The 9 Points of Saddle Fit

by Saddlefit 4 Life®

At its very core, there are 9 basic points of saddle fit that should be assessed before moving further onto the full 80+ point evaluation. These 9 points look at some of the most important areas of saddle fit to the horse.

1 - Saddle Balance: Place your saddle on your horse and lift the saddle skirt to view the stirrup bar. The bar should be parallel with the ground. If it's point up or down, it means your saddle is too low/high in either the front or back.

Is this saddle balanced?

No, the balance of this saddle is not correct. It appears to be too low in the back

2 - Wither Clearance: With your saddle on your horse (w/o a pad), check the gap between the top of the withers and the inside of the pommel - the gap should be no less than 2-3 fingers along the gullet channel.

3 - Channel Width: Flip your saddle over and check the width of the gullet from the pommel to the cantle - it should be a minimum of 4 fingers wide all the way through.

4 - Panel Contact: With your saddle on your horse (w/o a pad), lift the flap and place a simple ballpoint pen beneath the panel where the tree begins. Holding the flap with slight downward pressure to prevent the saddle from falling off, gently slide the pen along the length of the panel. It should not be stuck or moving too freely at any point. If the pen gets stuck, you have too much pressure in that region, whereas if the pen moves too freely, it means there is very little/no contact in that region.

5 - Billet Alignment: Have your horse standing square and take two steps back, kneeling down so your eye is level with their elbow. View the flat of their ribcage right before the swell of the belly, your billets should fall just at or before this point.

6 - Saddle Length: With your horse standing square, palpate from the point of the hip forward until you find the last rib, carefully following the CURVE of the rib upwards towards the spine to find the LAST THORACIC VERTEBRAE (T18). This is the end of your saddle support area - no saddle should place pressure beyond this point. NOTE: Going straight up from the edge of the last rib will land you in the lumbar region which is not able to sustain carrying the weight of a rider without severe consequences.
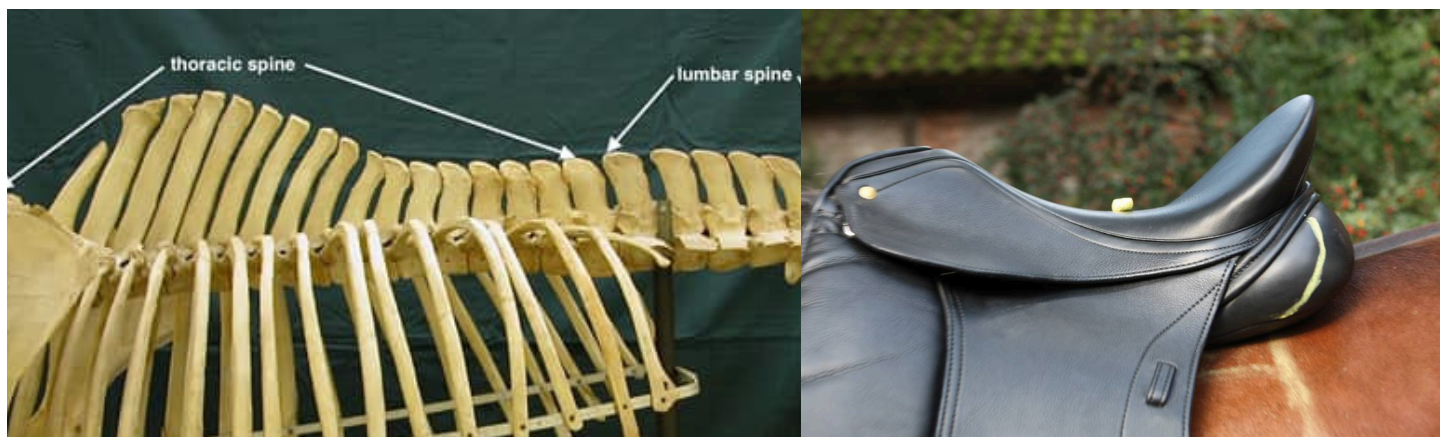
7 - Saddle Straightness: With your horse standing square, place your saddle on your horse on top of the shoulder and carefully slide it back until it settles. From here, gently push the saddle forward - you should not be able to move it forward once it settles behind the scapula. Carefully stand behind your horse (use a stool if needed) and view the saddle from behind. The gullet channel should be parallel with the spine, and the pommel and cantle should be aligned.

Is this saddle straight?

No, this saddle is twisting and shifting to the left

8 - Tree Angle: Palpate back to front approximately 6-8" down from the spine to find the edge of the scapula (Line 2). Mark this point, and mark a second point 4" in front, towards the head (Line 1). Using a ballpoint pen, place one end in line with the edge of the spine on Line 1, and flip it downwards once, placing your finger in the center of the pen to hold it in place. This angle should match the piping of your saddle from the D-ring, to about 3-4" down, depending on the saddle make/ model.

9 - Tree Width: With your horse standing square and the saddle on w/o a pad or girth, place your fingers in the gap between the sides of the withers and the panel/tree of the saddle. Your fingers should be closed, and your hand should be flat with the palm facing downwards. Check both sides to ensure a minimum gap of at least 2 fingers to allow for optimal room for lateral spinal movement and flexion of the trapezius up to 4" below the top of the withers.

2 - 3 Finger ⇒

*To learn more about our education & certification programs including the 80-Point Saddle fit Evaluation which follows the 9 Points of Saddle Fit, please [Book a free consultation](#) with a Saddlefit 4 Life Instructor. On the call they can help answer your questions and point you in the right direction based on your goals and needs.