



## The Right Saddle

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Reprinted with permission from:

*The International Phryso*, vol 5, no 4, October 2002

In spite of the many different ideas about dressage techniques, training, etc., opinions about the importance of a properly fitting saddle are generally the same: the saddle used by the rider plays a major role in the horse's performance. The right saddle gives the rider the best possible means of sitting comfortably for a longer time and working the horse properly. It also ensures that the horse can make the optimum use of its body without being hindered in its movements.

The right saddle provides a fit that conforms to the shape of the horse. The saddle must correspond properly to the horse's back, both in front and in back as well as in width (over the ribs). In order to prevent sores - a nightmare for horse and rider alike - the saddle should cover a sufficient surface of the horse's back so that the weight of the rider is properly distributed. On the other hand, a saddle must exert no pressure on the withers and backbone and provide enough room for good movement of the horse's shoulder blades, thus allowing total freedom of movement in the forelegs.

The saddle must not only provide the horse with a proper fit but must also be the right size for the rider. In an overly large saddle, the rider's weight can shift too much forward or backward; this will result in an unsteady, bumpy seat. A saddle that is too small, however, will not allow the rider to stay in touch with the horse's movements, there will not be enough room to give the horse the leg aids, and the seat will be uncomfortable - all leading to such results as a painful experience if engaged in for any length of time.

The size for the rider (the seat) is measured from the pommel to the cantle of the saddle and is expressed in inches. A wider, longer seat does not necessarily mean that the saddle itself will be much larger. There is great variation in how the panels on the underside of the saddle are cut. This means, for example, that a saddle with a larger seat can also be placed on a smaller horse or that a saddle for a slender person can also fit a large horse without the rider getting lost in an overly large saddle. Besides the length of the seat, the size of the saddle is also determined by the width of the seat that can vary from 1 through 5 depending on the shape of the horse's withers.

In addition to being the right size and having the proper fit, the saddle also has to be constructed of good, durable material that will be comfortable for both horse and rider. It has to be able to breathe and to be easily cleaned. It is also important to devote enough attention to the quality of such accessories as the girth and saddle blanket since these will also come into direct contact with the horse and, in the wrong size, fit, or mat-

erial, can cause irritating sore spots and/or wounds.



In most Friesians, the shoulder is fairly sloping while the withers are sometimes not that pronounced.

### Saddles for Friesian Horses

A good saddle isn't always the same as a properly fitting saddle. Ideally, you would have a different saddle tailored exactly to a certain horse and rider. In most cases, however, this is simply not feasible. Even so, it is quite possible to use one saddle on more than one horse and not to be faced with any problems as long as the body builds of these horses are generally similar. Although the Friesian horse of today is different in type than the Friesian of years ago and is now heading toward the look of a modern performance horse, there are still enough differences in the build of their bodies when contrasted to the Dutch Warmblood or German-bred horses that extra attention should be given to choosing a saddle. Many owners of Friesian horses have already noticed that the good saddle they may have been using satisfactorily for many years on their Dutch Warmblood seems to shift back and forth on their Friesian horse, slides downward when mounting, or simply doesn't sit as nicely as it did on their other horses.

Special points to consider when buying a saddle for a Friesian horse are: the shape of the horse's rib cage, the curvature of its back and the position and shape of the shoulders and withers. Friesians often exhibit a more rounded rib cage; as the ribs extend outward from the vertebrae, they come out in a more horizontal direction before gradually rounding downward. This often makes a Friesian's back and loins broader than those of other breeds. When choosing a saddle, this means that the panels will have to be wider to distribute the weight of the rider over a larger surface of the back. Furthermore, the shape and flexibility of the saddle will have to be such as to follow the almost horizontal section of the ribs properly.

Attention will also have to be devoted to the shape of the horse's back from front to back. Friesians often have a somewhat more concave back (a bit "swaybacked") and also tend to gain weight easily. For this reason, it is important to check to make sure that the saddle fits properly on the back right