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Tack(y) Thoughts

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Let's talk about how important it is to correctly fit and care for your tack. You and your horse's comfort and performance are at stake. Also, as you well know, tack is very expensive and, therefore, needs to be well maintained. Buy the best tack you can afford. Good leather is well tanned, and supple; it will not easily break thus causing a tack(y), and dangerous, "buying of real estate!" Good leather lasts a very long time if properly conditioned and maintained.

Saddle fitting is important but sometimes overdone. Have your vet check to make sure it's sitting properly. A saddle should NOT interfere with your horse's shoulder. Make sure it is far enough back so he can move freely and the flap cannot pinch him. See that your saddle is straight in the seat when the horse is standing still and square. See that it does not rock. When you are in the saddle, there should be approximately a hand's width between your butt and the cantle. There should be three sideways finger widths between the inside of the pommel and your horse's withers. The withers should be protected at all costs, as this is one place where the nerves come together. You should also be able to see daylight through the gullet. This ensures that not only the spine is free, but also the saddle is sitting on the proper muscles. After riding, check your horse's sweat mark for any dry spots. This means that the saddle is putting too much pressure there. You may need to have it re-stuffed. If buying a used saddle, if you can squeeze the pommel and the cantle at the same time and bring them together even a little, your saddle tree is compromised; don't buy it.

Make sure to wipe off your tack with a damp cloth after each and every ride. Sweat is a killer and will rot the stitching. Twice a week do give your tack a good clean, perhaps with Castille soap that has been wiped off, and then put some kind of oil, neatfoot or vegetable, on the underside, the un-tanned side, so it can be absorbed by the leather. A simple once-over with glycerine soap will seal the pores and help to retain the oil. ALWAYS, ALWAYS see to your stitching. Check the billets, check ABOVE the billets where they are attached to the tree by cloth. Check for cracked leather, and check to make SURE the ends of your stirrup bars are in the straight position. NEVER, EVER raise those ends. It prevents the stirrup from separating from the saddle in case of an accident when you, unfortunately, seem to have your foot still in the stirrup!