

## A VERY SPECIAL SADDLE

My horses have found their dream saddle. During the recent visit to Hestheimar , in Southern Iceland, I asked a saddle question. Mainly because I had spotted the same saddle that I have, on a stand among many others. My question,

“ How do you know which saddle will fit the horse for all the rides especially the longer rides?” For a trekking or even day ride business, horses must be sound, comfortable and lasting the season in good condition. Happy horses means satisfied customers. I booked a ride and Marteinn put his saddle out for me to ‘find out’, to find the answer for myself. I certainly did.

This saddle was comfortable for me and my horse was obviously content and responsive without argument. When I removed the saddle I noticed that it had stayed exactly where it had been placed. It had made contact with the full length of the supra-spinal muscles. These are the muscles that need to develop in place in order to support the rider away from the spinal processes. The contact and stimulation help these muscles to develop into full length support and therefore distribute the rider’s weight evenly. In turn, the horse is able to maintain a more consistent balance which aids its gaits. The rider is more able to maintain their balance so that the horse does not consistently have to move its balance to catch the rider’s in-balance. This is what new Icelandic horse riders were taught. We were taught that the balance is the key to riding this low center of gravity horse with a tall rider. Rather like a ships mast, the further up the mast a weight goes the more unstable the boat becomes. I have experienced this in one of those terrifying but controlled moments in life!

The saddle I speak of is made in Reykjavik in the saddle makers own home. There are two styles, both fashioned from English leather. I chose the model BARRI with a more open form and with an 18” seat. The tree of these saddles is formed so that it conforms to the movement of the horses back. This form also contributes to less weight. It is obvious from my enthusiasm, that I brought one home.

My horses cannot speak but as it is said, ‘ actions speak louder than words.’ I have been amazed at the subtle differences. In bit acceptance in one horse, Tölt action in my four gaiters, Tölt in my five gaiters and the fact that the saddle fits broad-back, short- back, long- back, down- hill build and also makes a difference to their obvious comfort without any padding, sheep-skin, gel pad etc.

There is a web site for these two saddles [www.drakboda.se/js-saddlery.html](http://www.drakboda.se/js-saddlery.html) the saddle maker Jón Sigurdsson has been in business for over 25 years. His saddles are never returned for repair although he and his wife do repair saddles. Switzerland has one person spreading ‘the word’ and this is obviously a small scale production so definitely no threat to larger distributors. I am speaking enthusiastically only from my own experience. [susanandsteve@xplornet.ca](mailto:susanandsteve@xplornet.ca) or go to the site Dakota Consulting J S saddlery STAKKUR

I wrote about this experience and my observations before I discovered that there is a web site. Originally I had said that there was not as I only had an E mail address. We each make decisions for our own reasons and based on gathered knowledge. It is good that there are many paths to the 'ROME' of saddles for the Icelandic horse. This just happens to be mine via the roads of quite a few brands of saddles, some of which were not specific to this breed and did fit with modifications.