

Checking the fit of your polo saddle

Ill-fitting saddles is a principal cause of lacking performance! Even before you detect pain or discomfort, your horses may start to display avoidance behaviour, directly affecting their ability to accelerate, or collect and decelerate or turn (think a pebble in your shoe).

Here's a simple guide to check the fit of your polo saddles. Please get in touch if you have any questions or are interested in a saddle consultation.

To check a saddle on any given horse: Put the saddle on the horse without a saddle pad and tighten the girth so that the saddle is comfortably secure.

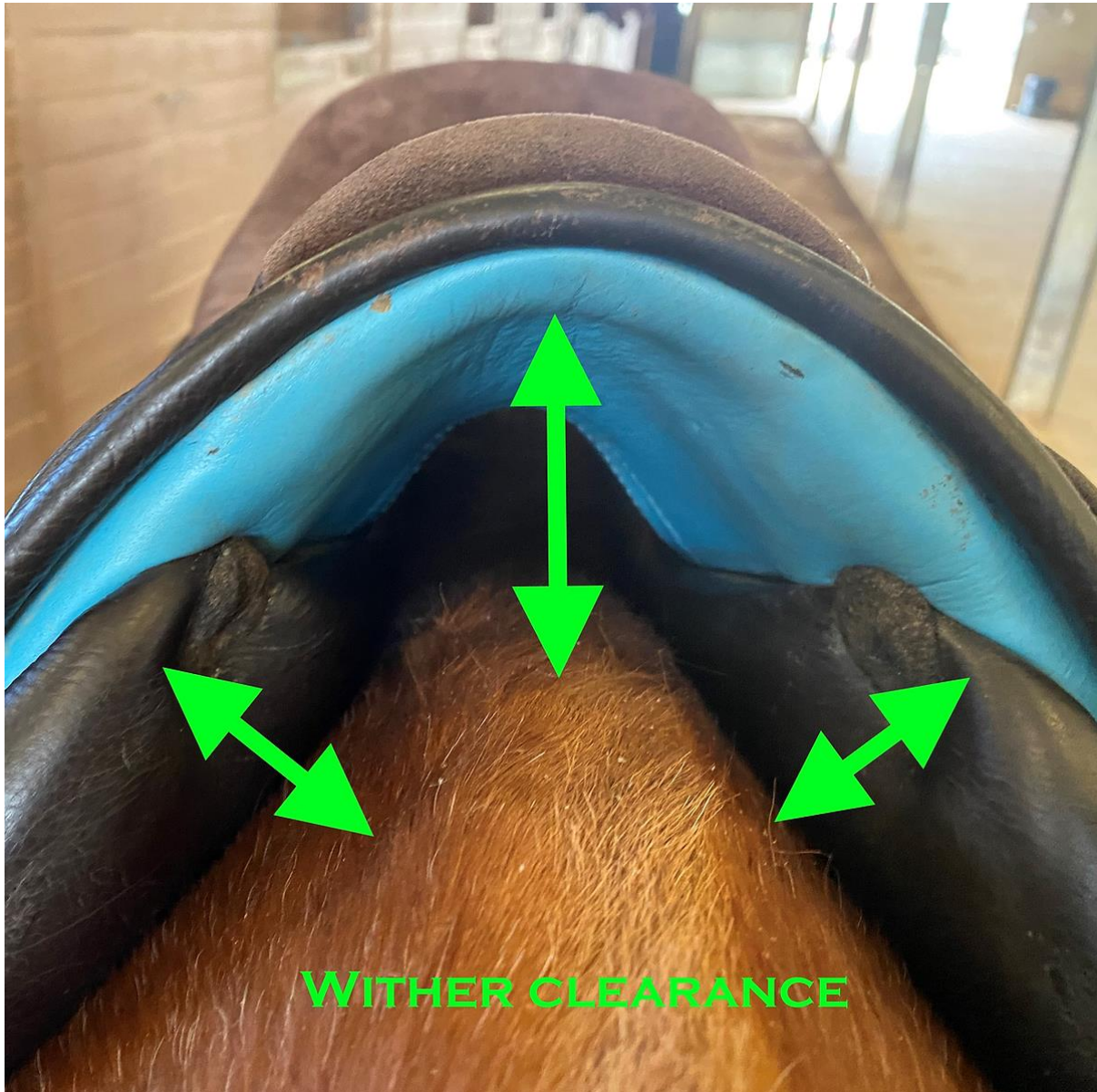
1 - Check position and length of saddle



Looking side on, check that:

- a) **the saddle is level.** If it tilts forward, the saddle may put pressure on the withers. If it tilts backwards, it may pinch the shoulders and it puts your weight too far back
- b) **the saddle doesn't extend beyond the 18th thoracic vertebra.** Your pony's back is the weakest beyond this point and should not carry any load. The last rib attaches to the 18th vertebra ... use your fingers to trace the last rib (red line, continue the line of the rib all the way to the spine to identify the 18th thoracic vertebra (black line)

2 – check wither clearance

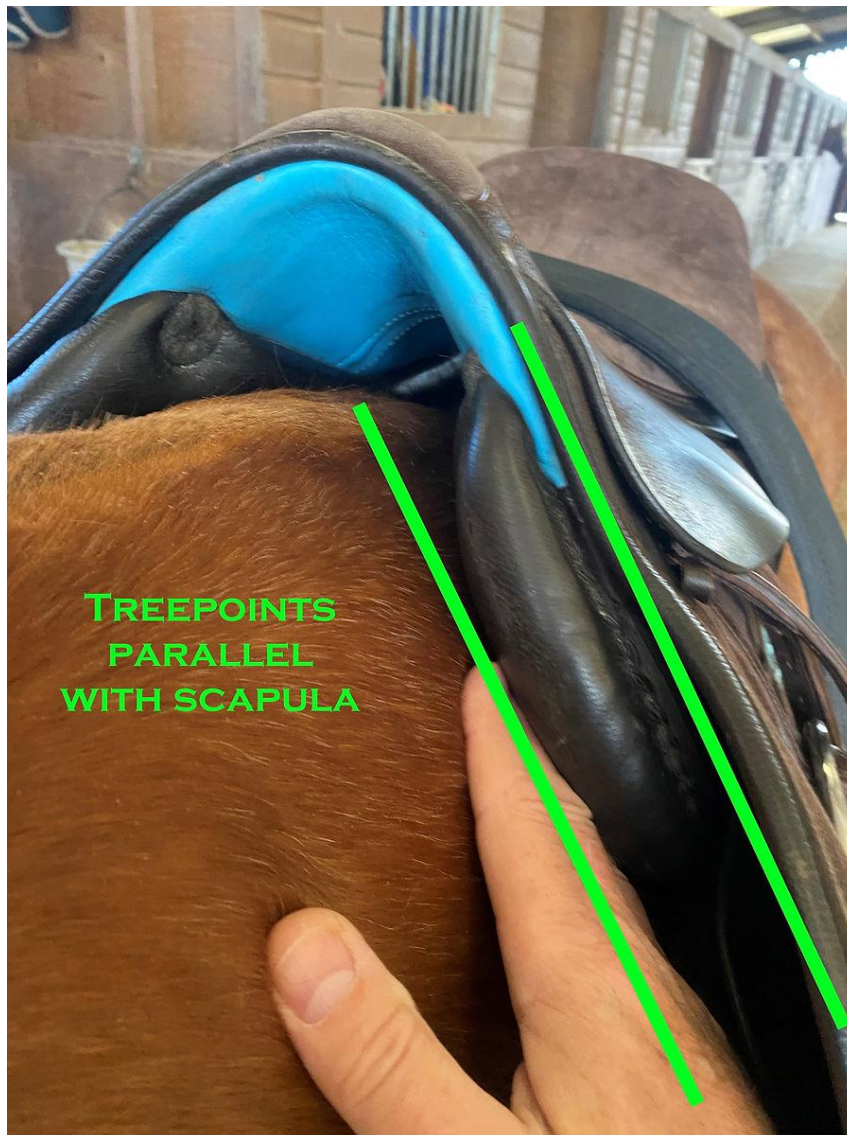


Both the top and the sides of the withers are extremely sensitive to pressure and pinching. Your saddles must:

- a) provide clearance at the top of the withers (2-3 finger widths), as well as
- b) avoid pressure on the sides of the withers (no direct contact)

Once the girth is done up and you have been in the saddle for a while, your saddle may well be much closer to the withers compared to the same saddle ungirthed and unloaded. Check the loaded clearances after a few minutes of riding. Lean forward in the saddle, as if reaching for a hook, then check that you still have clearance corresponding to 2-3 finger widths.

3 - Check angle of tree points



Tree points that are too narrow will pinch your pony's shoulders. If they are too wide, the saddle will likely put pressure on the withers. Check the fit by:

a) visually checking that the two green lines (the line to the right indicates the angle of the tree point and the line to the left indicates the slope of the pony's shoulder) are parallel

b) slide your hand between the panel and the pony's shoulder. The panel should have no direct contact at the top, and the pressure on your hand / fingers should feel the same as you slide your hand down along the inside of the front of the panel

Please note that most polo ponies change shape in the course of the season, particularly around the shoulders. The saddle that fits when a horse returns to work may not fit when that same horse has reached playing fitness.

Also, many polo saddles spread with age, some even in their first season, and the saddle that was fitting well last season, may rest on the withers in the second season.

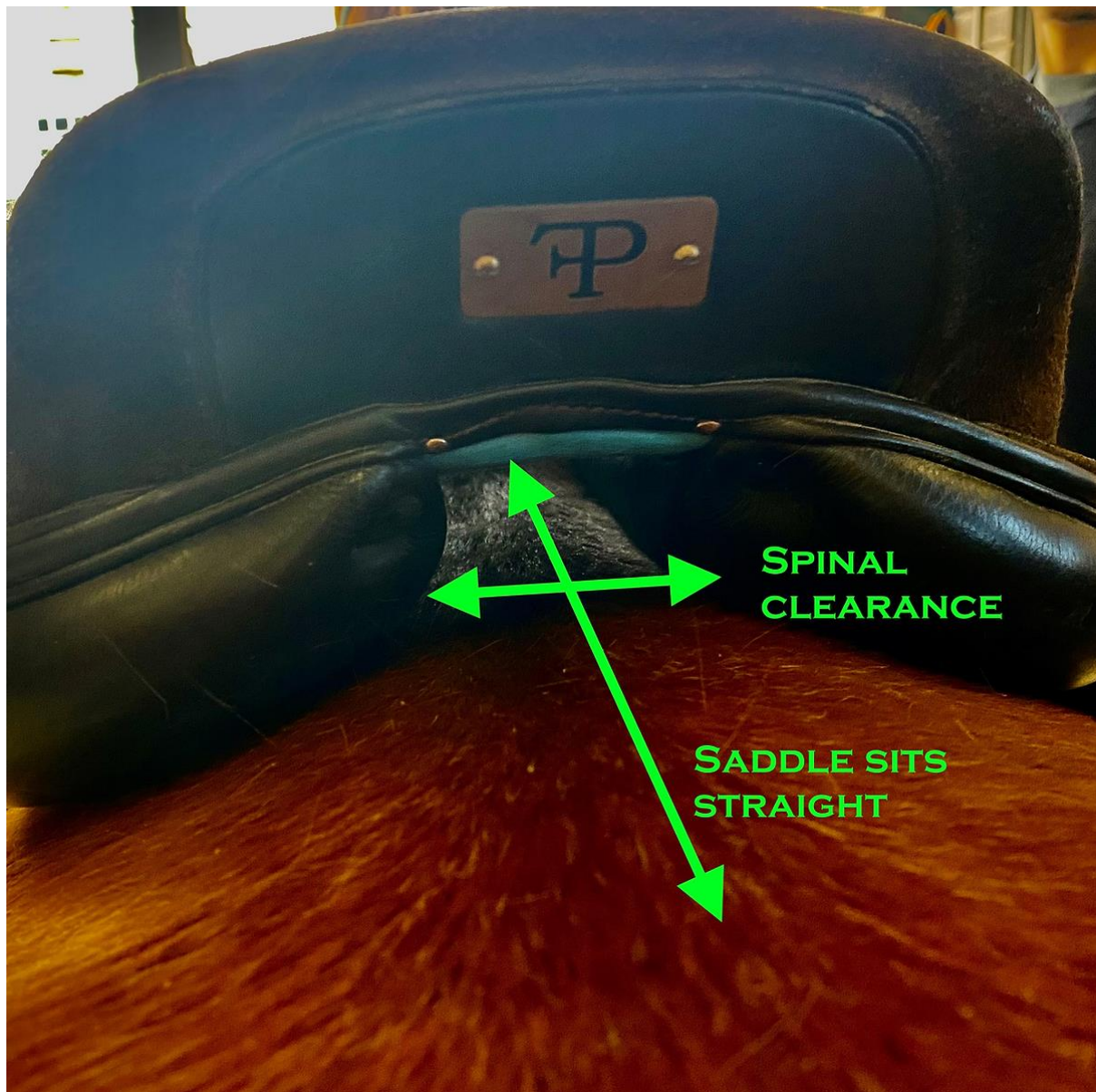
4 - Check panel contact



Lift up the flaps on your saddle and check that the panels are in even contact with the pony's back along the length of the panels. Do this by sliding your hand between the panel and the pony's back, from front to back. You should feel an even pressure along the entire length. Keep an eye out for two key issues:

- a) higher pressure in the middle of the panel.** Such a saddle will have a tendency to rock back and forth and it concentrates the load in the middle of the saddle
- b) if you can slide your hand under the middle of the panel with little or no resistance, then your saddle is said to be bridging,** focussing the load at the front and at the back. This is always problematic, but especially so if your pony suffers from a kissing spine, or the precursors of a kissing spine.

5 - Check spinal clearance and straightness



The channel / gullet between the panels should be wide enough to ensure that there is no contact between the panels and the pony's spine and the ligaments on either side of the spine.

Ideally you should measure the distance from the outside of the ligament on one side of the spine to the outside of the ligament on the other side, but as a rule of thumb the channel width should be at least 2"/5cm along the entire length (many polo saddles have channels that start wide but go narrower towards the back, thus leaning on the spine at the back).

Also check that your saddle remains straight once you've ridden a while as a crooked saddle may come into contact with the spine. A crooked saddle may be caused by a variety of issues but must be addressed.

What to do if your saddle fails any of the tests above?

The obvious answer is to find another saddle that fits well, and maybe you have such a saddle in your tack room. Otherwise, choose the Ainsley MVP, which ensures that your polo ponies are firing on all cylinders! Unique to polo, the MVP is adjustable to fit horses of different shapes, it is available with either memory foam or wool flocked panels, and the saddle tree is guaranteed for 15 years (no risk of spreading).

In addition, we will assist you adjust and fit your MVP saddles for your horses, in person or by video call.

Order your MVP saddle(s) here:

MVP Series 1:

<https://www.p-polo.com/product-page/MVP>

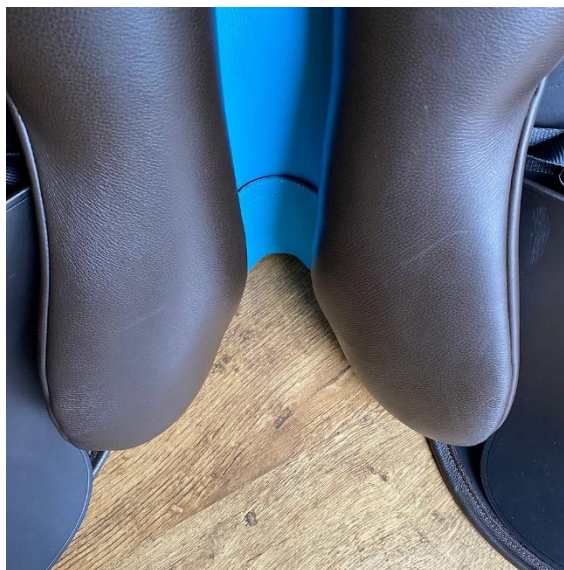
Slimline memory foam panels - ideal when your horses are of similar shape and you have no access to local saddle fitters



MVP Series 2:

<https://www.p-polo.com/product-page/ainsley-2-polo-saddle>

Wool-flocked panels – can be modified for perfect fit. Ideal if your horses each have their own saddle. Extremely comfortable



[mvp-series-](#)