rider needs to have an incredibly comfortable saddle with an incredibly comfortable seat. The horse also has to have a huge bearing surface that is soft and forgiving. Show saddles, specialist saddles for ponies, and adjustable tree saddles need to be understood by the saddle fitter as well so that they are able to fit almost any variety of saddle.

Looking at the panel and tree type and being able to advise the client that one particular manufacturer may make a better panel and tree type for a particular shape of horse, whereas another manufacturer makes a different panel and tree type that is better suited for another kind of conformation is an important aspect of a saddle fitter's job.