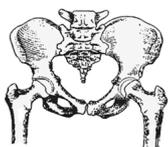


Everything you ever wanted to know about saddle fit, but were afraid to ask.

by Jochen Schleese, CMS, CSFT, CSE

This is a topic which one would think is simply common sense, yet most riders do not know there are specific difference between saddles made for men and saddles for women. This makes sense given the lack of gender appropriate saddles on the market; traditions in the trade of saddlery are too ingrained to be easily changed.



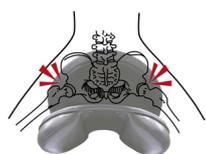
The demographics of the equestrian industry have shifted over the last 50-plus years from where it was mainly men riding, competing and using horses in the military or for agricultural purposes to where it is now mainly women – especially in the adult amateur category or strictly recreational activity. One would expect the design of the accompanying necessary tack – especially the saddle – would reflect this change in rider demographics, yet Schleese is an anomaly in the industry. Why? This makes no sense – it is like women using men’s equipment of any sort when playing sports.

Granted – at first glance hockey, soccer or tennis equipment looks pretty much the same, but upon closer examination, modifications have been made to the equipment to accommodate female needs. Let’s take a look at the saddle – which is crucial to comfort and protection as well as the interface for two living beings; both horse and rider need to be able to perform well. You would think more riders and saddle manufacturers would be concerned about the correct design.

August 2015 - Girl Talk

Written by Jochen Schleese, CMS, CSFT, CSE
Tuesday, 04 August 2015 23:15

Schleese has carved out a unique niche in the equine industry as the female saddle specialist. Our secret to success is conferring with medical specialists, riders, trainers, physiotherapists and many equine professionals over the last 20-plus years to come up with saddles that accommodate the female pelvis, allow female riders to excel. Believe it or not, there are significant differences to the male pelvis which beg to be addressed in saddle design. Below is a short summary of significant differences in male and female anatomy that need to be addressed in saddle design for the sexes.



Still Not Convinced?

Schleese has documented cases of many clients who have suffered recurrent bladder infections, chronic back aches, ongoing skin irritations, and – dare we say it? – “female problems down there...” All are caused by riding in saddles made for men.

Some of the issues you may be dealing with may be caused by the fact you are riding in a gender inappropriate saddle (keep in mind – there are exceptions to every rule; there may be other causes). However, if you are constantly falling into the dreaded “chair seat,” have problems with your legs staying under you and tending to shoot forward, if you are slouching, your hips hurt, your inner thighs ache, you are rubbing in the pelvic area, or your knees keep moving over the front of your flap – these are just some of the things you could be feeling if you are a woman riding in a saddle made for a man. Clitoral desensitization also can occur if the

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rider is in a saddle which presses her against the pommel for extended periods of time.

Ladies - these are not fairy tales! These are facts based on science and documented evidence of many riders. Comfort in the saddle should not be compromised. A saddle should work like a well-fitting and well-worn shoe – not really noticeable yet very protective and supportive. Schleese is used to hearing the throng of voices saying “Bah humbug. My saddle is so comfortable; it fits me and it fits my horse and I’ve never had to get it fitted.” Their response is “Aren’t you lucky. Perhaps it could be that you haven’t had the chance to experience a truly fitted gender appropriate saddle – and your horse has not had the luxury of being ridden in a saddle that truly fits in dynamic movement.”



Consider if the saddle has not been evaluated and fitted by a professional, perhaps the horse has become so tolerant of poor fit, and has accommodated his movements to the restrictions imposed by the saddle, that his conformation simply does not change or cannot change.

There are several design characteristics of a saddle made for women, as illustrated in the accompanying photo (bottom right image on this page). In short:

1) Width of the seat to accommodate the wider seat bones and larger/higher gluteus maximum

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- 2) Skirts need to be attached lower on the seat leather with flat seaming
- 3) Twist is usually narrower than for a man to allow the leg to hang straight and counteract the natural leg turnout
- 4) The pommel is at a flatter angle and the seaming of the waist is wider to avoid undue pressure at the pubic symphysis
- 5) Seat foam at the cantle needs to support the higher glutes and shorter tailbone
- 6) Main support area of the saddle for the proper balanced seat (this is where we have instituted our “crotch comfort” area)
- 7) High and steeply angled cantle to support the pelvic position
- 8) Balance point of the saddle (generally further forward than in a “male” saddle to support the pelvis)
- 9) Extended stirrup bars to accommodate the female leg which is generally longer from hip to knee than knee to ankle – will help the proper straight leg position in dressage

If you're interested in finding out more about what riding in a gender appropriate saddle can do for you, please contact Schleese for your own 80 point diagnostic evaluation. And happy, pain free riding. For you. For your horse!

For more information, visit www.saddlesforwomen.com or call 800-225-2242.

	MALE	FEMALE
Backbone/shoulder and seat bones	The male pelvis is wider apart in a more masculine	The female bones closer together
Spinal column	Wider back	Narrower
Balance point of pelvis	Pubic symphysis, shorter pubic length, wider pubic angle, shorter ischial spine, shorter femur, longer seat bones and pelvic symphysis	Pubic symphysis, longer pubic length, narrower pubic angle, longer ischial spine, longer femur, shorter seat bones and pelvic symphysis
Pubic Symphysis	Longer and more horizontal in why it fits the pommel area	Shorter, higher than female, more vertical - will fit better seat
Hip joints	Pubic symphysis is the pivot point for the hip joint. The male pelvis is wider apart and all cartilage	Pubic symphysis is the pivot point for the hip joint. The female pelvis is narrower and all cartilage
Upper leg	Female upper leg is longer. Female femur is longer. Female tibia is longer. Female fibula is longer. Female tibia and fibula are longer. Female tibia and fibula are longer. Female tibia and fibula are longer.	Female femur is shorter. Female tibia is shorter. Female fibula is shorter. Female tibia and fibula are shorter. Female tibia and fibula are shorter. Female tibia and fibula are shorter.
Quadriceps and hamstring	Female quadriceps are longer. Female hamstring are shorter. Female quadriceps are longer. Female hamstring are shorter. Female quadriceps are longer. Female hamstring are shorter.	Male quadriceps are shorter. Male hamstring are longer. Male quadriceps are shorter. Male hamstring are longer. Male quadriceps are shorter. Male hamstring are longer.