This manual is intended for 4-H use and created for Maine 4-H members, leaders, extension agents and staff.

COVER CREATED BY
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Cathy Thomas
&
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REFERENCE LIST:
Western Saddle Guide
Dictionary of Equine Terms
Verlane Desgrange

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INTRODUCTION

There is a lot to consider when mounting up on your horse and riding into the sunset. Knowledge of different kinds and uses of saddles, knowing how to fit a saddle, life of the tack, what to look for when buying used equipment as well as care of equipment to gain optimal use are just some of the things a horse lover should be aware of.

Saddles are broken down into the following types:

Western, English and Endurance

Each of these types have generalizations that make it a Western, English or Endurance. For example, Western saddles generally have horns and are heavier than English saddles. English saddles do not have horns, but do have leathers and smaller skirts. An Endurance saddle is generally the lightest of all saddle and known for it's padded seat.

Some saddles are built for a particular breed. For example:

Arabian saddles - also called the Arab saddle is built specifically for the confirmation of Arabian horses. With shorter wider-set bars and specific gullet widths to fit the pitch and angle of an Arabian's withers.

Gaited Horse saddles - are designed to allow as much shoulder freedom as possible; this cut out section over the withers allows the horse to move more freely and with a lot more action.

Mule saddle - Mule bars and shorter skirts are designed to fit the typically short and flatter back of mules.

It would be wise to make a few decisions before going to a tack store or barn sale when saddle shopping. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Main seat (what type of saddle) will I be riding in?
2. How much money do I have to spend on this saddle?
3. Have I considered the other expenses of tack (such as cinch/girth, bridle, breastplates, irons) that are usually not included with the purchase of a saddle?
4. How much riding do I plan to do in this saddle?
5. Will this be the saddle I use more often than others?
6. Would it be wiser for me to try to find a good used saddle to practice in and save my money for a new saddle that I plan to compete in?

These are just some of the thoughts to prepare for when shopping for any sort of equipment.
WESTERN SADDLE
BREECHING RIGGING - ALSO CALLED SADDLE BRITCHEN - USED TO KEEP SADDLE FROM SLIDING FORWARD (USED ON ROUGH TERRAIN)

CRUPPERS - USED TO KEEP SADDLE FROM SLIDING FORWARD - USED MORE IN SHOWS AND EVERYDAY
PARTS OF WESTERN SADDLE TREE

HORN

FORK/SWELL

CANTLE

BAR

Wade

1

2

3

4

Bowman

A - Tread
B - Side Pieces
C - Bolt
D - Roller
E - Bolt Wear Leather
F - Tread Wear Leather

8" to 10" in width

Slick Fork

also called

A- Fork

generally

11" 14" in width

Swell Fork

generally

11" 14" in width

Undercut Swell Fork

WESTERN BREAST PLATE

RIGGING STRAP
OR TUGS

CENTER RING
OR RIGGING
UNDER THAT
THE "PLATE"

CENTER TIE
DOWN STRAP

PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.HORSESADDLESHOP.COM
Traditional English saddle trees are constructed of high quality wood and re-inforced with spring steel along the length of it. This spring steel allows some "give" to the saddle. The stirrup bars are attached directly to the tree; offering more strength for the leathers. Re-inforcing steel is added to the pommel for added strength as well as a gullet plate.

Today's trees are built with similar foundation, however, the raw materials may be polyurethane or fiberglass. Polyurethane trees are very durable, whereas the fiberglass trees are not.
FITTING A SADDLE

When fitting a saddle, the rider must consider the comfort of two members in the partnership. The saddle must fit the horse correctly, if not the actions of the horse (bucking, kicking, rearing or not moving at all) may be due to ill fitting tack and therefore, not the horse's fault for such actions. The saddle should also be well fitted and comfortable for the rider. Knowing how you are supposed to sit in a saddle, what the functions of saddle parts are and how they should measure up to the rider, are all part of the well fitted equation.

Horse confirmation effect saddle fit. Consider the following:

➔ Withers - height and width of the withers
➔ Back - length = will the saddle interfere with loins & hips and shape = is the back narrow or wide
➔ Shoulders = will the saddle allow movement of the shoulders or constrict it
➔ Barrel = will the saddle tend to slip forward or backward due to underline of barrel

Saddle fitting is an endless art. There are many aspects to consider and for higher levels of competition, a rider may consider consulting a saddle maker for that "perfect" fit. For our purposes, however, a few simple, but ever important steps, will get a fit that will make for a happy horse.

* Have horse standing on level ground - you do not want your horse to be up or down hill when fitting the saddle.
* Place saddle (no pad) in correct position before checking for fit.
  place saddle on withers and slide back into place -this place is where the saddle tree is just behind the shoulder blade and places the rider just behind the horses' center of gravity.
  The horse's center of gravity (without rider) is at the heart of girth.
*Step back and take a look at the saddle -is it level or running up/down hill ?
  running up hill = pommel is higher then cantle
  down hill = cantle is higher then pommel/fork
*Check the wither clearance - you should be able to place 2 -3 fingers (width wise) between the withers and gullet.
*Look to see where the back skirt lands on the horse
  will the skirt interfere with hip?
  will the rider be sitting on the loins?
  the skirt should not extend beyond the horse's loins.
*Run your hand between front skirt and shoulders of horse can you do so without pinching? If horse turn it's head towards you, does it pinch?
  Stand behind the horse, you should see light from the pommel end.
*Place saddle pad on horse and cinch up saddle -the back should not rise up.
Note this horse's confirmation for saddle fitting
Back and short - owner may want to consider a saddle with round skirts
Low & wide withers - the saddle should have a wider fork
Wide back - owner will have to pay attention to gullet depth and tree width

Note this horse's confirmation for saddle fitting
Back is long and narrow.
Withers are high and narrow.
The owner will have to be on the look out for a saddle that has a high gullet and tree that will comfortably fit a narrow bodied horse.

DECENT FITTING FORK/POMMEL

FORK SET ABOVE WITHERS
ABLE TO GET 2-3 FINGERS IN UNDER FORK

ILL FITTING FORK/POMMEL

FORK SETTING ON WITHERS
NOT ABLE TO GET 2 FINGERS IN UNDER FORK
SADDLE FIT

POMMEL / FORK IS 2-3 FINGER WIDTHS FROM WITHERS

SKIRTING DOES NOT INTERFER WITH HIPS

WHEN MOUNTED, RIDER IS PLACED JUST BEHIND THE HEART GIRTH

SADDLE SITS LEVEL ON THE HORSE'S BACK = FORK & CANTLE ARE LEVEL

THIS SADDLE IS DOWNHILL OF THE HORSE (BACK HIGHER THAN FRONT)
THE SKIRTING DOES NOT INTERFER WITH HIP BUT POMMEL / FORK SETS ON WITHERS

THIS SADDLE SETS LEVEL ON HORSE BUT THE SKIRTING INTERFERES WITH THE HIP - HARDER FOR HORSE TO FREELY ENGAGE HIND END
This saddle fits nicely = the saddle is setting level and off the horse's shoulders.

The gullet is wide enough to accommodate the withers.

The pommel allows 2-3 finger width between withers and underside of pommel.
NOTE: For all saddle types, ill fitting & dirty tack can cause sore spot on the horse. Too much pressure in an area results in lack of proper circulation (blood is continually pressed out of that spot) resulting in dead skin cells (the sore) which is called pressure necrosis. Often times when hair grows back, it will be white. When unsaddling your horse look for the following signs:

- dry spot - when rest of back is sweaty
- ruffled hair
- broken hair
- when running hand down horse's back he/she flinches or arches the back
- bumps or lumps

If any of these signs are visible, it might mean:

1. the tack does not fit
2. is dirty or has a rough spot in it
3. there is a wrinkle in the pad or
4. out of balance rider / saddlebags

If you are still experiencing saddle fit failure after carefully sizing the horse to a saddle, consider riser pads or built up saddle pads. Look around, talk to professionals; there are lots of items on the market to finesse your saddle fit.
FITTING THE RIDER

Although a correctly fitted saddle to a horse take precedence for safety and well being of horse and rider, a saddle correctly fitted to the rider will ensure more time in the saddle and lesson the degree of "saddle seat sores" for the rider.

There are some general rules of thumb to bear in mind when sizing a rider to a saddle.

1. Seat size refers only to the size of the seat for the rider - it has nothing to do with fit to the horse
2. There should be room in front of your legs (amount is determined by saddle type) and room behind you (again, determined by saddle type) - discussed later on.
3. When sitting in the saddle, your legs should fall (with stirrups on) underneath you. The fenders or leathers should not put you in a "chair" position (toes up by the horses shoulders) nor should they keep your heels behind your hips. Sometimes you will see a young child in an oversized saddle with their feet in line with their knees. They are unable to maintain a correct position simply because the saddle does not fit them.
4. Consider the width of the seat; does it put the rider into a "split" position, leaving the legs dangling at the knees rather than having control of the upper leg?
5. If the rider is at a growing stage and a correct fit can not be gained, it is better to choose a slightly bigger saddle than smaller one. When in the saddle, the rider does not want to feel trapped or unable to dismount quickly if need be.
6. Know how to measure a seat size of the saddle.

Western type saddles are measured in inches
The seat is measured from the base of the horn to the center of the cantle

English type saddles are measured in inches
The seat is measured from the "nail" to the center of the cantle (this is the actual tree size of the saddle)
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

WESTERN

1. ALLOW APPROXIMATELY 4" BETWEEN THE FRONT OF YOUR BODY AND THE FORKS.
2. YOUR RUMP SHOULD REST AT THE BASE OF THE CANTLE BUT NOT BE PRESSED UP
   AGAINST THE BACK OF IT.
3. FENDERS SHOULD LINE UP WITH LEG, ALLOWING HEEL TO REST COMFORTABLY
   UNDER YOUR HIP.
4. CHECK OUT THE FENDER & STIRRUP LENGTH -

   GENERALLY SPEAKING:
   WITH FEET OUT OF STIRRUPS AND HANGING COMFORTABLY DOWN SIDE - THE
   BOTTOM OF THE STIRRUP SHOULD BE AT THE ANKLE BONE IN LENGTH. MAKE SURE
   YOUR FENDERS HAVE ENOUGH ADJUSTMENT TO ACCOMODATE THE RIDER'S LEG.

PERSONAL PREFERENCE CONSIDERATIONS
1. SEAT DEPTH
2. SEAT SLOPE
3. CANTLE SLOPE
4. CANTLE DISH
5. FORK TYPE
6. FORK HEIGHT AND SLOPE
7. HORN HEIGHT AND SLOPE

ENGLISH

1. WHEN SITTING IN THE MIDDLE (AND DEEPEST) PART OF THE SADDLE, THE RIDER SHOULD
   BE ONE HAND WIDTH BETWEEN RIDER'S BACK AND THE CANTLE.
2. THE LEATHERS SHOULD HANG IN SUCH A POSITION AS TO ALLOW THE RIDER'S HEEL TO
   REST DIRECTLY UNDER THE HIP.
   A SADDLE TOO SMALL MAY PUT THE HEEL BACK OF THE HIP, WHEREAS A SADDLE TO
   LARGE TENDS TOO PUT THE HEEL AHEAD OF THE HIP.
3. THE LEATHERS SHOULD HAVE ENOUGH ADJUSTMENT TO ALLOW THE STIRRUPS TO HANG
   JUST AT THE ANKLE BONE WHEN THE LEG IS RELAXED AND FOOT NOT IN STIRRUPS.
4. THE LEGS SHOULD REST IN THE HALLLOW OF THE FLAPS.
5. THE KNEES SHOULD FALL JUST AT OR BEHIND THE KNEE ROLL.
6. CONSIDER CHECKING YOUR COMFORT IN 2 POINT POSITION
7. STIRRUPS SHOULD BE AT LEAST 1/2" WIDER THAN RIDING BOOT.

PERSONAL PREFERENCE CONSIDERATIONS
1. SEAT DEPTH
2. CANTLE HEIGHT
3. SEAT WIDTH
4. KNEE ROLLS
5. BACK LEG ROLLS
6. STIRRUP STYLES
BARREL RACING SADDLE

- Thin, tall horn to hang on to
- High cantle for deep secure seat
- High forks secure the rider
- Shorter skirt can be round or square
- Minimize bulk & weight
- Roughout / suede seat, jockey or fenders for better grip
- Front cinch only
- No flank cinch in skirt rigging
- Narrow stirrups hold foot in place

BARREL RACING SADDLES
Are light weight - small & usually under 30 lbs

CUTTING SADDLE

- Tall thin horn = grip
- High, wide and straight forks
- Double rigging
- Fenders a bit forward and free swinging
- Long, flat seat
- Low cantle
- Rough out or suede
- Seat and jockey = grip
- Slim stirrups
**TRAIL SADDLE**
LIGHTER WEIGHT SADDLE

- THINK HORN FOR HANGING ON TO
- MED. HEIGHT CANTLE WITH PRONOUNCED DISH SEAT OFTEN PADDED
- HIGHER FORK FOR SECURE SEAT
- STRINGS FOR ATTACHING GEAR
- IN SKIRT RIGGING TO LESSEN WEIGHT OF SADDLE
- WIDE STIRRUPS

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**PARADE SADDLE**
IS ALL ABOUT THE ACCENTS -
LOADS OF TRIMMINGS
TOOLING ON LEATHER
DEEP SKIRTS FOR MORE TRIMMING & TOOLING
TAPADERO STIRRUPS

MUCH HEAVIER SADDLE DUE TO ALL THE SILVER
NOTE THE DISHED SEAT FOR COMFORT
THIN AND HIGHER HORN FOR HANGING ON TO
REINING SADDLE
DESIGNED TO KEEP RIDER OUT OF HORSE'S WAY - FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

HORN AND FORK ARE LOW (LOWER THAN CUTTING SADDLE) - NOT TO INTERFERE WITH RIDER'S HANDS & REINS

DEEP & LONG SEAT, AMPLE ROOM TO ROLL PELVIC FOR BIG STOPS

CUT OUT SKIRT MORE COMMUNICATION WITH HORSE

DROPPED RIGGING TO LESSEN BULK UNDER RIDER'S LEG

FREE SWINGING FENDERS MORE COMMUNICATION

THIN TO MED. STIRRUPS

LOW CANTLE, DEEP SECURE SEAT, SUEDE FOR GRIP

SHOW SADDLE
LOTS OF SILVER TRIM AND TOOLING

SHORT HORN AND FORK LESS INTERFERENCE WITH HANDS AND REINS

LOTS OF TOOLING

DEEP SKIRTING - TO SHOW OFF MORE TOOLING AND TRIMMING

DEEP AND WIDE STIRRUPS
ENGLISH TYPES

ALL PURPOSE SADDLE

- Semi deep seat
- Stirrup bar
- Kneel roll
- Flap slightly forward
- Back of flap may be in a more straighter downward line
- Saddle good for: pleasure riding, cross country, jumping, hunting, trail riding, endurance

DRESSAGE SADDLE

- Deep seat
- Stirrup bars set back to allow for long straight legs
- May have knee roll
- Long straight flap
- Good for: dressage, pleasure, schooling on the flat
- Extended billets
ENGLISH TYPES

SADDLE SEAT

RELATIVELY FLAT SEAT

CUT BACK HEAD TO ACCOMMODATE WITHERS FOR MORE FRONT ACTION THE SADDLE TYPE & GAITED BREEDS REQUIRE RIDER SITS BEHIND THE Girth Area, WHICH PLACES WEIGHT OF RIDER MORE TO REAR THAN OTHER SADDLES. ALLOWS THE HORSE'S SHOULDERS TO BE FREE FOR MORE ACTION
ENGLISH TYPES

CLOSE CONTACT SADDLE

LOW CANTLE

OFTEN SQUARED CANTLE

FLAT SEAT

NOT AS PADDED

FLAPS ANGLED FORWARD FOR JUMPING

GOOD FOR:
- JUMPING
- HUNT SEAT
- EQUITATION
- HUNTING
- CROSS COUNTRY

THIN KNEE IF ANY AT ALL

JUMPING SADDLE

FORWARD POSITION CANTLE

SHALLOW SEAT

KNEE ROLLS

GOOD FOR:
- SHOW JUMPING
- FOX HUNTING
- CROSS COUNTRY JUMPING
- EVENTING
- STADIUM JUMPING

VERY FORWARD FLAPS TO PUT RIDER IN SECURE 2 POINT POSITION
Western Saddles require latigo straps or cinch straps. There is a shorter one located on the "off" or right hand side of the saddle and a longer one on the "near" or left hand side. The strap on the off side serves as an anchor for the latigo knot that is tied on the near side.

To attach either of the straps follow these directions:
1. There are usually 2 sets of 3 holes in a triangle shape on one end of the strap.
2. Fold the end of the strap in such a manner that the holes line up with each other (the one nearer the horse will be the longer piece of the strap; the end of the strap where the 3 holes are closer to the end of the strap will be facing towards the outside as to not cause galls or sore spots on the horse.
3. Insert the "string" leather strap through the 2 parrell holes (from outside to inside-holes near the horse. Keeping the ends of the string even - do not tighten up at this point.
4. Now needle both ends of the string through the top holes (its now coming back towards you or the outside) and down through the loop formed from inserting the string in the parrell holes.
5. Tighten the string.
LATIGO KNOT OR CINCH BUCKLE

For the most part, cinches today come with "buckles" giving the rider the option of using a latigo knot or using the cinch buckle to secure the saddle in place. The following are instructions for both:

LATIGO KNOT

1. Assuming the "off" strap is secured and the cinch is attached; reach under your horse's belly and carefully grab the cinch making sure there are no twists in the off strap or cinch.

2. Thread the strap through the cinch ring from the belly side (inside of ring) up through to the outside of the ring -remember to check for twisting of the strap -it should lay flat against the horse.

3. Next thread the strap down through the dee ring in the saddle -working from the outside of the ring towards the inside of the ring - this will place the threading end of the strap closest to the horse and swing the end of the latigo towards the front of the horse. NOTE: depending on the length of the latigo strap, you may need to make an additional wrap or two (steps 2&3).

4. The strap should be snug, but not tight. Now cross the end of the strap (which is now heading towards the horse's head) over to the other side of the ring (butt side of horse).

5. Thread the end of the strap from inside of dee ring of saddle (near horse's body) to outside of the dee ring and down through the loop you made in step 4. At this point the cinch is snug not tight.

6. To tighten the cinch hold onto the top loop running from saddle ring to cinch ring and gently pull up. You may have to pull up on several of the wraps if the cinch is long. With your other hand, take up the slack in the knot and tighten. If you have a long tail left in the strap, simply feed it down through the latigo holder on the saddle.

NOTE: Remember to tighten your cinch up in stages, not all at once. It will prevent multitudes of problems and make your horse happy. Walk your horse around a bit and check the tightness one more time before mounting up. Horses may "blow up" or expand their lungs while being cinched, but they can not hold their breath and walk at the same time -hence the recheck just before mounting.
CINCH BUCKLE:

1. Assuming the "off" strap is secured and the cinch is attached; reach under your horse’s belly and carefully grab the cinch making sure there are no twists in the off strap or cinch.
2. Thread the strap through the cinch ring from the belly side (inside of ring) up through to the outside of the ring - remember to check for twisting of the strap - it should lay flat against the horse.
3. Next thread the strap down through the dee ring in the saddle - working from the outside of the ring towards the inside of the ring - this will place the threading end of the strap closest to the horse.

NOTE: depending on the length of the latigo strap, you may need to make an additional wrap or two.

4. Now we are at the point where the knot is made, however, rather than crossing the strap over, take the loose end of the strap and thread it down through the cinch ring, working from inside of ring to outside of ring.

5. Hook the strap onto the buckle tongue. Make sure you pull down on the top layer until the tongue lodges against the ring, locking it into place.

6. Thread any excess strap in the latigo holder of the saddle.
BUYING THE RIGHT SIZE

CINCH
A horse that has a correctly fitted cinch will have the cinch rings just above the horse’s elbow on both the near and off side of the horse.

Place the saddle with pad on the horse, measure from the off (right side) cinch strap (midway of the elbow and dee ring of saddle) under the belly and up to midway of the near (left side) of the elbow and dee ring.

This measurement (in inches) is the number you will be looking for when cinch shopping.

The main goal is to have the cinch ring higher than the elbow and not interfering with movement of elbow, which could cause galls.

NOTE: Cinches are measured from end of ring to end of ring.

GIRTH
A correctly fitting girth falls midway of the billets on an English saddle.

Place a saddle with pad on the horse’s back, measure from midway of the billets under the belly and back up to midway of billets on the opposite side. This will allow some adjustment in the fit.

This measurement (in inches) is the number you will be looking for when girth shopping.

NOTE: Cinches are measured from end of ring to end of ring.
Handling & storage of your saddle is as much a part of taking care of it as cleaning it! A saddle of any type should be handled in such a manner that, when carrying it, all girths, cinches, stings and cinch straps should be hung over the saddle and not dragging in the dirt and mud. Dirt, hay, straw & shavings picked up by dragging saddle parts are an excellent way to cause sores on your mount. The only thing you want between the saddle and horse is a clean saddle pad!! Debris will only cause unnecessary irritation and soreness.

Store the saddle in a dry place out of moisture and the sun. Moisture cases mildew and the sun causes dryness and cracking. The saddle should have a rack that supports the shape (seat) of the saddle and is tall enough to keep stirrups from dragging. Saddles that have a curl in the skirts are saddles that did not have proper support during storage - allowing the skirts to curl under.

Cleaning the saddle ensures longevity of leather, maintains the value of the saddle and keeps the horse from getting saddle sores and galls. Incorporating saddle care into your horse activities on a regular basis makes the job that much easier. A simple wipe down of the saddle after each ride will help stop the build up of dirt jockeys and crusty horse sweat.

Leather care: a glycerin bar of soap, sponges and water is a great combination to clean tack. 
Do not be afraid of the water on your leather products; leather needs some moisture to maintain flexibility and prevent dry cracks.
There are plenty of choices available today - be sure to read the instructions.
Leather conditioner - again lots of products on the market - read directions allow the saddle to dry before applying the conditioner.
Remember to clean both sides of the leathers (the grain or smooth side and the flesh or rough side).
Pay particular attention to the leather that comes in contact with the horse.

Synthetic care: Synthetic saddles require as much cleaning as do leather ones. There are synthetic cleaners like Horseplay Synthetic Saddle & Tack cleaner to clean with. Read the directions before applying.

Note on oils: BE CAREFUL with oils. Most tend to over oil the leather which results in a greasy mess. The best oil for leather is 100% pure neatsfoot oil. Use sparingly- the secret is many light coats as opposed to one heavy one. Remember the oil will "seal" (if you will) the leather so be sure the leather is clean before buffing the oil on.

??SQUEAKY SADDLE??
Try Baby Powder
- turn the saddle upside down.
- sprinkle the powder between the fenders and jockeys as well as fenders and skirts.
- make sure the powder gets deep into the saddle near the tree.
- turn the saddle back over and shake out excess powder.
- wipe down the saddle.