

Girth Guidelines

By the Australian Side Saddle Community (ASSC)



Correctly fitting saddlery is essential in all riding disciplines — and side saddle is no exception. Your saddle must be safe for the rider and fitted correctly to the horse to ensure comfort, performance, and welfare.

Saddle Fit

- The saddle must be correctly fitted, centred and straight.
 - It must not touch the horse's spine or impede shoulder movement.
 - The saddle must be fitted with either a quick-release safety bar or a safety iron (2 cm wider than the widest part of the rider's sole).
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Girths

- A leather girth is preferred. Where a long balance strap is used, the girth must have a centre keeper to prevent slipping and pinching.
 - Three-fold leather girths are generally the most suitable and are considered the correct girth for side saddle. These are typically wider than standard astride girths, allowing pressure to be distributed more evenly and helping prevent saddle movement and pinching.
 - Synthetic girths are acceptable; however, elastic-ended girths are not permitted.
 - Buckling will differ depending on whether you are using a long girth with short points (buckling under the flap) or a short girth with long points (buckling below the flap).
 - With short girths and long points, careful attention must be paid to the position of the buckles and pressure on the horse.
 - Due to sensitive anatomy and the risk of elbow interference, buckles should sit approximately even on both sides of the horse — particularly when using anatomical girths designed to sit centred over the sternum.
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Buckles & Horse Welfare

Your horse's welfare is always the highest priority.

- Girth buckles must not come into direct contact with the horse, as this can cause pinching and discomfort.
 - Ensure the girth is the correct length for your saddle and point configuration.
 - When using long girths with short points or short girths with long points, select a girth designed to prevent buckle contact with the horse.
 - Lonsdale-style girths extend beyond the buckles, helping protect the horse from pinching. These should be checked regularly, as buckle attachments may stretch over time.
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Professional Fitting

The Australian Side Saddle Community strongly recommends that an experienced side saddle fitter assess your saddle, stirrup leathers, irons, and girth to ensure correct, safe, and comfortable fitting.

Below left: this girth is not fitted correctly, a longer girth is advised in this case to ensure no pinching occurs to the horse



Below right: for saddles with longer points choose a girth that has the buckles protected from contact with the horse



Handy Tip:

Girth buckle guards are commonly used on short girth points under the saddle flap. However, they can also be very useful if your girth does not extend far enough to reach the saddle. Simply invert the guard and slide it onto the girth points so the buckle guard sits between the horse and the girth buckles — a simple, effective temporary solution until a more suitable girth can be sourced.

