In this extract from his book *Suffering in Silence, the saddle fit link to physical and psychological trauma in horses* (J A Allen, £19.99), Jochen Schleese considers commercial dilemmas facing the saddle industry.

**Economics versus education**

Many of the traditional and newly rediscovered realisations about the cause and effect of saddles, anatomy, and riding were not documented in literature until recently. Saddle fitting is still not part of the curriculum in many of the mainstream educational programs within the equestrian industry—whether for body workers or veterinarians; nor is it yet included in the training to become a professional rider or trainer. It is an unfortunate, though realistic, fact that saddle issues are the cause of many behavioural and training problems, as well as being responsible for a lot of lameness, which is more often than not addressed pharmaceutically rather than physically.

To better accommodate the physiological and anatomical requirements of horse and rider, the saddle industry needs to undergo a shift in willingness to produce a product that takes these into consideration, for example, by incorporating a fully adjustable gullet plate into the saddle tree.

There are already a number of companies that have embodied into their designs wider gullet channels, adjustable gullet plates, and larger panels for better weight distribution over the saddle support area. However, there are still too many saddles on the market that are simply not adjustable and do not take the horse’s requirements into consideration.

It is not only the lack of knowledge and a certain inherent resistance to change that hinders innovation and new designs being introduced to the market. It is a long and expensive process to bring a new product to the consumer; to change an entire mindset to produce completely different saddles using new technologies and state-of-the-art information is even more difficult to achieve.

One of the main obstructions in this process is the simple fact that both manufacturer and retailer likely have a huge inventory of saddles remaining—made and bought without the benefit of this new knowledge—and these still need to be sold! What happens to these thousands and thousands of saddles not made in accordance with these criteria? What about the client who just bought one of these new saddles?

This is an unfortunate situation that is simply ignored by many companies, even if they know that there are alternatives out there that would definitely be better for the horse and rider. This is where the conflict arises between knowing what is right and doing what is right.

Yes, of course, restocking a saddle inventory that is made using the anatomically correct criteria is an extremely expensive proposition—not only for the above reason. Even the manufacturer could not immediately revamp the entire production process to accommodate these criteria.

Developing new saddle models requires planning and beta-testing of prototypes. New moulds will need to be made, new patterns designed, and possibly new tools and machinery required. And none of these guarantee instant success or resonance in the marketplace. Even a structured and focused marketing campaign will not result in immediate sales.

Market testing and acceptance by the end consumer are crucial, as are the actual results and changes seen when a saddle is used. The new designs need to be seen as being more effective than what is currently available, and this can take years. Given that some of the damage attributed to a poor fitting saddle can take a long time to manifest. The attitude may well be, “If it ain’t broke, why fix it?” which leads to some resistance as well. Financial considerations for both manufacturer and retailer also take time to resolve when rolling over the inventory.

Riders will become more and more frustrated and angry as issues arise and saddles don’t fit time and time again. The end consumer will become more educated and able to draw her own conclusions, based on findings on the Internet, at conferences, symposia, and seminars, and will be able to ask the relevant questions and raise the arguments for or against saddle designs.

The pressure to design a mainstream offering of physiologically and anatomically correct saddles will come from this person. If we ignore this, horses will continue to suffer long-term damage. The more critical the end consumer becomes, the faster saddle manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers will bow to her wishes.

**Improving the connection**

The design team at Harry Dabbs Saddle Makers is consistently working to improve comfort, harmony and connection between horse and rider. And they believe they’ve hit the spot with two new saddles, the Italiano and the Future. The sleek, stylish Italiano jump gives a truly close contact feel. Featuring a wood laminated spring tree guaranteed for the life of the saddle, it’s covered with Italian calf leather.

With an open seat for quick position changing between jumps, the Italiano is available with either foam or wool flocked panels and comes in a choice of sizes and colours.

**Believe in the Future**

The Future saddle is designed to increase freedom of movement of the horse’s shoulder as it rotates, enabling strides to be lengthened with minimal interference from the saddle.

To achieve this, Harry Dabbs Saddle Makers have changed the cut (leg) of the panel used on most jump, GP and event saddles. Traditionally, the cut follows the line of the top flap; however, the panel at the front of the Future saddle has been cut away so that it can sit comfortably behind the shoulder.

To maintain balance and stability for the rider’s leg, the flap at the front has been reinforced. This also prevents the flap from collapsing against the horse’s shoulder and interfering with his movement.

The Future is available with event, jump or GP style flaps.

Harry Dabbs Saddle Makers 01922 612238

**Saddle fitting science on show**

Scientists and saddlery experts will share their knowledge at the second Saddle Research Trust (SRT) International Conference in Cambridge on 29 November.

BETA has negotiated discounts for members who would like to attend.

The event, supported by World Horse Welfare, will examine the latest scientific research on the interaction between horses, riders and saddles.

Advance tickets are £100, £75 for SRT members and students or £125 on the door. Email research@saddlerearchtrust.com or telephone 07775 912202 to reserve your place.