

## Bit's letter of the month

*Christine Linneweever's mare always gets a little soft lump on her back after riding. And to Christine's horror it is located exactly on the spinal column. Can her saddle be the cause of this? Bit asks master saddlemaker Danny Kroetch for his expert's opinion.*

An osteopath treated Christine's seven-year old mare on her back several times. It has made the mare easier to ride and has improved the muscles on her back. Could the little lump be the result of the new muscles? Or could it be that the saddle simply doesn't fit as well as it used to? Christine excludes that possibility by riding in her twentyfive year old saddle. No lump. It has to be her regular saddle. But it seems to fit, and she likes riding it so much. So what could be the cause of the problem? Christine explains. "I would be willing to buy another saddle if that is what causes the problem, but I would have to know which saddle will fit my horse perfectly. What should I look out for? And how do I prevent the lump?"

Danny Kroetch is a master saddlemaker. That is something completely different than a saddlemaker. Kroetch knows all about the build of a horse, the build of a rider, what goes on in both bodies during riding and the interaction between the two. On top of that he knows how to fit a saddle properly. He is the ideal person to take a look at Christine's problem. The moment Kroetch sees the mare, he can already tell a lot about her. He talks about the anatomy of the horse and explains how the mare moves and behaves when Christine is riding her. He states that Christine sits incorrectly because the saddle fits poorly. "Your right leg is more to the front on the horse and she is probably strong and difficult to bend on the left-hand side." Christine admits surprised that he is right. "Your horse is asymmetrical and your saddle has to be adjusted accordingly, otherwise the saddle will intensify the asymmetry of your horse." Kroetch feels the back of the horse. It is sensitive to the left and right of the withers. The saddle is brought in. When Kroetch puts his hand under the saddle at the left and right of the withers, it pinches. That means the tree is too narrow and therefore presses on the shoulder of the horse. Then he takes his hand further down and the saddle doesn't apply any pressure there at all. "This means that the skin of the withers is pulled down every step and that hurts the horse." Furthermore the back of the saddle flaps in motion. "Your horse needs a wider tree, which at the same time should fit more tightly on the shoulder. Wider on top and narrower further down." So what caused the lump? "The skin consists of seven different layers. The saddle causes friction and that then causes a swelling with fluid. The friction occurs over and over again and so the swelling returns every time." Kroetch is a great advocate of saddles with a flexible tree that can be fitted for every horse. Christine's saddle can be adjusted to fit a little better. "But even then it will not fit well enough. Not for your horse and not for you." To prove his findings Kroetch lets Christine ride a well fitted saddle for half an hour. Immediately afterwards they take off the saddle, and as it turns out: no lump.

Christine returns home satisfied. "I know now that my saddle doesn't fit and what to look out for when buying a new saddle.

Marjan Tulp