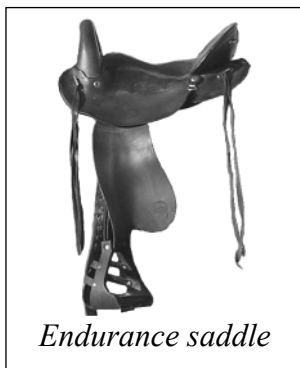


Chapter 4: More Modern Developments

The traditional saddle design has many elements which require craftsmanship and high-quality materials. Some recent developments in technology have allowed saddle manufacturers to take shortcuts in the craftsmanship and materials. Some of these innovations have worked well; some have not.

Further, some saddle designers have attempted to avoid the intricacies of trees and fitting entirely. "Treeless" saddles are now available. These offer a very different kind of riding experience, and have their advantages and drawbacks also.

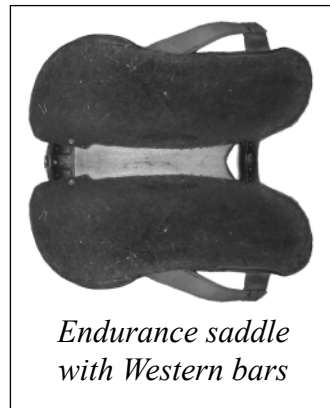


Endurance saddle

Endurance Saddles

I discussed Endurance saddles in previous chapters, along with English and Western saddles. They merit further discussion in this section. The Endurance saddle is a combination of designs, which does not fully incorporate the positive benefits of any. An Australian saddle may have many of the same designs as an Endurance.

Many Endurance saddles have a Western-type tree, with bars rather than panels. However, they do not include the heavy skirts as on a Western saddle. The skirts are an important part of the Western tree. They help distribute the weight of the saddle, and they provide some buffer to keep the saddle from biting directly into the horse's back. Without the skirts to help spread out the weight, the hard bars of the tree rest directly on the horse's back. This is much less desirable.



Endurance saddle with Western bars

The saddles with English panels, on the other hand, have a "crossbreed" tree. In order to extend the panels, the tree is given extensions toward the rear of the saddle. Recall that the English saddle tree is very well designed for what it does; changes in the design affect the balance of the tree. While it's good for the horse to have longer panels--larger weight distribution area--it's still most ideal to use a real Western tree for long, inflexible saddle surfaces.