



Introduction to Treeless Saddles

Introduction to Treeless Saddles: Why treeless, how they work and where to start

Why treed saddles?

- Horses were primary transportation
- Typically long duration low intensity riding
 - i.e. walking on the trail
- Typically carrying extra weight in packs that needed to be distributed

What has changed?

- Now riding is typically short duration and high intensity
 - .e. jumping, trotting, cantering, small circles, sharp turns, etc.
- Typically carrying rider and limited other items
- Equine conformation
 - Shorter backs, more well sprung rib cages, bigger front end movement

The Treeless Saddle System

- Treeless saddle
 - Some have layers of materials to aid in weight distribution and spinal clearance
 - Others have panels, either fixed or movable, to aid in weight distribution and spinal clearance
 - Some have both, layers of materials to create a soft tree with external panels.
- Treeless saddle pad
 - Need at least full length inlays in a pad for treeless saddles.
 - Width and material of inlay depends on the saddle and your horse's conformation.
 - Ideally a pad with ability to shim for saddle balance.
 - MOST quality treeless saddles impression pad test well with "mid" level padding, for example a merino pad with felt inlays. Some need more robust padding depending on the saddle, rider and horse, for example a merino pad with 20 mm 3mesh inlays PLUS



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- felt inlays. Some with external panels test well with less padding, like a cotton/polymix treeless pad with 10mm 3 mesh inlays PLUS felt inlays.
- “Mid” level padding is a safe place to start for most saddles, riders and horses.
 - See the impression pad tests for further info:
<https://www.havenhorsemanship.com/impression-pad-tests>
 - Appropriate girth material, length and shape
 - Leather or elastic
 - I am not a fan of neoprene or no slip materials
 - Western and dressage girths should have buckles at where the muscle of the foreleg meets the horse’s barrel.
 - Straight vs anatomic vs crescent
 - This depends on your horse’s girth groove. This is covered in advanced fitting.

Treeless Saddle Types

- “Glorified bareback pads”
- No or limited built in spinal clearance
- Built in spinal clearance
- Adjustable systems

Brand Overview

- This is not an exhaustive list, but it covers the majority of the most popular International and US brands. If you’re curious about another brand, feel free to contact me. If you think a brand should be added, please contact me.
- No or limited built in spinal clearance, not adjustable
 - Bob Marshall
 - Freeform (older models)
 - Circle Y models
 - Sensation (older models)
 - Black Forest



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- Total Contact Saddle
- Built in spinal clearance, not adjustable
 - Ansur
 - EasyTrek
 - Heather Moffett
- Adjustable systems
 - EDIX (most models, pommels/gullet plates, some panels)
 - Trekker (pommel and panels on all models)
 - Hidalgo (panels)
 - Startrekk (pommels and panels)
 - Ghost (panels)
 - Barefoot (pommels)
 - EZ Fit (panels)
 - Sensation (post 2018 models have exterior panels with some adjustability)
 - Freeform (newer models have exterior panels)

Fit for Horses – First Things to Check

- Weight bearing length
 - Saddles that sit over the scapula
 - Measure from center of scapula to where last rib meets spine
 - Brands and models with interchangeable fiberglass or wood pommels
 - Saddles that sit behind the scapula
 - Measure from a couple of inches behind the scapula to where the last rib meets the spine
 - Brands with external panels
- Pommel angle
 - Too narrow: lower edge of pommel is making contact, upper edge is not



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- Too wide: upper edge of pommel is making contact, lower edge is not
- Just right: whole surface of pommel is making contact

Fit for Rider – First Things to Check

- Seat size
 - There is some subjectivity to seat size, less so in English saddles, more so in Western saddles.
 - English, your upper leg length must fit with your knee on the flap and the angle of your upper leg length and knee should follow the curve of the flap. This means that upper leg length correlation to seat size depends on the model of saddle (GP vs dressage vs jumping)
 - Western, seat size is more set. You should have a couple of fingers between your thigh and the side of the pommel. If you prefer a shorter stirrup length, you may need a slightly larger seat size. If you prefer a longer stirrup length, you may feel more comfortable in a slightly smaller seat size.
- Flap length
 - For English saddles, $2/3$ of the rider's leg should be on the flap. Flap length (from iron bar to edge of flap) should therefore be $2/3$'s of your preferred leather length (from iron bar to top of iron). In general, a too short flap is preferable to a too long flap.
- Balance point
 - Balance point of a saddle and whether it is appropriate for the rider, the horse and their activity is a complicated topic, it will be covered in advanced fitting.
 - Balance point refers to where the design of the saddle encourages the rider's center of gravity to align. Many aspects of design influence balance point, the flap shape, flap tie in, position of iron/stirrup bar, depth of seat, twist/waist location, etc.

What do different brands offer?

- Again, this is not an exhaustive list, but it may give you an idea of where to start. If something is incorrect here in your experience, please let me know! If there's a brand that you think should be added, please contact me.



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Brand	Entry level models for \$1500 or less	English	Western	Endurance/hybrid	Show legal models
Bob Marshall			X	X	X western dressage
Freeform		X		X	X dressage and western dressage
Circle Y			X		X western dressage
Sensation		X		X	X dressage
Black Forest	X		X	X	
Total Contact Saddle	X				X with some set ups in certain dressage situations
Ansur		X	X	X	X dressage and western dressage
EasyTrek	X	X			X dressage and jumping
Heather Moffett Vogue		X			X dressage
EDIX Saddles	X	X	X	X	X dressage, western dressage, jumping
Trekker Flexible Saddles				X	
Hidalgo Sattel	X	X	X	X	X dressage, western dressage, jumping
Startrekk		X	X	X	X dressage and western dressage
Ghost	X	X	X	X	X dressage and western dressage
Barefoot	X	X	X	X	
EZ Fit	X		X	X	



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Please let me know what questions you have and I'm happy to help you to the best of my ability!

You can email ari@havenhorsemanship.com if you'd like to discuss further course work:

Basic Treeless Saddle Fitting: assessing your horse's conformation, assessing rider build and preferences, saddle balance

Advanced Treeless Saddle Fitting: "hard to fit" types, the full picture of treeless saddle fitting, back mapping, impression pad testing

Professional Treeless Saddle Fitting: continuous fitting, biomechanical assessment of horse and rider, virtual fitting vs in person fitting