

FTBS FIT DESIGNATIONS

The different fits are labeled with a one or two letter designation. In addition, a general description of each follows along with the more familiar breed-specific or back-type classification. These limited descriptions cannot be readily utilized for fit determination but will assist when comparing one to another.

J - Semi-Quarter Horse (Semi)/Arabian (Arab) - Steeper front and rear rafter angle and closer-spaced bars relative to Standard Quarter Horse fit when positioned at standard spread. In addition, sufficient bow (rocker) enables this fit to conform well to the short Arabian back having a narrow wither dropping off quickly to the shoulder.

D - Standard Quarter Horse (SQ) - Approximate 92° front rafter angle. Good front flare, bow and upturned tails to avoid bridging and bar edge pressure points.

TF - Full Quarter Spread (FQ) - Same bow (rocker) and wind (twist) as 'D' fit with an additional 1/2" front spread ('GW+1/2' or '+1/2') than standard.

NE - Straight-Back Quarter (SBQ) - Similar flare and rafter angle to the 'D' fit with much less bow. Developed for straighter backed, well collected horses. Also works well for mules that require a flatter front rafter than the 'SE'.

SE - Mule (Mule) - Reduced bow and steeper front rafter angle to conform to the distinctive mule back. Helps prevent the back of the saddle rocking up when cinched, which creates tremendous pressure under the stirrup leather when the rider's weight pushes it back down.

HA - Draft Horse (DH) - Approximate 105° front rafter angle. Flatter rear rafter also and less bow for broad, flat backs with little dip.

LT - Gaited Horse (GT) - Steeper rear rafter angle, additional front flare and more bow relative to the 'D' fit.

PW - Walking Horse (WH) - Similar to LT with steeper front rafter angle.

AW - Full Wither (FW)/Arabian (Arab) - Flared out front and rear to allow for full or mutton wither with no pockets. The resulting bow enables this fit to conform well to the short Arabian back having wide withers rounding out into the shoulder. The AW has also been found to work for more dipped-back draft horses.

X - (Fit Form not yet available) Performance Quarter (PQ) - Flatter front and rear rafter angle and less convex front bar pads allow for the broad wither and well-developed shoulder muscles of the highly trained, daily ridden working quarter horse. A more open waist facilitates collecting and core development.

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Our vendors have been supplied a list of the trees they use, indicating the fit of each. We are urging them to include the fit designation along with the other saddle tree information routinely provided with each saddle.



Purveyors of Quality Saddle Trees for over 150 Years



Please note in the FTBS FIT DESIGNATION descriptions that the 'TF' fit results from spreading the front of the 'D' fit an additional 1/2". All fit forms save the 'TF' are molded with the bars set at 'standard' spread. A wider spread of an additional 1/2" over standard spread is noted as '+1/2'. All fits can be spread farther apart or moved closer together from standard spread. Rafter angles will remain the same with only the distance between the bars changing. The necessary spread alteration can be determined by moving the fit form either toward or away from you while keeping it level. Please see 'FAQ' for how you can utilize FTBS for your next saddle purchase.



SADDLE TREE
FIT
DEMONSTRATION
SYSTEM



Saddle/Saddle Tree Fit

As the oldest and largest manufacturer of classic wood western saddle trees, we at Steele Saddle Tree receive a large volume of inquiries regarding saddle fit. The majority come from riders who are experiencing difficulty finding a proper fitting saddle for their horse. These horses are frequently described as 'unusual' shaped because every off-the-rack saddle they've tried causes soring, is unstable, won't stay in position, or their horse acts up when it is placed on the horse's back; all of which can be indications of improper fit. I can assure you as a saddle tree maker with literally dozens of available fits, 'unusual' is the new normal.

When horses were the chief mode of personal and family transportation in this country, they were bred to a somewhat uniform conformation within the breed. A saddle represented a considerable investment, so it wasn't necessarily replaced as often as your horse. The saddle often needed to properly fit your last, your present and your next horse. A horse that didn't fit your saddle rendered your investment worthless, so was not in great demand. 'Unusual' shaped horses were relegated to activities other than riding, such as pulling wagons and carriages or plowing. With the present demand for carriage and plow horses at essentially zero, there is now only one major market for horses - Riders. Uniform conformation, as a prerequisite for buying a 'riding' horse, has disappeared over the past century as the understanding and awareness of proper fit has declined. In other words, there was a time when if you bought a 'riding' horse, chances were it fit your saddle. There are no longer 'riding' horses, 'carriage' horses or 'plow' horses. They're all 'riding' horses now! But riders continue to consider proper fit a given (though there is a growing awareness of the problems associated with improper fitting saddles). We're never going back to the way it was, so the next step is to increase rider knowledge of proper fit in order that these 'unusual' shaped horses must no longer suffer under poorly fitting saddles.

It All Begins with the Saddle Tree

In the simplest terms, a saddle is an upholstered saddle tree. Some trees require the saddler to create and shape the saddle seat, but the underside shape, or 'fit', is not routinely altered by the western saddler. Therefore, how your saddle fits, or conforms to your horse's back, is determined primarily by the shape of the tree inside. If the tree doesn't fit properly, neither will the saddle. There are pads that enable you to fill in the spaces created by or resulting from an improper fit. These function well for fine tuning a relatively close fit, but cannot completely compensate for a drastically improper fit, so should not be used as a permanent substitute for a truly proper fitting saddle tree / saddle.

What is Proper Fit?

At Steele Saddle Tree we define proper fit as achieving contact between the tree and the horse's back over as large an area as possible while not creating pressure points during normal riding activity. This distributes the combined weight of the rider and equipment over as large an area as possible, thus reducing the pound per square inch ratio (*the more square inches of bearing surface, the less weight per square inch with a given load*). There is no single, absolute definition of proper fit because different riding disciplines benefit from slight variations. For instance, a barrel racing tree gives the rider an advantage if it has additional clearance at the ends of the bars so that 'bridging' and the associated restriction is not an impediment to the horse when bending around the barrels. A cutting tree gives an advantage to the rider by having a flatter rear rafter angle. This allows the rear of the saddle to float, thereby not restricting the horse's maneuverability by locking the horse's rear end to its front. There are as many of these slight variations as there are disciplines but, in general, more contact means less pressure per square inch and thus less likelihood of restricted blood flow and skin/muscle trauma.

Fit Classification-Confusion Rules

Despite the near-universal use of measurements (gullet, spread, etc.) and breed- or body type-specific descriptions (semi-quarter, full quarter, draft, gaited, etc.), there are NO INDUSTRY-WIDE ACCEPTED AND UTILIZED STANDARDS for saddle tree fits! It's every saddle tree maker for themselves; one tree maker's 'quarter horse' fit is not necessarily the same as another's. Even within some tree maker's own lines, the same fit description can be applied to entirely different shaped trees. Furthermore, it is impossible to accurately describe - especially for comparison purposes - the complex, three dimensional shape of a saddle tree using a few measurements from one side to the other.

Determining Your Needs and Selecting Your Saddle

Due to the reasons mentioned, it is virtually impossible to determine that your horse needs, say, a 'quarter horse' fit. The only way to know if a particular saddle truly fits your horse is to place a tree identical to the one inside the saddle onto your horse. This is impractical and more often than not, impossible (*How many stores have trees that correspond to all saddles in stock?*). *Steele Equi-Fit* saddle trees are the only ones on the market that adhere to an across-the-board standard of fit that can be readily tried or demonstrated on your horse using 'Fit-To-Be-Seen' (FTBS), the Equi-Fit saddle tree fit designation and demonstration system. An overview of *Fit To Be Seen*® (FTBS) follows.



The FTBS System provides for both identification of existing fits and demonstration of these fits on individual horses.

The surest way to know how a saddle truly fits the horse is to put a saddle tree identical to the one inside onto the horse's back; something both impractical and often impossible to do. This situation arises because there are no official, industry-wide standards or a uniform classification system for the fit (underside shape) of saddle trees and thus saddles. Tree makers, saddlers and riders must use either ambiguous, breed-specific names or the three frequently used measurements (gullet height, gullet width, and bar spread) to describe or classify the many fits available. Even when a saddle is said to have a certain fit, there is no real way to know the true shape of the tree inside, i.e. a saddle labeled as a quarter-horse fit. It is fair to ask and reasonable to expect accurate, factual answers to the following questions

- **Who made the tree?**
- **What shape does that particular tree maker call a quarter-horse fit?**
- **Is every tree maker's 'quarter-horse fit' the same?**
- **Is this one identical to the last quarter-horse fit saddle bought?**

Answers have been hard to come by - until now.

To answer these questions and eliminate any uncertainty regarding *Equi-Fit*® saddle trees and the saddles built on them, Steele Saddle Tree Company introduces *Fit To Be Seen*® (FTBS), the *Equi-Fit*® saddle tree fit identification and demonstration system. FTBS consists of nine 'fit forms'. These fit forms are fibreglass moldings that duplicate precisely nine of the most widely used fits in our *Equi-Fit*® saddle tree line. When placed on the horse's back, the fit forms literally allow the fit to be seen unobstructed by the saddle skirts, rigging and stirrup leathers. We realize that not everyone is an expert on fit, but serious fit problems are usually obvious with an unobscured view.

Fit To Be Seen® was developed in response to the many requests we receive for information concerning saddle fit and to address the near total absence of information available concerning same. Additionally, it is not possible to accurately describe the three dimensional shape of the bottom of a saddle tree using three measurements or a breed-specific name. Absent universally accepted and utilized

standards, FTBS enables us to clearly identify and actually demonstrate a cross section of our extensive variety of fits. *Fit To Be Seen*® also enables saddlers to demonstrate the fits of their various saddles to dealers and stores, gives sales representatives a system to classify the fits of the various saddles they represent to buyers, and allows stores to provide what amounts to 'custom' fitting of the 'production' saddles they carry to individual horses. Everyone benefits: saddlers, stores, sales representatives, riders and - ultimately - horses.

Buying a saddle by labeled fit only - actual fit to the horse's back unseen - could be compared to buying a pair of shoes without being able to try them on. . . just buying ones labeled 'long and narrow', for example, because persons of your ancestry tend to have long, narrow feet; then not even knowing for certain if they are long and narrow until after you buy them and try them on. FTBS eliminates the guesswork. No longer must riders wait on dry spots, white hairs, swelling or sores to find out their 'quarter horse' saddle doesn't fit their quarter horse. Stores will never have returned saddles due to fit problems that would have been obvious with FTBS, and sales representatives can precisely identify the fits of their saddles. Fit To Be Seen makes it possible to know, before the sale, exactly how the *Equi-Fit* tree inside is shaped and see how that shape conforms to the horse's back to be fit.

FITS NOT CORRESPONDING TO FTBS

We produce many fits in addition to the nine that can be examined on your horse using FTBS. These are designated either 'classic' or 'unique/exclusive' (U/E). 'Classic' denotes fits developed prior to 1989 and are currently used by more than one saddler. 'Unique' fits are both 'classic' and one-of-a-kind fits used by only one saddler but available to everyone. 'Exclusive' fits embody customer ideas or are designed to their specifications. Examples or demonstrations of 'exclusive' fits must be obtained through the saddler. All others not corresponding to the FTBS fit forms may be examined the old-fashioned way - Using an actual tree.