

EQUINE INSPIRED'S LINE OF DRESSAGE SADDLES

by George Gullikson

Most saddles made today, are what we consider 'stock' saddles. Even those companies that proclaim to make a custom version of their saddles, seldom do. What they mean, is that they may alter the length of the flap, add colored welting, or offer a different gullet plate, but when it comes to addressing a woman's individual's physical idiosyncrasies, that they can't do.

However, men and a few women that are fortunate to have narrow hips, short ilium, straight back, equal lengths of their upper and lower legs, in other words, women built like men can get by with a stock saddle – the Hennig is the best of those models.



And although we can sell those saddles, we seldom do once a client feels the difference while riding in our Gullikson-Baines saddle, and feel the freeness of movement with their horse, and their ability to ride in a relaxed shoulder-hip-heel position.

Our market focus for the Gullikson-Baines saddles, is for the rest of those women that require different seat configurations, twist locations, adjustable stirrup-bars, flap rotation, width of seat, and other alterations, to allow all women a relaxed shoulder-hip-heel position, no matter how they are built.

We are a very small company that focuses on detail, and as revealed by the complexity of the research I did for our Web site, and information given at our lectures; we have taken the design, construction, and the fit of a dressage saddle for the female rider, to a whole new level.

We don't advertise and don't hand out free saddles to accomplished FEI riders, solely to say they ride in our saddles. Those costly two marketing strategies, are very expensive, and are responsible for adding additional cost to the sale price of those saddles – we would rather pass those savings on to our clients.

However, our first focus is the horse; its comfort and ability to move with the least amount of resistance represented by the saddle and rider. Then there is the matter of addressing the diverse requirements of the different breeds of horses and those horses that have had to develop compensating musculature from a previous ill-fitting saddle, or manipulative training. This is what really sets us apart from other Saddlerys.



Our specialty is to make a saddle that won't create any resistance to a horse's natural mechanical movement represented by saddle and rider. As shown by this off-the-track thoroughbred on the left; once he was ridden with a specifically designed and fitted dressage saddle, as shown on the right, he went on to become a very talented upper-level dressage horse.



Another adaptation we use instead of the rest of the industries status-quo, is how we place our panels in the pommel of the saddle. In the center picture, the two red arrows indicate where all of the other saddlerys attach their horizontal panels, thus creating a 'banana tree'. And as shown on the sketch to the left those panels sit on the muscle group thoracic trapezes, or wither muscle, shown by the red area on the wither. This is a muscle of submission, and when pressure is placed there, the horse becomes short-strided, or 'pacey'.

On the other hand, we drop out panels almost 1 ½", as shown by the green arrows in the center picture, leaving a more open channel and more importantly, as shown on the picture to the right, there won't be any pressure placed on that sensitive muscle group – resulting in more freedom of movement of the shoulders.

It would seem that all saddlerys would adapt our design, but the cost of designing and manufacturing another tree that would accommodate a longer gullet plate, would be cost prohibitive.

I often hear that a female rider needs a saddle with a very narrow twist – However that mindset is has to do more with the inability of a female rider to sit in the twist area, rather in the seat of the saddle that is a lot wider than where they need to be positioned. Although this is an easy fix, unfortunately the explanation may be very complex, but like so many issues with the saddle industry in trying to convert a saddle that was originally designed by and for the male rider, it has become a product dealing with the 'result'.

When I first started to ride in the discipline of dressage a long time ago, I only had a choice of 3 saddles, Kiefert, Passier, and Stubben. None of those saddles had either knee-rolls or thigh-blocks – there was no need to, those saddles were designed by and for men.

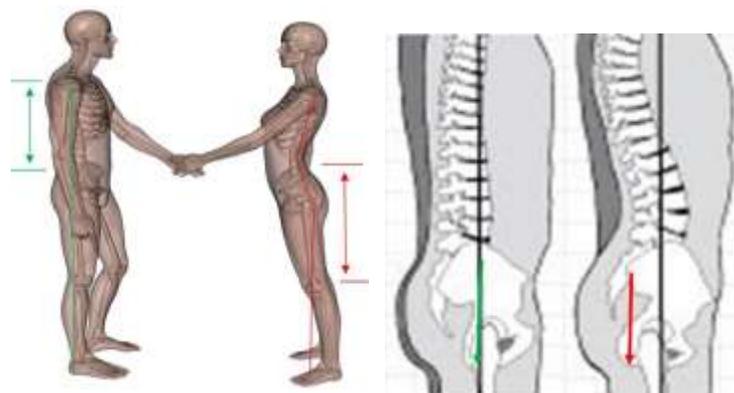


Even when women did ride and became successful, as with Nicole Uphoff, when she won the gold at the '88' & '92' Olympics, left side of right picture, she did so because quite frankly, she was built like a man.

Passier was so moved, that she became the first women to be successful in dressage, they named a saddle after her – the 'Nicole'".

Of course every woman in the world wanted to ride like Nicole, so they purchased thousands of those saddles. But as shown on the picture to the right, most of the women rider's not built like Nicole, could not ride in that type of saddle. Hence, when Passier saw that most women's legs were going over the flap, they changed their design to have the first thigh block which manipulated the leg from going forward – that saddlery mentality still exists today – work on the result versus the cause.

The difference between men/ women built like men and other women is quite obvious – men and women are anatomically very different.

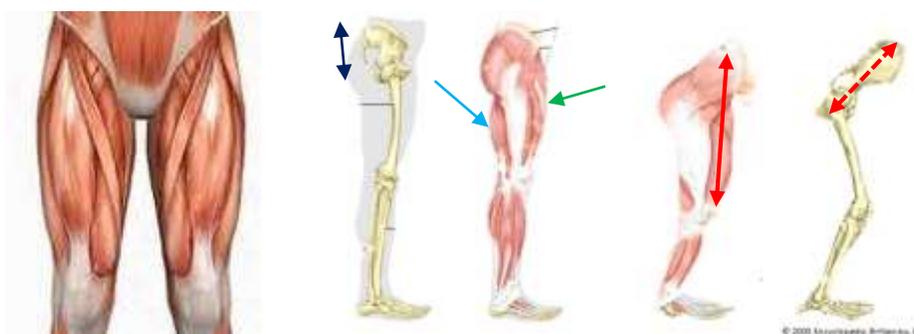


Men tend to carry their weight above their waist, while women tend to carry their weight below their waist. Men balance off their heels, while women balance of the balls of their feet. Men have a straight spine, while women to some degree have an inward curvature of their spine; lordosis.

The degree of that inward curvature of their lower back is either a genetic trait or a result of a discipline that has required a woman to over-use their quadricep muscle groups; dancer, gymnast, horse jumping disciplines, skier and speed skater.



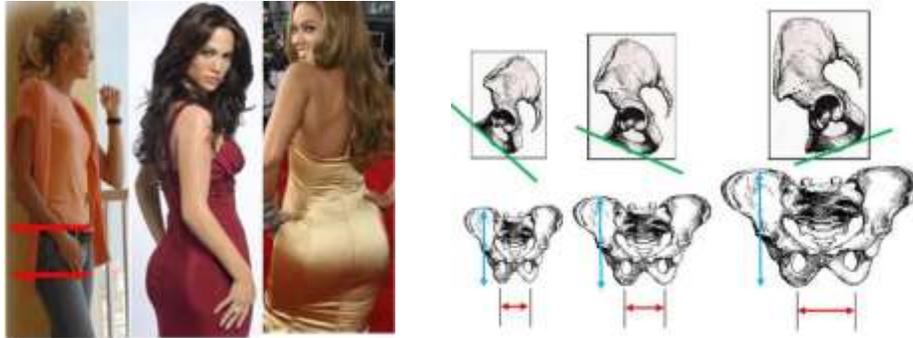
In the genetic traits, a woman built like Lisa Wilcox, left side on the right picture, has a balanced upper-to-lower leg lengths which becomes a huge advantage when riding a horse. However, a woman built like JLo on the right of that picture, with a huge upper-to-lower leg disparity, would find it almost impossible to ride in a dressage saddle without making some major bodily compensations. Women built like Lisa have a short ilium, top green arrow, while JLo has a very tall ilium, top red arrow, also called short-waisted. In addition to that upper-to-lower leg length disparity, women built like JLo will have a tipped pelvis making her pubic bone lower than her sitting bones when riding, while women built like Lisa, probably have never felt their pubic bone while riding in a saddle. With that tipped pelvis, it will also create more inward curvature of their lower back, resulting in a more protruding buttocks.



This is where the difference of the male and female become very evident. The quadricep muscle is attached to the top of the ilium, or pelvis. It is the interaction of that muscle group plus the intersection of the abdominal muscle groups attached to the bottom of the pelvis to create a contraction during child-birth. The shorter the ilium, the less interaction there will be. On the left two plates on the picture to the right, is a depiction of the male anatomy. Notice that there is the same amount of musculature of the quadricep, green arrow, as there is in the opposing musculature, ham strings, blue arrow.

On the right two plates of of the right picture, you can see that the pelvis is much taller, and the quadricep muscle groups are more developed, red arrows.

Another interesting aspect of the activation of the quadriceps, is that when a woman rider feels the contact of the thigh block against their quadriceps, it not only causes them to activate the muscle group more, but that additional pressure forces those women to ride off their knees - therefore instead of a more secure position, it actually raises the female's center of gravity.



Therefore, because women have a certain degree of lordosis due to the height of their pelvis, we have had to make the openness of the seat of the saddle in 3 configurations to reflect the amount of width of their ischial tuberosities, sitting-bones, the degree of their tipped pelvis, and the angle of their ischial contact in the seat of the saddle – the 'V' seat, left picture and pelvis depiction, the closed 'U' seat, center picture, and the open 'U' seat on the right.

You are what you are, so if genetics has delt you a figure that is not conducive to riding in a saddle made for a man, it only makes sense to get a saddle that is built for a woman.

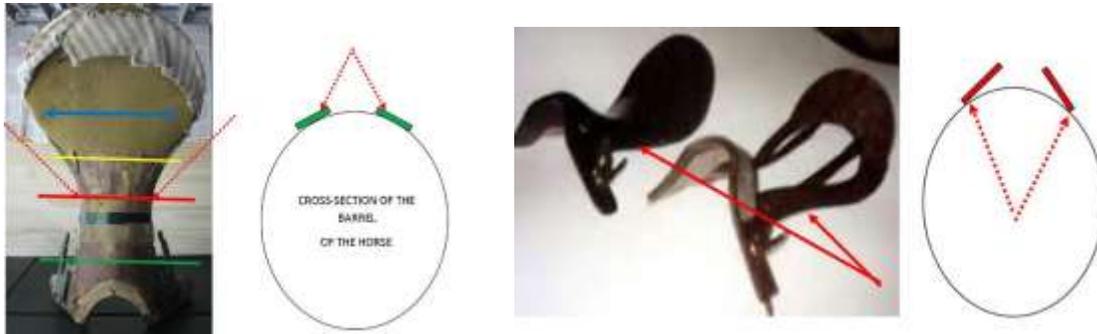
So how did the Saddle Industry back then and still do today design a dressage saddle for those unfortunate women built like women?

That industry and a lot of trainers still try to make those women ride like men by artificially manipulating them to sit in a saddle made for men or those fortunate women built like men, to either install large thigh blocks and/or rotate the flap further forward. The problem of making an artificial position correction, is that the rider is forced to sit outside of their natural aerobic frame and because of that compensation, they are often subjected to spinal nerve impingements, which can cause siatica and herniated discs as in the riders position and and resultant herniated disc between sacrum and L-5



The picture to the left is the position she wanted to have when riding, the picture to the right is where the saddle forced her to sit – resulting in a very painful herniated disc.

But worse yet, is that the industry knows that most women choose a saddle for their comfort, even though it may be at the expense of the comfort of the horse or the ability for their horse to move in their correct mechanical frame.



In the set of pictures to the left, is a tree of an old Passier PSL – I still believe it was the best tree ever made. The narrowest area between the front of the saddle, the pommel, and the rear of the saddle, cantle, is called the waist, or what we refer to in America, the twist. When women say they require a very narrow twist, it may not be that at all. Simply because they actually may not be able to sit in that area because of 3 incorrect factors of their position; stirrup-bar location in reference to twist, and/or twist ratio to an area in the seat of the saddle for their ischial tuberosities, that is incorrect for their physical idiosyncrocies. So the reason most women hated the Nicole, was because it didn't have a narrow twist – but it did. The real reason, is that there were very few women that could actually sit there.

However, if you look at how the rails of the tree at the twist location of the PSL, those rails were correctly designed to allow the horse to lift their backs, small green rectangles indicated by the red dashed lines. By having this tree conform to the back of the horse, allowed them to build the correct musculature and become what we seldom see today, the 'back-mover'.

In the pictures on the right, is how the saddle industry has given women that feeling of a very comfortable saddle, unfortunately at the expencse of the correct mechanical movement of the horse. By turning the rails inward, red rectangles indicated by red-dashed arrows, they can create a very narrow twist saddle that does not conform to the horse's back, which then forces those horses to move middle-back hollow, out behind, and what we call today in Modern Dressage, the 'leg mover'.



The above picture to the left is how my was forced to ride in a saddle that did not address her physical idiosyncries. To the right, is the saddle I designed for her where her position allowed her to use her core-strength, and her horse to move without the resistance of saddle and rider – relaxation.

Our saddles are made with the strongest gullet plates in the industry that can be readjusted as the horse makes positive muscular/skeletal changes without losing the plates integrity.

The soft Italian leather can't be matched by any other saddlery.

We use a combination point and 'V' billeting system.

An even longer and stronger plate is used on our saddles for the Arab, Baroque, and Frisian horses.

Small adjustable air-panels are used in the deep shoulder-hole area of the high-withered thoroughbred.

Hennig Saddles start at \$6,500. Sofa and Princess saddles slightly more. Delivery after receiving full payment, is 4-6 months.

Our Gullikson-Baines saddles start at \$4,195, but never exceed \$4,395. Delivery, after we take or receive all measurements for rider and horse, is 4-6 weeks – we do ship saddles, they are delivered and then adjusted for horse and rider on site.

Our saddle comes with a service – two free readjustments as your horse makes positive muscular/skeletal changes, and \$95 for adjustments after that.

Please see our educational articles and videos on our Web site www.equineinspired.info