

Tack(y) Thoughts 2

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Last time we talked about saddle fitting and the care of all that expensive tack!! This time I'd like to mention all that other stuff that's so very tempting in the catalogs and tack shops.

Perhaps you admire a certain horse and rider combo and THEY use a standing/running/German whatever so you think that if it works for them, it's got to work for you. WRONG!! Hey, we've all made that mistake. Sometimes we try different things because they're there and we're looking for a solution to a certain problem. Sometimes we just want to throw money at our horses. That's fair. More often than not, however, like an aspirin, new equipment masks the problem but fails to truly solve it.

I once had a teacher who said that the whole thing was very simple: two things, it's a bad horse/rider combination for the path you want to pursue; there is NO substitute for hands, legs, and seat. Over the years, I have found both to be oh so true!! All right, few can afford the perfect combination and we must compromise! Resign yourself to the fact that it's never going to be perfect but, at the end of the day, it ain't all that bad. You love your horse and, provided both have smiles, the trip couldn't have been all that bad. The challenge is to get the most out of what you have. This is where equipment comes in. Sometimes, the rider hasn't the time or talent to improve the horse with arms, legs, and seat to the degree necessary. Buy the equipment (although I recommend you "rent" it from a friend first!). Use it for at least two weeks. Talk about the problem with everyone. Even a less experienced rider may have hit upon a solution for your specific problem. If a certain piece of equipment works ever so slightly, you've probably found a partial solution. Continue the arms, legs, seat thing, use the equipment when necessary and hope for the best. What you are getting may well be "the best". Live with it as long as it isn't dangerous. Give it time, time, time, the horse may "grow up", resign himself and things will improve. REMEMBER, it's often a physical thing with the horse!! If he hasn't the muscle to do whatever you're asking, he hasn't the muscle and that's the end of that. It will develop just like any athlete. Wait it out and see if it's improving little by little. This is where a ground person can assess the situation better than you can. But I digress.

There isn't time or paper to cover every piece of equipment on the market. "In the old days", we had a snaffle, a Pelham, a standing, and, rarely, a running martingale. We had a bat and a pair of spurs. That was about it. We all survived and I think these tried and true pieces of equipment are the first ones you should try. After that, there is such a myriad of stuff out there, that one should consult an "expert" for an opinion. Ride in front of an experienced teacher and log in plenty of opinions. Now that you are totally confused, re-read paragraph three. NOTHING is going to make that horse "perfect!" As to fitting all this equipment, consult the C USPC manual and a qualified friend. The dangers of poorly fitted equipment cannot be over emphasized!! A loose martingale or uneducated hands on draw reins is an accident waiting to happen. When we have lessons, ask the instructor to watch your horse in the new equipment and have her offer an opinion. She will be happy to comply.

All extra equipment should be taken care of properly. If you aren't using it, sell it or clean and oil it, put it in a non-humid environment and re-oil it once or twice a year. If you haven't used it for a while, recheck to make sure the leather hasn't dried out and rotted.

Bitting is another subject that I refuse to address. There are so many "variations on a theme" it's mind-boggling. You will have to go with whatever you feel suits your horse remembering that over biting can really scare him.

REMEMBER, ALL TACK MANUFACTURERS WANT TO SELL THAT WHICH THEY MAKE- IT'S A BUSINESS; DON'T FORGET IT. (They're doing very well, by the way!)