

Circle Y makes a line of Trail Gaiter saddles. This saddle design allows the horse to move easier in the saddle.

“We identified the type of horse, gaited type, and designed a saddle that would also help the horse move better on the trail,” said Fordyce. “It allows for the freedom of movement that a gaited horse requires for performing its desirable gait.”

Trail saddles are known for being light weight, which helps the horse not feel as weighed down when spending time on the trail. Treeless saddles and saddles made from synthetic material provide for a lighter saddle, but leather is still preferred by most trail riders. Most synthetic trees are not as rugged as traditional wooden trees. Sometimes the synthetic materials wear out faster and then need to be replaced sooner.

English trail saddles

The English trail saddle is a lot lighter than the Western trail saddle. They can also be adjusted by adding or taking off panel features. Many riders prefer English-style saddles because they allow the rider to position their legs in the narrow groove between the horse’s forelegs and its belly, which helps the rider’s balance and contact with the horse.

The three types of English saddles—hunt seat, dressage and saddle seat—are all suitable for trail riding. Hunt seat and saddle seat models were originally designed for pleasure riding out in the open. Dressage saddles were designed for schooling horses in more of an arena setting, but plenty of people use dressage saddle for trail riding today. When choosing an English saddle to take on the trails, it’s important to consider how comfortable it will be for both horse and rider.

Hunt seat and jumping saddles

The hunt seat saddle and jumping saddle has a shallow, flat seat that holds the rider in a forward position. The forward seat of this saddle can make it hard to keep balanced when going down steep hills on the trail. These saddles also provide great contact with the horse. Some riders find that lengthening the shorter stirrups to their height allows for a more comfortable ride.

Dressage saddles

Dressage saddles are similar to hunt seat saddles, but have a deeper seat, making the rider’s position more upright. Wide long flaps on the dressage saddle are beneficial for trail riders. The stirrups on dressage saddles are longer than the hunt seat stirrups, which again, can be more comfortable when on the trail. Duett Saddles offers a hybrid trail/dressage saddle with a padded seat

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Smith-Worthington’s trail saddles have steel and wood trees that are flocked with stuffed panels and can be custom fitted to the horse. Different width twists are available to accommodate riders of various builds. www.smithworthington.com



This 1535T trail saddle from Valley Head Saddlery is built for comfort and durability on a Steele Equi-Fit tree. The saddle features a five inch cantle, padded smooth grain seat, brass hardware and rawhide accents. www.valleyheadsaddlery.com



Big Horn Inc.’s Infinity trail saddle features Sil-Cush that provides extra comfort in the seat. This saddle is built on Big Horn’s special flex bar tree. (423)867-9901