

Mortack has introduced its Gazelle line to complete the Arc de Triomphe saddles. "It's a look-alike level to make the entry-level riders feel like they're just as important," said owner Rebecca Bisilliat.

The 24K saddle from Thornhill (8) has "a whole new look," said Schmidt. "The cantle is tapered for that French look, and we switched to French leather. It's a very grippy leather, extra comfortable and has a secure seat." This model

features white stitching on leather edges of skirts and flaps.

Overall, saddles shown for 2004 address riders who shop for performance. "We are very horse friendly," said Frank Baines of Frank Baines Saddlery. "Horse and rider can't exist without each other."

He added his philosophy of the saddler's goal: "You want to get the rider feeling comfortable and in unison with the horse—and the horse feeling like he has no rider at all." 8



## Beyond the Mainstream

"My horse's face softened," said Amber Benson about changing to the ANSÜR saddle. "I can feel his back muscles through me, and I know my aids get to him easily. I don't have to overaid."

Like many amateur riders, Benson seeks harmony with her horse. Riders like her are willing to investigate alternatives to increase comfort—from companies that market directly to riders.

The treeless ANSÜR saddle is a dramatic design, with layers of cowhide to move with the horse. Without the rigidity of a tree, the saddle promotes communication between horse and rider.

"The complicated part of my design is the simplicity of it," said designer Peter DeCosemo.

Another model marketed directly to consumers is the Freedom Holistic saddle from Mondial Industries. It is the only saddle licensed by the British Association of Holistic Nutrition and Medicine. With a unique tree, the saddle conforms to the horse's back to free the shoulders.

"The tree inside our saddle is notched," explained Bill Rodgers of Mondial. "It works like a spine, as a unit with the horse's back."

Trainer Mary Trowbridge praised the Freedom. "The horse is able to open his shoulder and never feels constricted. I can feel the front of the saddle open."

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