AN OWNER'S MANUAL FOR YOUR EQUINE INSPIRED JUMPING SADDLE

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We highly recommend that you read through this manual before delivery of your saddle.

This manual will walk you through the issues you may encounter while riding in your new jumping saddle. There will be questions in bold print, followed by an explanation, and then a recommendation in red print.

The first comment we hear from clients when they ride in our saddles, is "different" – it should be. I'll explain.

1.) The 1st difference was how we designed the saddle to allow the horse to move with the least amount of resistance represented by saddle and rider. This required different approaches for the diverse asymmetries represented by breed genetics, and/or conformation idiosyncrasies due to rider manipulation or a horse being forced to move with a lameness issue.

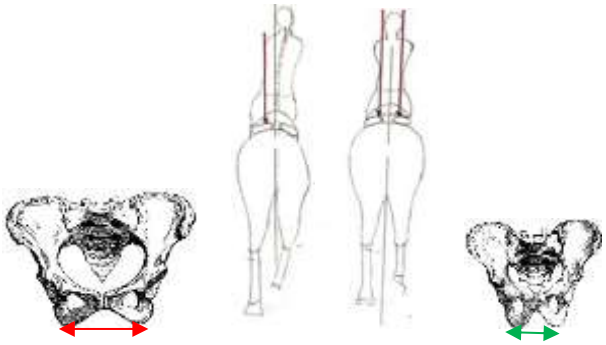
2.) The 2nd difference was how we designed the saddle to allow the rider, especially the female, to sit in a position that reflects relaxation to their horse, the ability to use their core strength, or what I refer to as their 'aerobic frame'. Here I had to look at the diverse genetic traits of the female anatomy; lordosis (inward-curvature of the spine), the height of the pelvis, the distance between the ischial tuberosities (sitting bones), openness of the pelvis, arc of the ischium (bottom of the pelvis making contact in the seat of the saddle), upper-to-lower leg length disparity, and other asymmetries that may have been caused by child-birth, an injury; coccyx (tailbone) protrusion, pelvis fracture, etc.

3.) The 3rd difference is how we fit our saddles to a horse – which is much more complex and unfortunately controversial in the States (readily accepted in Europe). That is fitting the saddle for the asymmetrical build of the horse – which by the way is 99% of all horses. This may take into consideration the passive hock, the development of compensating muscles not required for dressage. Our saddle-fitters are instructed to address those idiosyncrasies of individual horses, to make them track evenly, thereby allowing symmetrical muscular development while atrophying compensating muscles, taking pressure off ligaments and tendons that have developed laxity due to compromised mobility. The importance here, is that once the entire muscular/skeletal system is balanced correctly, the horse can easily carry the weight of the rider evenly on all quarters. The horse won't need to have joints injected, special trimming or shoeing, and will become much more athletic using the entire hindquarters, instead of just one side.

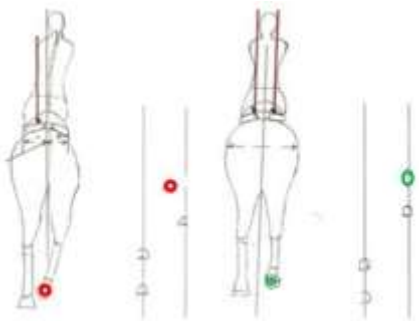
IMPORTANT -When the saddle was delivered, there had to be some major differences in the way your horse moved; with less contact of your saddle on the sensitive thoracic trapezes, wither muscle, your horse was able to experience more freedom of movement of their scapula's, shoulder blades. The following will describe why that is happening

First of all, 99% of all horses are asymmetrically built and 90 % of Jumping saddles are symmetrically made. In addition, no matter what the cost of the saddle, none of the trees are made to address the diverse shapes of the wither muscles, all have short gullet-plates that force the saddle to sit on top of the horse, and most have felt or foam panels that can't be adjusted for the asymmetry of the horse's back. The following will describe the reason for that different movement.

For the male rider, the symmetrical saddle on an asymmetrical horse is not a big deal – because of the narrowness of their sitting bones (ischial tuberosties), green arrows on right pelvis,or their sitting base, is not affected by sitting in that uneven base.



For the female rider it is a much different story. With a much taller and wider pelvis then their male counterparts, their sitting base, or the distance between their ischial tuberosities is much wider. If they were to sit centered in a symmetrical saddle, they would have the sensation of falling into the weaker side (in this case – to the right). However, because of the affects of self-preservation, women riders always have the tendency to place more weight on the stronger side of the horse (left side) and then cantilever their upper torso in the opposite direction for balance.

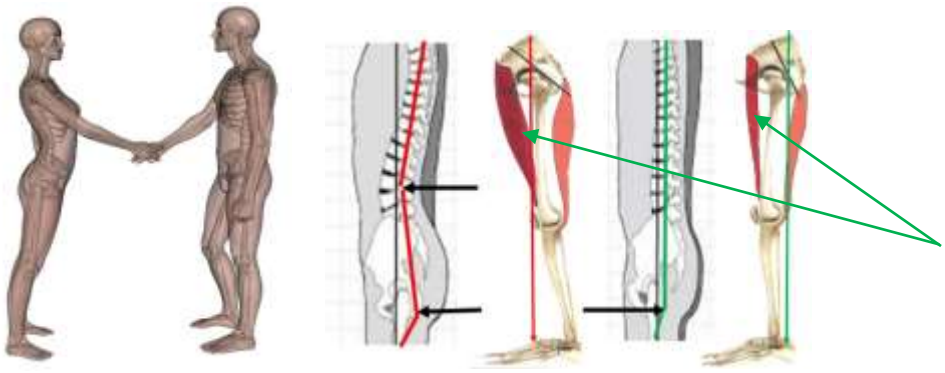


For the horse carrying the weight of the male rider (right sketch) in a laterally balanced position, the horse is capable of tracking straight, as shown by the foot-falls on the right of that sketch.

However, for the female rider, the horse forced to carry an unbalanced rider placing more weight on their stronger side (left), will not only make the horse develop more strength on that already stronger side, but also force the horse to work in an oblique movement – three-tracking. And as shown by the foot-falls to the right of the left sketch, the right hind will have an inward rotation, which not only causes the right pelvis to collapse downward, but also because of the instability of the hock and stifle moving in an unnatural motion, will create laxcity in the stablizing collertal and cruciate ligiments supporting those joints – not to mention atrophy the gluteus and hamstring muscle groups on that weaker side.

What this unbalanced position will do for the female rider in the Jumping disciplines will follow the 1st rule of Newtons law of energy; In an intertial reference frame, an object either remains at rest, or continues to move at a constant velocity unless acted upon by a net force.

The next issue which makes men more secure in a jumping saddle than women, is their ability to stay centered in the saddle from front-to-rear.



While men balance in a posterior frame, on their heels, plus having a straight back, short pelvis, they don't require developing quadriceps to balance, as shown with the green arrow on the right side of the right sketch.

However, for the female rider, that have a tendency to balance off the balls of their feet, are required to activate their quads, as shown by the left side of the right sketch. The more that muscle group is activated, the more developed they become. In addition, by a woman activating their quads, the secondary energy is to grip with their knees. This in turn, causes the women riders to raise their center of gravity – which is not a desirable thing to do when jumping. A secondary advantage of not consistently activating your quadriceps, is that your calves will rest along the side of your horse creating you to securely lower your center of gravity – it was my design of a saddle, to allow a rider to sit into the horse, instead of on top of a horse, which is just 'common sense'..

As shown by red arrow at the top of the female's pelvis on the left sketch, with increased activation of the quadriceps, shown by the green arrow, will tip the pelvis forward – the tipped pelvis. The problem with that unnatural position, is that for many of the women in the Jumping disciplines that I see, have created a greater degree of inward curvature of their lower spine (lordosis). And as shown with the CAT scan and x-ray to the right, that unnatural lordotic spinal position can easily cause a herniated disc, shown by the red arrow.

What that anterior balance position creates for the female rider, is an inability to sit back into to the saddle on a fence refusal, especially if the stirrup-bar position is set too far forward.

So the long story short – it is because of the male's natural position for balance in a jumping saddle and their success in the show ring, that the saddle industry has and always will, design jumping saddles for men or a few fortunate women built like men – they just don't understand the ergonomic design of a saddle that would be required for the diverse physical anomolies of the female rider.

The following are the differences of our jumping saddles versus the status quo of the other saddlerys..

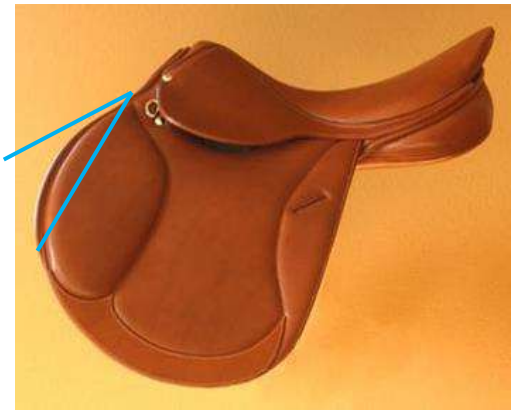

Instead of those other saddlery's horzantal panels that are separate panels merely sewn to the underside of the saddle, shown to the right, we use an intergrated panel that is part of the underside which is an enclosed panel that we can add either air panels and/or wool to adjust to the asymmetry of the horses back.

Unlike the the gullet plate found in all jumping saddles as shown by the top plate (red arrow), we use a longer and stronger plate as shown by the green arrow. This not only gives us the ability to adjust the plate to duplicate the shape of the horse's wither, but also be able to adjust it many times without affecting the integrity of the plate. In addition, this will give the saddle a lot more stability on the horse's back by allowing the saddle to 'sit-into-the-horse',instead of on 'top of the horse'.

Unlike most jumping saddles that incorporate what is known as a 'narrow-frame' tree, which was designed by men for men with narrowly placed sitting-bones as shown on the left, we use a much more secure tree that not only allows women with a wider base to sit without making contact with the seams of the seat, but also allows for better weight distribution on the wider panels for the horse.


Instead of the forward position of the stirrup-bars found in almost all jumping saddles that force the rider's 2-point position to be almost over the horse's neck, I use the Wellup adjustable stirrup-bars. This will give the female rider an ability to sit within the seat of the saddle which will prevent her from activating her quadriceps and have the ability to use her abdominal muscles as she is either coming down a bank, or in case there is a refusal. This relaxed position is necessary to prevent the female rider from getting thrown forward – instead, the female rider will be able to just sit down into the saddle in those unfortunate instances - a more secure seat, allows the rider's energy to stay with the motion of the horse, which in turn equates to relaxation, for both horse and rider.

The forwardness of the flap is determined by the discipline, the shortness of the leathers, and the measurement of the riders upper-to-lower-leg length disparity. In other words, the Event, Hunter and Jumper saddles will all have the same tree, but the discipline will determine the position of the flap, to insure that the rider will always have a leg position where their knees have the comfort and use of the soft knee-rolls.

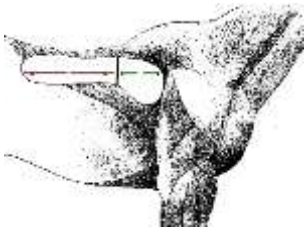


The gusseted panels will allow for balancing the saddle for an uphill horse without having to over-stuff the panels with wool and unlike saddles with foam and felt panels, gusseted panels also provide much better weight distribution of the rider's weight. In addition, when a horse has more top-line musculature one one side versus the other, which happens in 99% of the horses, it becomes very easy to asymmetrically reflock those panels to give the rider an ability to sit centered in the saddle.

Another difference that seperates our saddles from others, is panel contact on the horse's back. As shown on the left sketch, the panel of the saddle shown by the green line has a portion, shown in red, sitting on the sensitive wither muscle, thoracic trapezes. That contact can and often will, prevent the natural mechanical movement of the scapulas; by blocking the motion, the horse will be unable to open their humerus (shown with the blue arrows). If a horse can't move that limb, they are limited to how high and wide they can jump.

What we do with our panels is to drop the panels as shown by sketch to the right. This panel contact does not offer any resistance to the natural movement of the the shoulders, which not only helps the horse develop correct musculature, but the freedom-of-movement of the scapulas allow the horse to jump bigger.

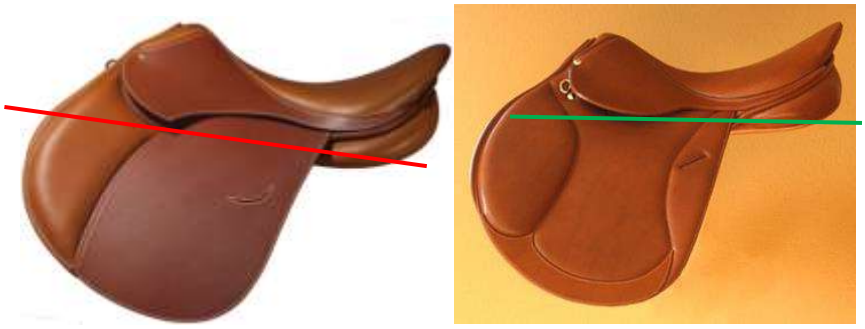
For the Thoroughbred, Irish Sport Horse, and other breeds that can have narrow withers with deep shoulder-holes, as the horse on the left, we like to use small adjustable air panels placed in the pommel area, as shown by the green lines on the sketch below – the rest of the panel is filled with wool, which allows us to address the asymmetry of the horse. This allows the shoulders to move without the resistance represented by saddle and rider.



The picture of the horse on the left, was a rescue that we did in 1988. Not only were there scars on top of his withers where the saddle had been sitting, there were also lacerations along the back of the scapula's caused by him trying to move his shoulders back. By placing small air bladders inside the saddle's panels in the area of those deep shoulder-holes, this horse was able to freely move his shoulders, which was the beginning of physically developing a very athletic upper-level dressage horse as shown on the right – those two pictures were taken within a year. Crescent Moon was with us for 18 years.

What do they mean by a close contact saddle?

A complete misnomor – As shown on the left, it is supposedly designed for the rider to feel like they are sitting very close to the horse – this would be great if the horse was either built down-hill or relatively have a flat back from wither to hip. Problem is, there are very few horses that are, and when riding in this non-gusseted flat saddle, the rider has to use a riser to keep from falling back into the cantle – completely counterproductive for what it was intended to do.



We only make gusseted-panel saddles, the size of the gusseted panel, is determined by how much of an uphill horse they are. The saddle to the right, a gusseted panel saddle, is how we design our saddles for maximum panel contact and better weight distribution. At first, the panels, which are over-stuffed with New Zealand wool may seem to be very bulky - they will compress and mold to your horse's back after a few rides.

The seat of the saddle will also seem to put you further away from the horse's back. However, the reason for that bulk, is that we use an EPDM rubber on the seat of the saddle on top of the comfortable wool. The EPDM rubber does not have a memory, which means that pressure of the bottom of your ischium, sitting bones to pubic bone, will compress as much that rubber as much as 5/8" to conform to floor of your pelvis.

CONDITIONING YOUR SADDLE

I use many types of leather when building a saddle: 'Italian leather', a misnomer, which is very soft and almost feels broken in on your first ride; durable elk, or smooth buffalo hide for riders who spend long hours in the saddle (requiring more conditioning before having that 'close to the horse' feeling); or for the basic introductory saddle, 'German leather', another misnomer, which requires a lot of conditioning, but nevertheless, allows the rider an excellent entry into world of your desired discipline. When first beginning the conditioning process, I recommend the use of Lederbalsam, a beeswax product, sold by Passier, Stubben and other Saddlerys. Clean the saddle with water removing any sweat and dirt, then spread the conditioner on the complete saddle. Complete this step after the first 10 rides, and then condition as needed. If this step is completed correctly, the saddle will have a soft supple feel, and have that wrap- around the horse feeling, instead of being stiff and unresponsive to your leg.

Once the saddle molds to the horse's back, there are a lot of other products that will keep the saddle clean and conditioned. However, use soap and glycerin sparingly, because although these products will clean stubborn dirt, they also will remove the moisture from the leather, and can actually dry the leather to a point it can tear.