When mankind began riding horses, and saddles were developed to help keep riders astride their mounts, the original purpose of the saddle was to support the horse in his job. Saddles were designed to accommodate the demands placed on horses during activities such as combat, transportation, and sport. And since riding in long skirts was not practical and it was unbecoming for a woman to straddle a horse, side-saddles were created to allow women to ride.

Recent years have seen a change in saddles from mainly functional to often fashionable (featuring bling, silver, etc.). More recently, as the general demographic of riders changed to primarily women, gender considerations have been incorporated into the mix of saddle design for both English and Western disciplines.

**Western Saddles**

In Western disciplines, riders have been willing to spend quite a bit of money to get the right look, with fashionable saddles incorporating beautiful tooling and silver accoutrements. The basic design or style of the saddle can include many variations in the seat, fork, swell, horn, cantle, and skirts, depending on the specific discipline it is designed for. All of these can change with the discipline. Western saddles are categorized by fork style, intended use, tree type, breed type, material type, and production technique.

Let’s look at some of the more popular types of Western saddles by intended use.

Cutting saddles are designed for riders who will separate a single animal from the herd. The flat seat and wide swells help...
the rider stay centered. These are not overly secure saddles, but designed to keep the rider balanced and out of the horse’s way during starts, stops, and turns. They can also be used for penning and for training, even for reining if needed.

Roping saddles are made for demanding use and maximum freedom of movement for the rider. These saddles must have a strong tree and horn, with a lower cantle for easier dismount. The seat is usually deep and covered in suede for grip.

For barrel racers, the saddle is designed for speed — the cantle is higher, the horn is thinner and longer (easier to hold on to), and the swell and cantle are built to wedge the rider into position so that when the rider comes out of the gate and has to make turns at full speed, she sits securely. Many saddles also feature wider gullets and greater flare on the bars to help the horse move freely, and with forward-hung stirrups to keep the rider in position by being able to brace the legs. Since females also comprise the majority of barrel racers, these saddles are often very flashy with bold colours and materials.

In reining saddles, the cantle and swell are lower and the seat is shaped to allow the rider to sit further back in the saddle to stay out of the horse’s way. A reining saddle provides the rider with the close contact needed to communicate subtle commands to the horse for the meticulous
patterns of circles, spins, and sliding stops.

For the relatively newer sport of Western Dressage, the ground seat, the cantle, the swell, and skirts are designed to place the rider more forward and over the centre of balance on the horse’s back. The movement in this discipline is somewhat different from that in any other Western discipline. The horse’s head is ridden very low so that the back comes up — which means a different fit is required than that of a Western saddle in any other discipline.

Traditionally, Western saddles have focused more on fitting the rider, since only limited fitting to the horse could be done. The quarter bars, semi-quarter bars, or Arab bars were basically the only changeable options needed in the past. The horses used for Western disciplines were usually Quarter Horses, which were kept relatively pure in their breeding lines. Certain breeds were for certain jobs and there was less cross-breeding back then. Western saddle fitting is now more complicated since many more breeds are being ridden within the various disciplines.

The options for the rider in a Western saddle have also increased in recent years. For example, the bars can now be ordered with six different options, with innumerable variations in each combination of choices.

These options include:
- Length of the bar;
- Twist of the bar (this is a different term than used for English saddles). The ribcage of a horse is angled more steeply near the shoulders than towards the back;
- Curvature of the bars (the “rock” in the tree bars);
- Width of the bars (mainly in the front);
- Flare of the bars (how much the bars flare up in front of the swell and behind the cantle); and
- Angle of the bar (mainly towards the front).

Schleese Saddlery has taken this individualization a step further and offers split bars and split ground seats to allow both male and female riders to use the same saddle, as well as fitting options to accommodate different horse conformations.

**English Saddles**

English saddles have many more combinations of variables, some based on the same parameters as the Western saddle but with different nomenclature. These include saddle size, flap length and

Cheer on the world’s best as they compete for over $1 MILLION* in prize money at North America’s #1 Indoor Horse Show†.

Horse Show tickets also get you a FULL DAY OF FUN AT THE FAIR Take and directly to Exhibition Place

ON SALE NOW ROYALFAIR.ORG

*total prize money awarded at the 2017 Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. †Voted by NARG
position, cantle height/seat depth, billet number and length, stirrup bar position and length, and gender accommodation, to name a few.

The general purpose saddle has become somewhat less popular in recent years as riders who are serious about the sport prefer the correct saddle for their particular discipline. Traditionally the GP came in two main variations — one more suitable for jumping, the other more suitable for dressage, and both were made to suit one of the following rider categories:

- An entry level rider uncertain as to which discipline to concentrate on;
- A recreational rider who was comfortable jumping occasionally but was usually “just riding out”; and
- The rider who wanted to buy just one saddle that could more or less do it all.

Eventing (cross-country) and jumping saddles are fitted differently yet again. There has to be enough room, especially at the front of the pommel at the withers and trapezius muscle, for both shoulders to move forward/backward/upward simultaneously in an explosion over the jump. Although the preference for these two sports seems to be close-contact saddles, many riders tend to place their saddles a little too far forward over and on the shoulder, which inhibits movement at the shoulder and creates the need for multiple pads to help bring the cantle back up to put the saddle in a level position. Where’s the close-contact now?

Endurance saddles are also fitted differently because endurance horses tend to be allowed to move in a natural way with their heads high to see where they’re going. When the head is high, the back is down, and the saddle needs to be fitted differently than for dressage where the head is lower and the back is up. The muscle definition in endurance horses compared to dressage horses is completely different as well, with as much disparity as between Thoroughbred racehorses and endurance horses. Just as human sprinters are typically bulkier than long distance runners, the same holds true for horses in comparable activities, and the saddle must

---

**Inspired by Innovation**  
**The New Devin Trail Saddle**

The revolutionary fit, comfort and performance of our new Western trail saddle for women was inspired by innovation.

Like our unique split ground seat and split bars for example — innovations that deliver infinite adjustability and comfort for a lifetime fit.

For years, we’ve been hearing from women like you that available Western saddles are limited in their ability to adjust and fit properly. So, after 30 years of perfecting saddles specifically for women riders, we are pleased to have (finally) applied our world famous fit philosophy and unique design innovations to create uncompromising comfort and performance for Western trail riders.
Antibacterial spray bandage for horses with Tea Tree Oil.
Forms a flexible, breathable film which seals out water, dirt and bacteria, lasting up to 2 days. This spray bandage covers the affected area like a second skin and allows natural healing. Available in a 500ml handy-grip trigger spray bottle (non-aerosol).

National Distributor:  Canadian Centurion • 1-800-361-3860
Local:  Janian Imports • (604) 462-9238

Manufactured for:  Integrated Bio Systems Inc. 34282 Manufacturers Way, Abbotsford, BC  V2S 7M1
Phone: 1-877-501-5003 • Fax: 604-852-9016 • E-Mail: intbiosys@shaw.ca
www.integratedbiosys.com

Available in 1L spray bottle for easy and quick application to larger areas, or a 500ml rub bottle. A soothing combination of natural essential oils in a gentle cream base. Specially formulated with natural ingredients to assist in the relief of leg, mustle and joint strain.

Jochen Schleese, Certified Master Saddler, Equine Ergonomist, is a leader in the concept of saddle fit, and teaches his Saddlefit & Life® philosophy worldwide. He is also the author of Suffering in Silence, The Saddle-Fit Link to Physical and Psychological Trauma in Horses.

www.schleese.com
www.saddlefit4life.com