YOUR HORSE INSIDE AND OUT
The more you know, the better they perform
Your horse’s digestive system…
What’s really going on in there?
Digestive System of the Horse

- Mouth
- Esophagus (4-5 ft.)
- Stomach (2-4 gallons)
- Small Intestine (50-70 ft.)
  - Duodenum, Jejunum, Ileum
- Large Intestine (24-27 ft.)
  - Cecum, Large Colon, Small Colon, Rectum
Mouth

- Mastication of feed (chewing)
  - chew side to side not up and down
- Saliva wets feed
  - produce approximately 3 gallons per day
- Regular dental care is very important
Esophagus

- 4-5 feet long
- Sphincter located at entrance to the stomach
- Horses cannot vomit
- Moves feed from mouth to stomach

Stomach

- Holds 2-4 gallons
- Extremely small in relation to overall size of horse
  - horses designed to be grazers
- Passes relatively quickly through the stomach
- Secretes enzymes and acid to break down feed
Small Intestines

- 50-70 Feet long
- 20-30 % capacity of GI tract
- Digestion and absorption of:
  - Protein
  - Soluble carbohydrates
  - Fats
  - Vitamins and minerals
Large Intestines

- Cecum
- Large Colon
- Small Colon
- Rectum
Cecum

- 3-4 feet sac
- Fermentation of fiber
- Bacteria, protozoa
- Carbohydrate spillage causes changes to microbe population can lead to colic and laminitis
Large Colon

- 10-12 feet long, 8-12 inches diameter
- 4 curvatures that are locations for impaction
- Be sure horse is drinking enough water
- Absorbs VFA’s and protein from gut microbes, water
Small Colon

- 10 feet long
- 3-4 inches in diameter
- Absorbs water
- Forms fecal balls
Rectum

- 1 foot long
- Store and excretes fecal balls
Tack Matters
Getting to know your Saddle
Knee Roll
Also called knee block or thigh block on dressage saddles

The block should end at the top of the rider's knee, and follow the natural angle of the fall of the thigh

- Designed to give rider support but not hold the leg in place.
- If the knee roll is holding the leg in place:
  - Rider’s lower back becomes rigid
  - Horse’s back becomes rigid
Knee pad

◆ Dual flap saddle
  ◆ Knee pad is the padded portion on the exterior flap that covers the block
◆ On monoflap and certain dual flap saddles
  ◆ Block is on the exterior of the flap
  ◆ So the knee pad is integrated into the flap

Wool can be either natural wool or a synthetic blend, protects the horses back from the tree and balances the saddle.
Point of Tree – tree points are in the front of the tree and come down behind the horse’s scapula

◆ IMPORTANT

◆ Tree points should not be on the horse’s shoulder
◆ Should be perpendicular to the ground
◆ They should follow the natural angle of the horses back
WHY DON’T WE WANT TREE POINTS ON THE SHOULDER

◆ Won’t move freely through the shoulders
◆ Can shorten stride
◆ Creates imbalance in the seat and pressure at back of panels

The distance between the tree points is what determines the width of the saddle and every brand has a different calculation to determine width.
◆ Stirrup Bar
◆ What the stirrup leather hangs from
◆ Some have a safety latch

◆ Skirt
◆ Leather piece that covers the stirrup bar
◆ Protects the inside of the rider's thigh

The stirrup bars should never be angled toward the horse. This causes soreness and hollow backs.
Pommel
The front of the saddle

The head iron, which strengthens and stabilizes the front of the saddle, is within the pommel
◆ **Twist** - Where the front of the saddle comes down into the seat.

◆ A twist that is too narrow can work against the horse by getting too tight at the base of the withers.

The overall shape of the tree dictates the width of the twist.
◆ Cantle - the back of the saddle (can be round or square)

There are numerous tree shapes and seat depths

The relationship of pommel and cantle height should not be used to determine if a saddle is fitting.
Panels can be made with foam or wool.

FOAM is a cut form and limited in adjusting to the angle of the horses back. The angle of the panel, if not correct, can cause pressure. This may lead to resistance in lifting the back.

WOOL tends to be more forgiving and can be adjusted.
◆ **Gusset** is a seam that forms an angle at the back of the panel.

Swiss style panels have no gusset seam. They tend to be more adaptable to the angle in the horse's back, as a set form has not been created with stitching.

The back edge of the panel can be gusseted or not.
◆ Girth Straps/Billet Straps

Can be long or short and attach to the saddle in a variety of places. When attached to tree points they are called “point straps” they help prevent saddles from sliding forward.

When fitting a short girth (dressage & monoflap saddles) They should come to a hand-span below the bottom of the flap.
Saddle Flaps
Layer of leather between the horse’s ribcage and the riders leg
◆ The flap should come to the thickest part of the riders calf

Sweat Flaps
The bottom flap, touching the horse.
CONGRATULATIONS!

YOU’VE COMPLETED PRO UNIVERSITY MODULE 1

Take our Quiz – Test your knowledge