

Saddles, Pads & SHIMS

from the Horse's point of view:

by Linda Parelli

Ahhh,.....How simple life was when we didn't know how much horses suffered from saddles that trap them, and stiff riders who sit in the wrong place!!

Since starting on this journey of learning about saddles that are kind to horses, I have learned A LOT and my horses have benefited immeasurably, as have hundreds of other horses that belong to our students. I look back at photos of Siren, my now retired Thoroughbred partner, and am shocked by how much I didn't know and therefore didn't see what his body was trying to tell me. How much healthier and more comfortable he would be if I just got him today, knowing what I now know!

It's thoughts like this that drive me to continue my research and bring the results to you and your horses. I love to hear the stories about how much your horses change mentally, emotionally, and physically when their saddles and riders are no longer causing discomfort...and even pain. I love even more that, when you get it right, the results are immediate. I even love helping solve frustrating problems like dry spots and ruffled hairs! In this article, I have more things to share with you...I want to make the concept of 'shims' more simple and to shed more light on the necessity of it all. I've also included a personal problem-solving story.

IF YOU USE A SADDLE, YOU PROBABLY NEED SHIMS

Have you ever seen a horse that is hard to saddle? He pins his ears, won't stand still, nips at you when you try to girth/cinch him up...and then, when you ride, he bucks, won't go forward, is impulsive or resistant? Horses are honest and responsive creatures, and they openly communicate about what bothers them through changes in attitude and body language. But something we often miss is how they communicate through their physical shape: the quality of their muscle development and ability to use their whole body to move.

The reason horses have trouble with most saddles, is because they pinch the horse as soon as he moves...the narrow gullets pinch their back, the front pinches the withers or shoulders, and the curved bars push the horse's back down, making it difficult for them to move.

Because it is so hard to find
the kind of saddle that horses like,
we developed our own.

The Parelli Saddles help our students ride more naturally and fluidly. If you've been present at any of our "makeovers", you know that the changes are profound...Hollow-backed, crabby, impulsive horses suddenly find nothing to be upset about; stubborn horses suddenly flow more freely forward; and riders find their Balance Point easily, instantly and securely. In order to have a saddle that is comfortable for the horse, it has to be a little too big for the horse, especially at the front. This is because, when a horse moves, his shoulder and back muscles have to bulge upwards. If a saddle fits snugly at rest, it's actually too small when the horse starts to move.

Try this test: When you sit in your saddle, is there room to push your fingers under the front of the saddle behind your horse's shoulders? If that spot is tight, you know it's pressing on your horse's shoulders, and that's all it takes for the horse to start having trouble.

The best way to create space under a narrow saddle is with shims, and the best way to get a wider saddle to 'fit' is also with shims. Shims can make up for atrophied muscles, hollow backs and a downhill posture where the withers are lower than the hips.

You will know your saddle was bothering your horse if, once you shim it appropriately, or change it, you feel like you're riding a completely different horse! We have all learned to fear dry spots on a horse's back, but what's worse is when the horse contorts his body to avoid the dry spots. This lulls you into a false sense of security--you might not get dry spots, but your horse's body may be changing shape and losing strength. You need to overcome both--and good pads and shims can help. BUT, there is nothing that beats the total formula of a good saddle, pad, shims and rider!



Please read MORE about:
HOW SHIMS WORK, and see our photo diagrams that illustrate 3 BASIC TYPES OF HORSES' BACKS and how to orient, organize and place your shims to best fill in where your horse needs them for optimum performance and comfort.

ALSO:
WHAT is it ABOUT SADDLES that BOTHERS HORSES?
SADDLES and WHERE TO PLACE THEM on your horse.