

QA Horsey shopping

Our experts



Brita Rizzi is a certified fitter for Dynamic Saddle Fitting. She's trained all over the world and competed in Germany.



Bomber Nel, Founder of Bombers Bits, has a clear vision for his bits – creating a clear connection starts with comfort.



The perfect fit

What signs might suggest that my horse's saddle doesn't fit correctly?

Emily Hartley-Widdow

Brita Rizzi answers:

Your horse's shape will change as a result of his age, workload, conditioning, nutrition and weight fluctuations, so even a saddle that fits perfectly at one time may fit poorly further down the line. This means it's essential to have the fit of his saddle checked regularly.

Horses are stoic and may work in discomfort without much complaint. However, there are some clues to look out for...

- sores, scars, white hairs or temporary swellings
- objection to being saddled
- muscle atrophy along the withers or topline
- sensitivity to being groomed
- inability to stand still or reluctance to be shod

- refusing to move, bucking, rearing or napping
- becoming cold-backed
- slow to warm-up or relax
- resistant to your aids
- subtle lameness or stumbling
- excessive spooking or lack of concentration
- rushing up or down inclines
- lacking straightness
- reluctance to round over his back
- rushing on the approach to fences
- swishing his tail, pinning his ears back, grinding his teeth or tossing his head
- finding collection difficult
- twisting over fences
- general loss of performance
- making wider turns or dropping his shoulder
- becoming gradually more unhappy during a ride

TOP TIP

If you have concerns about your horse's behaviour during work, ask your vet, saddler and physio to give him a full work-up to rule out any physical problems.



A medium sized fixed port

A medium sized broken port

Bits and pieces

A friend recently bought a ported bit for her horse with a sweet iron mouthpiece. What is this, and how might it help her horse's way of going?

Claire Wilson

Bomber Nel answers:

Many people find that their horse prefers ported bits over a traditional, single-break snaffle, because the port allows more room for his tongue. Despite many riders believing that a snaffle is a kind bit, those with a single break or joint actually distribute an uncomfortable action on the tongue, which some horses are uncomfortable with. Because the ported bit creates more space it's ideal for horses with larger tongues, such as cobs and draughts.

The pressures caused by a ported bit are mainly transferred to the bars of the mouth. With modern ported bits, you'll generally see a medium- to large-sized port that's either fixed or broken. The broken port has a central section like a barrel, which means the rein aids can act independently.

Many horses struggle with tongue sensitivity, which may be shown as headshaking, sticking their tongue out, trying to get the tongue over the bit, coming behind the bit to avoid the contact and snatching the reins forward. With more room in the mouth, a ported bit could help alleviate these issues.

Sweet iron oxidises naturally, which means it tastes sweet and stimulates saliva production. A sweet iron bit warms up quickly, encouraging acceptance of the bit.

TOP TIP

When sizing a bit for your horse, with an eggbutt, choose the measured size. For a broken bit, add 10mm from the measured size and add 5mm if the bit has a loose ring cheek piece.



DID YOU KNOW?

Take care using cooling clays, because if they aren't removed in time they can insulate your horse's leg and re-heat it as quickly as you've cooled it down.

Cool as a cucumber

I'm hoping to fit a couple of events in at the end of the summer, and I want to take good care of my horse's legs. Would it be worth investing in a pair of cooling boots for him?

Crystal Hunnigan

Horse&Rider answers:

Cooling your horse's legs and muscles after fast work is an essential part of the recovery process. There are plenty of ways to do it, but depending on a few factors, such as your budget and bandaging skills, it's important to find the right product for your needs.

Cooling boots come in a variety of options – some require freezing, while others can be soaked in water. Soaked boots are unlikely to cool your horse's legs as effectively, so ice is likely the better option. Ice boots can be tricky to transport, but packed into an airtight cool box they

should stay frozen for the duration of the day. High-quality cooling boots can be expensive, but they're easy to use, quick to put on, require minimal preparation and are very effective.

A budget option is to wrap ice cube bags in a J-cloth and put them on under your horse's boots. Never allow the ice to be in direct contact with your horse's legs, and take care to remove the boots after 20 minutes or as soon as the ice is no longer having a cooling effect, whichever comes first. As with ice boots, you can transport the ice in a cool box to keep them cold while you're out and about.

Fundamentally, anything you can do to cool your horse's legs is better than nothing. Whichever method you pick, always take care to wash your horse's legs thoroughly and check for any cuts or scrapes before applying your chosen cooling product. There's also no harm in mixing methods, perhaps by using soaked boots after fast work and an ice boot or freezer bag bandage on returning to the yard.

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