



PONY CLUB
AUSTRALIA

Why Not Try...?

The Discipline of the Month

Side Saddle



Five reasons to try side saddle

1.

1. It is a great way to test and improve your balance and your horse's responsiveness to the aids like seat and voice.

2.

2. Pony Club allows you to use side saddles at rallies and training days.

3.

3. Potentially any type, age and breed of horse can be ridden side saddle.

4.

4. Believe it or not, some horses actually go better in a side saddle than they do astride.

5.

5. It's much harder to fall off. Not impossible, but not as likely!



info@ponyclubaustralia.com.au

www.ponyclubaustralia.com.au



PONY CLUB
AUSTRALIA

A Brief History of Side Saddle

Both men and woman have been riding both astride and side saddle all throughout history.

Contrary to popular belief, it is not a discipline that discriminates based on gender and is not a 'female only' discipline. Often, it was a male who broke the horse in to a side saddle (lower photo), schooled and trained the horse aside as well as rode the horse to and from the hunt for the woman.

Riding side saddle only become the popular and the preferred way of riding for woman in 1382 when Anne of Bohemia rode across Europe to marry King Edward II.

Anne rode side saddle, or rather sideways, in a chair like 'saddle' that involved her sitting facing sideways on her horse, with her feet on a little wooden rest called a 'planchette'.

Moving forward to the 1500s, the 'sideways' style saddle then progressed to one that allowed the rider to face forwards on their horse giving them the ability to control the horse themselves and not have to be led.

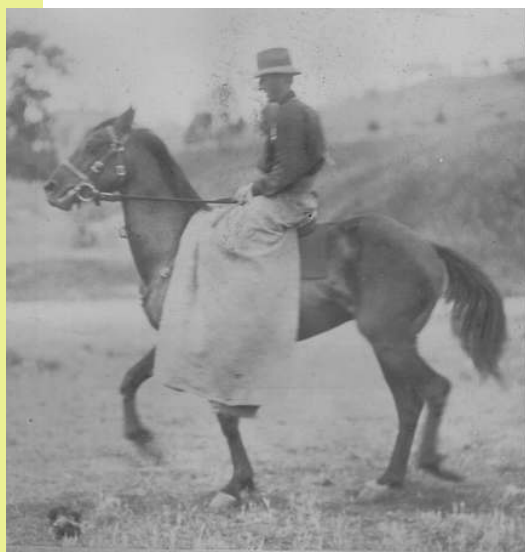
This saddle had an upright 'pommel' (also referred to as the fixed head or upper crutch) that the rider wrapped their thigh around to remain secure in the saddle through the paces faster than a walk, with their other foot in a stirrup.

Between the 1500s in to the mid 1800s the saddles progressed further to the design that we know them as today with the upright pommel and now the addition of a lower pommel, called the leaping head.

The seat of the saddles also progressed from being dipped (like a dressage saddle) to flat. This design afforded the rider complete control of the horse through all the paces including galloping as well as jumping.



Mrs. Esther Stace clearing 6' 6" on Emu Plains at Sydney Royal in 1915 riding side saddle. Their record held until 2013.



'Peter the Breaker' from the 1920s, getting a horse used to being ridden side saddle and in a skirt.

Photos from The Pennefather Collection, courtesy of the Equestrian Memories Australia Facebook page.



Yes, you still sit straight!

Riding side saddle means having both of your legs on the one side of the horse's body. This can be either the near side or the off-side of the horse though near-side side saddles are the most common type available.

This is a discipline that requires a special type of saddle; you can't just swing your leg over to the side in your regular saddle. Side saddles are purpose built for the discipline and can be bought second hand, new, made to measure or even hired.

Despite being called 'side' saddle you actually sit straight and centrally on your horse's back. The specially designed saddles distribute the riders weight evenly and balanced across the horse's back. When looking at a side saddle rider from behind it should be almost impossible to tell that they are riding aside. The whole upper body from the shoulders to the seat bones should be sat straight and square, just like riding astride.



One paralympian rode side saddle at Tokyo - and scored well. Barbara Minneci & Stuart (Belgium)

How to Get Started

This is not a discipline you want to venture in to alone and you certainly do not want to go out and buy the first side saddle you see!

To ride aside correctly and comfortably, the saddle must fit the riders specific thigh measurements as well as the horses entire back profile. If the saddle doesn't fit the horse, rider or both, it can be incredibly uncomfortable and even dangerous. There are also many 'fake' side saddles available for sale on eBay and Gumtree which riders need to be aware of. More often than not, cheap does not equal safe!

It is highly recommended that if you're interested in giving side saddle a go, you should seek the experience of a specialist side saddle instructor who can first give you a lesson to ensure both you and your horse enjoy the discipline then help you source a correctly fitting saddle either for hire or purchase.

Same Side Equestrian In Victoria, is a specialist side saddle business whose main focus is to teach side saddle within Pony Club at rally days.

They can also provide a list of contacts by state available to assist with side saddle lessons and/or side saddle demonstrations and theory.

We thank Stacey Rusic from Same Side Equestrian for her assistance with this guide.

<https://www.samesideequestrian.com/>





What to Expect From a Pony Club Side Saddle Lesson



Stacey Rusic at Same Side Equestrian in Victoria, is a specialist side saddle business whose main focus is to teach side saddle within Pony Club at rally days.

Here's what she (and others) do:

What you can generally expect from a side saddle rally day at Pony Club:

- A theory talk on the history of side saddle, parts of the saddle, where you can/can't ride side saddle in Australia, correct dress/turnout for the horse and rider as well as addressing any questions from members.
- Some side saddle experts will bring a range of side saddles out to your club for the riders to have a go on their own horses. The saddles will be correctly fitted to each horse and rider combination, and riders will be taught how to correctly mount, ride through all paces, possibly a small jump and how to dismount.
- For those who can't bring saddles or offer lessons, they may offer a ridden demonstration instead so you can see a competent side saddle rider go through all paces and possibly even a jump in addition to the theory component.



Right: It is hard to fall out of a side saddle.



Side saddle design - why change a good thing?



Spanish Side Saddle

ABOVE: The design of the side saddle hasn't changed since the late 1800s. Even a side saddle made brand new today will still be made to the same design. There are not many things that can be over 100 years old and still be considered modern! This saddle is a 'Champion & Wilton' that was made in 1901. It is ridden in today for showing, dressage and show jumping and even used at Pony Club!

Photo: Same Side Equestrian.



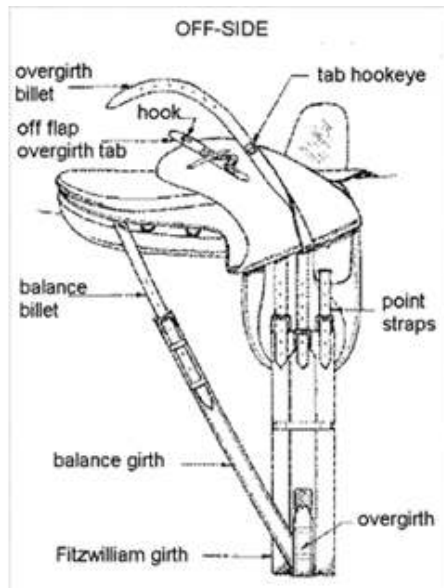
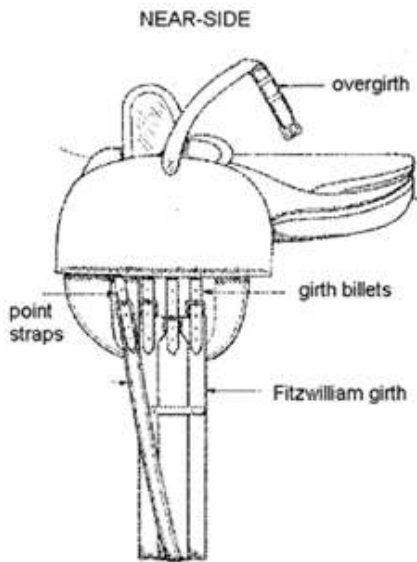
Western side saddle



Side Saddle Record Jump

The current Guinness World Record for the highest jump in a side saddle was set by Irish rider Susan Oakes in 2013 when she cleared a whopping 6'8 (2.07m) puissance wall. Prior to that the record was actually held by an Australian rider named Ester Stace when she cleared 6'6 (1.98m) at Sydney Show (Photo page 2)

Queen Elizabeth rode side saddle at the 'Trooping Of The Colour' parade every year until 1986 which was the final year she rode in the event, opting for a carriage from 1987 onwards.



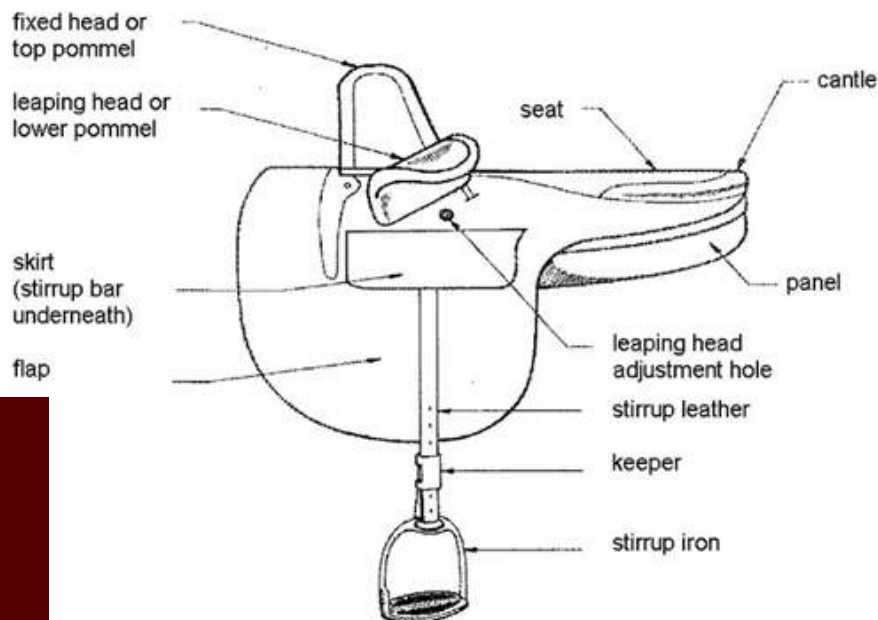
LEFT: Parts of a side saddle - from both sides.

Saddle trees showing the difference between a normal or 'astride' saddle and a side saddle. It makes it easier to see why they say it is hard to fall out of a side saddle.



Side Saddle Parts

RIGHT: A near sided side saddle with all of its parts listed. If you were to look at an off side side saddle, everything would be the same just in reverse. Note the flat seat.



Fun facts about side saddle:

- Side saddles can be made in different 'styles', just like an astride saddle.
- While English side saddles are the most common, you can also get Western and Spanish side saddles.
- Like astride saddles, side saddles can also come in different brands. Some popular brands of English side saddles are: Champion & Wilton, Mayhew, Owen, Martin & Martin and Whippy.
- At one point saddle makers like Stubben and Syd Hill also manufactured them as well.
- Some shows will have classes specifically for side saddle riders. If they do not, most associations will allow you to compete in 'open' hack or hunter classes in your side saddle.



Amanda Marfleet in the Lady's Sidesaddle Class at Sydney Easter Show, 2000. She is riding Russian Draught Horse Minkara Park Norman. Photo: Australian Horsesports 1999-2000 and Equestrian Memories Australia Facebook page.

Your challenge now is to invite a side saddle expert to your Club and try a fun new way to ride - then send us your photos via messenger or email

PCA Facebook or projects@ponyclubaustralia.com.au



7

If you are looking for activities to try at your Club or at home, all previous Disciplines we have covered so far are

[on our website here:](#) or

visit www.ponyclubaustralia.com.au/sports/disciplineofthemoth

