

Chapter 5: Elements of Fit

Thorough Evaluations

Checking Fit

Saddle Fitters

Evaluation of the saddle

Before bringing out the horse, examine the saddle. As described in Chapter 2, evaluate the saddle for symmetry, soundness, manufacturing flaws, and quality of materials. If the saddle fails on any of these points, there is no reason to even set the saddle on the horse's back.

Physical evaluation of the horse

Before you test a horse for fit, it may be a good idea to examine his back first. If his back shows evidence of a poorly fitting saddle, then he will need treatment and may need a different saddle fit afterwards. Even if his current saddle fits, if he has lingering issues from previous saddles, then his back may change with treatment. In Chapter 1 we listed a number of indications for back discomfort. Some of them are obvious signs of a poorly fitting saddle:

- white hairs in the saddle area,
- dry patches under the saddle after riding,
- rubbed areas under the saddle after riding, or
- hairless areas under the saddle after riding.

It is difficult to detect most back soreness. Even if he is not being saddled, a horse may be patted, rubbed, or groomed. As a result, when people are around, the horse likely **already has his back tensed**.

When most people check for back pain, they poke the back to see if the horse reacts. Since he has already tensed his back, he does not react. This is not an effective method to check for back pain! Most horses will not pull away unless their back pain is severe.