

**How to Fit a Western Saddle**  
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To fit a western saddle you must first measure your horse. You can't call a tack shop and tell them you need a regular or wide tree and expect it to fit just like that. Each saddle manufacturer has its own way of measuring saddles and they all are different. Even in the manufacturers themselves as most saddles are made by hand not by machines. This especially changes in a used saddle because they stretch with use.

To Measure your horse you need a flex-i-curve (which can be found at an office supply store in the drafting tools) or a piece of heavy coated 1/2" electrical wire, about 2' long. You'll also need a piece of cardboard or a piece of heavy stock paper. With this device you can make a form of your horses back with little expense. This will give a knowledgeable tack shop owner or employee a pretty good idea how your horse is shaped and help you in finding the right fit.

Start by finding your horses shoulder blade (easier said than done on some of our chubbier horses!!) When you find it take your wire and bend it slightly so it will fit over your horses back. 2 fingers behind the shoulder blade. Which by the way is where you should be placing your saddle to keep it from restricting your horses movement and making him uncomfortable. Be sure the wire is sitting flat on both sides of your horse before you remove it. Then carefully trace the inside of the form on your paper or cardboard. Take this form with you when you travel or send a copy of it to your tack shop advertising saddles and ask them if they have anything that may fit your horse. By using this form you can place it up inside a saddle and tell how its going to fit your horses back. No it isn't a sure thing. But it will tell you immediately if something won't fit though to save you extra miles or shipping costs.

When you get the saddle have your horse stand on level ground. For fitting western saddles you should be using the saddle pad that you will be using with the saddle. I recommend thick saddle pads for western saddles to protect the back. Place the saddle on the pad and slide it until it finds its natural resting spot behind the shoulder blade then at this point pull the saddle pad up into the gullet and girth up the saddle. Now is the saddle level on the horses back? The way to tell this is look at the skirt of the saddle it should be straight from front to back and not be slanting up or down , and the seat should have a level spot in it where you would be sitting. Now see if you can slide your hand under the saddle on both sides of the withers. This is very important you don't want it pinching your horse. You also should be able to stick a couple fingers under the horn of the saddle comfortably. After this check to see how far back the saddle goes towards your horses hip bone. You should have enough space between his hip and the end of the saddle so it doesn't rub. If you have a Morgan or Arab this is pretty common. More often than not a horse of this type would need a round or pretty short skirted saddle.

If all these things check out then mount up and ride in the saddle at a walk for 5 minutes or so then dismount and check the fit again. I've found that the thick western pads although are great for protection sometimes hide a fitting problem at first because you need weight in the saddle to "squish" them down!! If still okay then if the store allows it take the saddle out for a good test ride of walk , trot and canter for at least 15 minutes.. At this point be aware of your horses behavior and attitude. Is he exhibiting any bad behavior like pinning his ears, bucking or biting his sides? (any thing that he hasn't done before?) If so than the saddle maybe bothering him somewhere. Also be aware of how you fit into the saddle too. You should feel comfortable of course with enough room to at least put your hand on your thigh between your leg and the pommel. Your legs should hang down comfortably neither too far forward or back without your feet in the stirrups. When you pick up the stirrups notice if they are forcing you to ride in an unnatural position.

If the saddle is used take off and ride in it for a good long time so that you can get some sweat marks on the saddle pad. They should be fairly even, and your horses back shouldn't have any dry spots around his shoulders. Also watch for rubbing in the back skirt on his back. Of course if the saddle is new, most shops aren't going to want you to ride in it for this long because you'll also get sweat marks on the new saddle. So Its really important to check all the other points carefully.

If after checking you find that the saddle is too tight around his withers than your going to need a saddle with more gullet space. Take a measurement of the space between the gullet on the saddle. Most full quarter horse or Arab saddles measure 7", a quarter horse 6 1/2 and a semi 6. But this will vary, If the saddle is setting down on our horses withers you have to look and say either that the saddle is too wide or it could be your horses withers are pretty high and you just will need to look for a saddle with a higher pommel. A cutting or an A-fork. In any case, really visually check why your saddle doesn't fit and write it down with as many measurements as you can, this will help tons later.

After you find that saddle before you go on a long trail ride, or anything else, condition it really well over and under! Lexol conditioner is great and it comes in a spray bottle so you can get under the skirt and condition the stirrup leathers. You'll want to condition every speck of leather 2 or 3 times before you ride in it. This will cut down on sweat stains later. After you ride just rub your saddle down with a soft rag that has some kind of your favorite conditioner on it. I find by doing this I don't have to really "clean" my saddle only once a year or so. The less time you spend putting water on your saddle the better of you'll be.