

## **“IN THE TACK SHOP”** by Annette Gavin

Welcome to my guided tour of the tack. This series of articles is being tailored to give you an insight into the world of tack. We'll discuss what innovative and exciting products are coming on the market and then “test drive” them with you to let you decide for yourself about both the pros and cons of each item. We'll provide news and educational pieces about saddle fitting and bitting as well as a guide to how equipment actually performs in the field. No serious topic concerning equine performance is “taboo”! We'll share information, personal experiences, problems, and solutions (yours and ours). You can Email them to [info@hastilowusa.com](mailto:info@hastilowusa.com) to be included in future pieces.

Quote Of The Month: There are no problems! Only Opportunities!

An introductory look at leather seems like a good starting point. Leather is the foundation of all our finest equipment. Leather is a natural product. It breathes, sweats, dries, and is impacted upon by its surroundings. The method of tanning, the resultant quality, and the care it receives determines how long a life it has and how good a value for money it is. Neglected saddlery can significantly worsen the performance of our horses and of our riding, it is also a danger if it fails.

Good leather should feel supple springy and alive, it should return to its shape easily and not be limp or bendy. There is a definite look to good leather it has a closed grain surface and no sign of pores, it should be thick enough to wear well, but not so thick as to be like a board with little flexibility. On your saddle seat the leather is a more flexible soft type, but not too soft as this will wear quickly and need replacing in a few years, so make sure that the feel is good but not thin. French leather is lovely to touch but is not wear resistant so these seats need to be replaced frequently.

Flap leather should be full of body and hold its shape, do not oil it too much as this will cause it to roll up under your leg. Keep it supple, but firm. Some saddles are made of Pittards pre-oiled leather which is water resistant (WR), sometimes called Memel or Vintage, these are soft and durable and are really already broken in for you. This leather needs little or no oiling and only a quick clean with glycerine saddle soap to maintain it.

Bridle leather is the narrower strips taken from lower on the hide, but not the belly. This leather is coloured and waxed after tanning, most of the staining of this is done by hand still. This is the leather used for all “bridlework” a collective term used by saddlers for all the accessories a horse uses, leathers, halters, martingales, breastplates, girths etc. It should appear firm but flexible and the edges should be finished round and smooth. It shouldn't be too soft and the lines of stitching should be clear, straight and the stitches not too small as this weakens the leather, not too large either as this makes a weak attachment. These days all stitching is done with a polyblend or nylon thread which doesn't stretch or rot, so there is no need to worry about cleaning the stitching areas too much it won't be affected, however stitching does wear especially on your leathers where there is a lot of friction, so the buckle stitching should be checked each time you clean tack, bridle billets are exposed to similar conditions so watch them as well.

Good quality leather is tanned and comes from colder climates where the animals have quite a lot of body fat beneath the skin, Argentine and Indian leather tends to be less dense and drier with a fibrous look to it's flesh side. This makes these leathers more likely to stretch and crack as they have less tensile strength and they can break, often they have a pigment finish rather than a stain as this finish covers defects better.

Look after your leather well, wipe it down with warm water when it is used or is excessively sweaty, give it a good complete stripped down clean every couple of weeks and check all the stress places especially where the bit rubs or the irons, then use a good quality glycerine saddle soap to finish – it is used as a wax to feed the leather, it will leave a nice shine and make the leather pliable.

There is nothing like the smell of clean tack or the feel it gives when you ride on it , happy dressage, hunting and jumping.