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Saddle Fitting Mini-Clinic

Agenda

Introductions

Why are we here? Goals and Expected Outcomes

Why is proper saddle fit important?

Quick overview: Parts of a Saddle (English and Western)

Review the 6 major components of a comprehensive saddle fit evaluation

- Lecture and hands on: Component one: Saddle evaluation off the horse
- Lecture and hands on: Component two: Evaluation of the horse
- Lecture and hands on: Component three: Saddle evaluation on the horse (static)

Group Discussion: How do the above three components above affect the other three components and the overall physical and mental health, performance and behavior of the horse and rider?

Questions

Wrap up



Saddle Fitting Mini-Clinic Goals and Expected Outcomes

- STAY SAFE!!
- Walk away with some practical tools you can use to help your horse and yourself. (Don't worry!! The goal is **not** to make you a saddle fitting expert in 90-120 minutes.)
- Ask questions....and (hopefully) get some answers
- Share group wisdom
- Have fun!!
- STAY SAFE!! (Yes, this is a repeat.)

6 Major Components of a Comprehensive Saddle Fit Evaluation

Component one: Saddle evaluation off the horse

Component two: Evaluation of the horse (Note: I do some of this prior to component one.)

Component three: Saddle evaluation on the horse (static)

Component four: Evaluate the “rider’s conformation” (if they give permission—oral and visual only)

Component five: Saddle evaluation with the rider up

Component six: Saddle evaluation with the rider riding

Note: Each component has 20-30+ individual items to evaluate. Today, we will focus on a subset of items in components 1, 2 and 3.

Component 1: Saddle Evaluation off the Horse

We will focus on this subset of items today.

Tree

- broken or intact?
- symmetry? warped? twisted?

Panels (if using an English saddle) or Skirt (if using a western saddle)

- material
- thickness ok? equal on both sides?
- hard? soft?
- smooth? lumpy? holes? wavy?
- excess or uneven compression?
- symmetry?
- width
- blocked or unblocked skirt? (Western)

Gullet (English) or Center/Channel (Western)

- width
- symmetry

Component 2: Evaluation of the Horse

Note: I obtain a full health history of the horse including all current issues and concerns before starting component 1. This includes performance and behavioral aspects as well as nutrition/supplements and hoof status.

We will focus on this subset of items today.

- pelvis/hips: level? equal swing up and down, side to side? sensitivity/pain?
- shoulders: level? symmetry? muscle atrophy? sensitivity/pain?
- back including withers: symmetry? muscle atrophy? curvature? sensitivity/pain?
- withers pocket: symmetry? sensitivity/pain?
- feet: high heel/low heel? toe in or out? how many tracks? wear evenly?
- skin/hair condition: sores? white hairs? scars?

A word about selenium....

Component 3: Saddle Evaluation On the Horse (static)

Be sure the saddle is placed in the “natural pocket” and not too far forward or rearward.

THE HORSE MUST BE STANDING SQUARE AND ON LEVEL GROUND!!

We will focus on this subset of items today.

Length of saddle on the back

- beyond last rib? (English)
- seat beyond last rib (Western)? Skirt too close to point of hip?
- interfere with scapula (shoulder blade) movement?
 - 2 inches behind the scapula to account for movement (except points of a close contact saddle)

Level

- tilt right or left?
- tock back or forward?

Panels (English) or bars/skirt (Western)

- spinal clearance: (gullet or center/channel)

- front, middle, back (western too!!)
 - what will happen when the horse is turning?
- contact even? bridging? banana? (English)

Component 5: Saddle Evaluation with the Rider Up

We will not cover this today, but here is a subset of key items to evaluate.

Seat relative to rider

- too large or small? (length and width)
- twist shape? (English) seat shape (Western)?
- comfort?

Rider balance point

- centered or too far forward or rearward?
- side to side balance?

Line of ear/shoulder/hip/heal (aka column of support)

- proper alignment for saddle type and discipline? (There are slight variations.)
- chair position?

Stirrup bar placement

- even (height and forward/rearward)?
- alignment under hip?

Stirrups

- angle ok? (Western)
- level?
- comfort (esp Western)

Weight distribution

- dig in at shoulder or loin?

Spinal clearance

- front, middle, back

Knee roll and thigh block placement (English)

Rider postural considerations

- hips/pelvis and shoulders level? too far forward or rearward?