



SIDE SADDLE

All things aside

Riding side saddle isn't just a discipline, it's a dance between tradition and strength, elegance and resilience, writes **SIMONE JOHNSON**.

As a passionate side saddle rider, I've dedicated myself to preserving and promoting the timeless elegance of riding aside. While side saddle riding is steeped in tradition, it represents far more than history. It's an expression of grace, strength, and enduring beauty. Whether in competition, on parade, or during public demonstrations, it never fails to turn heads and spark conversation.

My journey is deeply personal. Before her passing, my dear friend, mentor, and supporter Wendy Tidbold, who devoted much of her life to this beautiful discipline, entrusted me to continue flying the flag for side saddle in Australia. It wasn't just a request; it was a legacy to carry forward. I gave her my word.

Since then, I've achieved international certification by becoming an American Sidesaddle Association qualified instructor. Wendy was also a qualified instructor, and I'm honored to follow in her footsteps, continuing the work she held so close to her heart.

It has been a joy and privilege to share this art with others. I've welcomed riders who have travelled hours to learn, including women with disabilities, graceful ladies well into their 50s, 60s, and 70s, and even one enthusiastic gentleman. Youth have also shown great interest - proof that the future of side saddle riding holds promise.

Riding side saddle has always been imbued with a unique sense of empowerment. Historically, it offered women the same freedom and independence in the saddle as men, while still allowing them to embrace grace and femininity.

Contrary to popular belief, riding side saddle is actually much more secure than riding in a regular saddle. Side saddles are designed with two horns: a fixed horn and a leaping horn. The rider gently hooks their right leg around the fixed horn without twisting their body, while their left leg rests naturally against

the horse's side without pushing the knee into the leaping horn

When the 'emergency grip' is engaged, this unique design offers remarkable stability and can provide significantly greater security than a traditional saddle, especially in challenging situations when a horse might buck, bolt, or rear.

Unlike the standard attire worn by astride riders in the show ring, I wear the traditional side saddle habit, comprised of a finely tailored jacket, a safety apron skirt, and a top hat of appropriate crown height and a veil. This habit became standard from the 1900s onwards. The look is both elegant and timeless.

Historically, the colour of the habit held significance: married women traditionally wore black, while navy was reserved for unmarried women - a subtle yet meaningful detail rooted in side saddle tradition.

Concours D'Elegance is a personal favourite for me. The classes allow competitors to wear the earlier and very elegant side saddle outfits. I own a habit made by Foxgloves Habits in Wales which is as replica of the outfit worn by American Socialite Josphine Pomeroy-Herrick in 1888.

I've had the pleasure of winning and placing in several Concours D'Elegance classes in this outfit, each time celebrating not only the beauty of the costume, but the history and artistry it represents.

Each ride is a tribute - to Wendy, to the generations of women who came before us, and to the joy of keeping this beautiful tradition alive.

Riding aside is more than just a skill; it's grace in motion and the preservation of a bygone era through the timeless elegance of side saddle. 

If you're eager to know more about riding aside, visit [SS Equestre](#) or the [Australian Side Saddle Community](#) site.



ABOVE: Simone has enjoyed success in several Concours D'Elegance classes in this stunning habit (Image Sharyn Hine). **BELOW:** Competing with Featherdale The Drumroll (Image Chris Seen Photography). **LEFT:** The outfit inspired by American Socialite Josphine Pomeroy-Herrick (Image Down Under Photography).

