

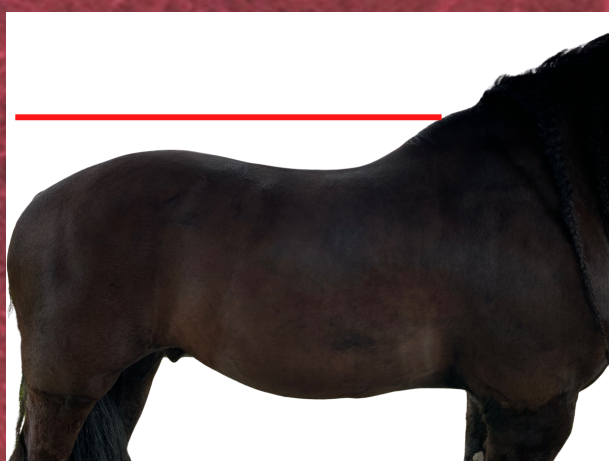
# Trilogy Tips

## Five Common Reasons for Lower Back Soreness Under Your Horse's Saddle

Some of the most important things to keep in mind when fitting a saddle, and keeping the horse comfortable, are even pressure distribution, balance and symmetry of the rider and saddle, and the musculature of the horse's body. Let's consider for these case studies that the tree width fits. Since all horses are asymmetrical, as are all riders, it makes it very challenging to get the saddle to sit in balance in the middle of the horse's back. If you are purchasing them a new saddle, there are a multitude of variables, and they're not always solved with a new saddle. For the best results, to assist in creating balance and symmetry with your existing saddle, we need to artificially create a symmetrical horse through padding and shimming.

### 1. If the Saddle Is Cante Low

The horse is higher in the withers than normal and the drop from the front of the saddle to the back of the saddle is too significant for a normal gusset. Additionally, if the pommel is perched too high, this often indicates a tree that is too narrow. The cantle needs to be higher. The rider needs to be able to ride in the deepest part of the saddle, which needs to be over their leg. The tree points are meant to be perpendicular to the ground. When cantle low, the tree point is no longer straight and is slanted towards the back of the scapula, creating a great deal of soreness. Cantle low focuses the rider's balance and weight into the back of the saddle, making it challenging to ride without the proper balance point. That localized pressure under the back of the panel creates soreness and, shortly after that, muscle atrophy where the muscle starts to waste away. This imbalance should be quickly addressed with shimming, or, in a new saddle design, a deeper gusset. Make sure that the shims you are using are beveled so that the shims blend into your horses back vs stacking them higher with a square edge under the saddle, which creates a major pressure point.



**High Wither with Excessive Drop to the Back of the Saddle - Will Need a Larger Gusset**



**Atrophy From Cantle Low or Asymmetry**



**Saddle Sitting Cantle Low**

### 2. If the Saddle Is Too Small For the Rider

When the rider does not have any room behind their seat in the saddle and the saddle's seat is filled to the edge of the cantle, there will end up being concerns. Even with a saddle that starts looking balanced, the panel will break down quickly and become unbalanced. The rider cannot sit in the deepest part of the saddle as most will find it difficult to ride without any room or consistency in where they can sit. You will also discover the leather in the seat will start to shift and wrinkle. This is because the leather follows the rider's seat, sliding down the back of the cantle while the rider tries to stay off from the cantle. Saddles are not designed to have a rider sitting at the back of the seat. Shims can help to maintain the balance longer as the saddle breaks down in the panel creating rocking, then a cantle low situation. Sometimes with a different length, location and angle to the block can be a game changer for many riders on a smaller or shorter backed horses.



**Short-Backed Horse That Requires a Smaller Saddle**

### 3. If the Saddle Position Is Too Short for the Length of the Saddle

Most have heard that the saddle cannot go past the 18th rib, otherwise the saddle is sitting on the lumbar without any rib support. When doing talks, this is an important part of horse selection- purchasing a horse that can support the size and length of your saddle. Often that is not the case. It is important to learn to identify where the 18th rib is located. Horses are like people in that they are short waisted and long waisted. The picture shown is a very long waisted horse. The average horse, I can fit about four fingers between their hip and the back of the 18th rib. As you follow the rib, it slants towards the front of the horse, creating a shorter saddle position that seemed to start in front of the hip. The tree is not inside the panel, so often the panel can be manipulated to avoid any issues. The tree ends where the panel joins the base of the cantle, under the round roll of leather. Again, sometimes a different length, location, and angle to the block can be a game changer for many riders on a smaller or shorter backed horses. The more forward, and sometimes smaller, the block, the more forward your leg and knee can be. This allows you to sit to the front of the saddle creating more room in the seat.



**Long Waisted Horse Creates a Shorter Saddle Position**

### 4. If the Horse's Back Is Low or Swoops Under the Saddle

It is imperative that the shape and depth of the saddle's panel, as well as the tree, reflects the shape of the horse's back. Included in this assessment is how much the horse's back lifts during work. A very slight belly lift can give you some indications of how flat a curvy horse's back can become. Be forewarned that fitting the saddle to completely follow the curve can stop the horse from engaging their back. The balance of the rider and saddle are affected by the conformation of the horse and it's back. Some horse's backs are low (sway), or often will have an upward incline starting at the end of the withers. If the back conformation is not addressed when fitting the saddle, this can cause the rider to feel like they are falling forward, bridging, and pain, which will result in atrophy (muscle wasting).



**Extremely Low Back**



**Back Inclining From Base of Withers**

### 5. Asymmetries

Shimming and padding are my favorite ways to manage asymmetry in a horse! When left without correction, the lack of even pressure distribution can be damaging and crippling, easily creating problems with performance and behavior. A cooperative, happy horse can start refusing flying changes, piaffe and passage, and even simple routine transitions. Identifying where the imbalance originates is always the challenge. Just remember that shims improperly applied can also be damaging. Often you are isolating a spot under the panel and beneath your seat, and sometimes it can require the full side of the saddle to be shimmed. Contrary to what you might think, it can be tricky because there are instances where the place to stop the saddle from shifting to the low side is by shimming the high side of the horse. At times it will be like a miracle has occurred just because you have shimmed the saddle to accommodate the balance, and you have made the horse artificially symmetrical.



**Asymmetries Affect Saddle Fit**

Of course, there is a great deal more to saddle fitting than what has just been discussed, but this is to stimulate your power of observation and perhaps make you a little more reflective regarding why your horse has stopped performing. There is a lot more coming up so don't forget to check out our website in our blog section. I am available for phone consultations and would love to have you send me your questions!

Stay tuned next month for more Trilogy Tips!