

This information will help you find an English saddle that will fit you and your horse. It will also help you take care of your saddle so it will last longer and keep it looking like new. Finding the right saddle can be frustrating, but we hope this will make finding the right saddle a little easier. We cannot guarantee a perfect fit, but these suggestions should help you get close to it.

First, you have to measure your horse. There is no single saddle that could fit every horse and even among manufactures there are different sizes. Most saddles are handmade and this also accounts for some differences. Also, the difference in tree material and sizes can affect a saddle's fit. A big difference occurs between new and used saddles, as used saddles are often stretched by use.

To measure your horse you will need

1. Something flexible like a heavy coated piece of electrical wire about 2' long
2. A piece of cardboard or heavy stock paper
3. A black magic marker.

With this you'll be able to make a tracing of your horses back and this will give you a good idea of your horse's back shape. You can also use this while in the tack shop to make sure you are getting a good fit for your horse. If you are in doubt you can have the tack shop sales clerk/owner help you.

Start by placing the wire two fingers behind its shoulder blade. This is where your saddle sits when it is properly placed. Take the wire and bend it slightly so that it fits over your horse's back. Be sure the wire is sitting flat on both sides of the back before you remove it. Take the wire off and carefully place it on the cardboard. Trace the inside of this form and make a note which side is right and which is left. You can take this form with you when you go to the tack shop. If you are buying a saddle online you should measure it at the store and take the measurements for the saddle you are interested in or it can be used to have a saddle specially made. To use the form place it inside the saddle, making sure that it doesn't bend or have too much clearance. The form should fit the saddle like the saddle fits your horse with just enough clearance for its withers. If the form goes all the way up inside the saddle to touch the gullet, or if when placed in the saddle you can fit your whole hand in between the top of the form and the gullet then try another saddle.

When you have found one that looks like it will fit your horse's shape you should sit in the saddle and make sure the seat is comfortable and isn't too small or too large for your seat.

When you get the saddle home have your horse stand on level ground without a saddle pad. Put the saddle on its back and slide it until it rests comfortably about 2 fingers width from its shoulder blades. Now you need to check for a proper fit again.

1. Is the saddle level on the horses back? The bottom of the saddle should be level with the ground, and the seat.
2. There should be an angle starting at the cantle (the back of the saddle) down to the pommel (the front of the saddle). The angle will differ depending on the type of saddle.
3. Place one hand on top of the saddle and press down slightly, there should be no "give".
4. Lift up the stirrup flaps and look underneath to be sure the saddle is resting on the horses back completely with no gaps or bridging.
5. Slide your hand under the front of the saddle on both sides of the withers. Make sure the pressure is equal on both sides and isn't pinching.
6. Now you need to check how much space you have between the pommel and your horse's withers. If all the other measurements are fine and you have clearance under the pommel to fit in a finger or two, then

the saddle should fit fine. This is especially true if the saddle is used. However, if the saddle is brand new you should ensure that the spacing is at least 3 finger's width.

After you have checked these basic measurements and all is fitting well you should check it again with a saddle pad. Tighten the girth and sit in the saddle. While you are in the saddle you should have between 3 and 4 fingers of space behind your buttocks and your leg when it is loose and in a natural position. If these measurements are all correct you should take a ride and see how it feels to you and your horse. Watch for signs that it is pinching like pinning his ears, kicking out or showing any other behavior that he hasn't shown before. If the saddle is used you should take a fairly good ride. When you are finished with your ride check the pad to make sure the dirt or marks are even. If there are big spots of white or heavier dark spots then the saddle may not be fitting properly.

Other things to consider when buying your saddle is maintenance. If it is a wool flocked saddle, it will need to be restuffed at least once a year or more depending on how much riding you do. If the saddle is used, you may want to get it restuffed when you buy it to ensure your horse's comfort and to prevent a sore back. Check with your local tack shop for the name of a saddler who can do this work.

A foam stuffed saddle will not need to be restuffed as long as it is used on the same horse. These saddles mold to the shaped of your horses back and don't change shape if they are new. If these saddles are bought used, then you should really ensure the fit and make sure that there are no gaps or bridging anywhere because it is shaped to the back of the last horse that wore it. Most of the time this isn't a big problem just be aware.

If you are buying a used saddle you should check the billets for wear and the tree for cracks. The best way to check the tree for cracks or breaks in the tree is to hold the pommel in one hand and the cantle in the other. Place your knee in the center of the seat and push. If the tree is broken or cracked then the saddle will bend easily or too much and there may be some sort of cracking sound. Check it again by putting the saddle between your knees and squeezing with both hands on both sides of the pommel this should be tight unless it has a leather tree. Some English spring tree saddles or leather tree saddles bend more than others if you are in doubt ask to have the saddle checked buy a saddler.

To maintain your saddle after purchase, you should keep it clean buy wiping it off with a soft rag every time you ride. Once a week clean it with glycerin soap and a good conditioner. Use care if you use an oil product on your saddle. Often people use too much oil and this can cause the saddle to rot or mildew. If your saddle becomes dry you can use oil, but use it in several very thin coats allowing it to dry between coats. Never apply a thick coat of oil to your saddle. While you are cleaning your saddle you should also check for wear, loose stitches or tears. Have these things repaired as soon as you notice them to prevent damage. This is especially true of damage to the tree. Most saddlers can repair these things easily and with less expense than buying a new saddle. However, if the saddle cannot be repaired or the fit isn't as it should be you should take out these instructions and find yourself a new saddle to enjoy.

These tips should give you a good start on finding the perfect saddle. Good luck and happy riding.