

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

I am starting to get some ideas for future articles, pages and posts for you all to read and gain more knowledge. However, I thought I should start with a more introductory piece. There are three main horses in my saddle fitting start, but don't forget the other 100 horses at the ranch, and all others!

It started quite a few years ago, when I kept going back to visit friends and family in Pennsylvania. I would always make a trip up to Buck N Horse Hollow (for sale now!) in Carlisle to visit my mentor, Terry Peiper. She has been saddle fitting professionally for over five years, and has helped so many horses (and their people, some even to tears), it was moving! I was hooked. The more I learned, the more passionate I became. And I remember talking with her husband, Larry, who was also our farrier, and saying that saddle fitting was my purpose in life. I never forgot that!

| CHARLIE |

One summer, Terry and Larry came to Colorado to visit. They stopped by the barn our horses Charlie and Slammer were boarded at, and did a saddle fitting demo for my sister, Kelsie, and brother-in-law, Jesse. I had owned Charlie for nearly 10 years at that point, barrel raced, ridden trails, and yes, we didn't know what we didn't know. Terry graciously did a fitting for Charlie, and it was like a slap in



the face. For years, he never stood still to be saddled. And again, he had the biggest, silliest personality of any horse I knew, so I just thought he was fidgety and being himself. That day, Terry put a saddle on him that fit him much better than any I had ever ridden him in. Side note – I was not present because I was still working at the guest ranch north of Steamboat Springs, but all of this was noted and seen in person by Kelsie and Jesse. When she put the properly fitted saddle on him, he stood completely still. My sister couldn't believe it. Then, Terry put my current saddle on him, and affirmatively told Kelsie to tell me, "never ride him in that saddle again". I felt sick to my

stomach. For so many years, I was hurting Charlie. And we would have never known, because he never showed any behavioral signs (stay tuned for a future blog) that he was uncomfortable. However, (knowing what I know now), the physical traits were there. Muscle atrophy on his withers, his back was swayed, he stumbled a lot, and just never really extended well. Unfortunately, I couldn't magically undo the damage I had caused, but I was determined to help more horses and educate their owners. I openly admit I ruined Charlie's back, and I won't do it to any of my horses ever again.

[SLAMMER]

Slammer is a less personal story, but still has a significance since he has been my sister's horse going on 12 years now. He has some underlying baggage, as we think he was abused at some point in his life before we got him. He doesn't bond with people quickly, and is most in tune with my sister. I had ridden Slammer a couple of times before moving him to Colorado, and they didn't go so well. After moving him to Colorado, Kelsie then got accepted to Wichita State in Kansas for graduate school. Towards the tail end of her two years, I came back to the front range and wanted to get Slammer back in shape for her. However, something was missing. His canter wasn't pretty. It never has been, and still going to take some time to get him to carry himself correctly. There was also something in my gut that told me he wasn't comfortable. Years ago, the saddle Kelsie had been barrel racing in had a crooked tree, so they bought a new saddle. It fits him just about right, but still just narrow at the top of his withers. In comes the adjustable western saddle! Yes, there is such a thing. After doing measurements on Slammer, his left shoulder is larger than his right. With that, we had to build up the right side so the saddle didn't shift naturally to the right, and so the left shoulder had freedom of movement. Long story short, it worked wonders and he was a different horse just that quick. He moved more freely, wasn't so tense through his neck and shoulders, and his canter was so much better! Yes, the canter still occasionally needs some work, but the fitted saddle helped a lot, and saved us countless hours of training the wrong muscles, and Slammer resenting us. Kelsie was almost in tears, and I was jumping up and down shouting "this stuff is real!" It was an incredible feeling, and I'm on a mission to help more people find that feeling and sense of helping their horses.



[J-LO]

This sassy gray wonder is the newest addition to the clan. She came to me through a dear friend at the ranch, after Charlie had unexpectedly passed away. She had been at the ranch for a little over four years, but she was born and raised in the Netherlands, and started for reining. She's a natural athlete, and I can't wait to see what she can accomplish.

This girl is the definition of a mare and sensitive. A complete flip from calm, cool collected gelding Charlie. Her big thing is she will tell you if something is hurting. A “normal” thing for her is when she sees the saddle pad, or saddle coming, her ears pin back and she bites the wall, or whatever is in front of her. It breaks my heart because I know that horses are not supposed to be doing that (if you’re your horse does that, have your saddle checked!), and the saddle somewhere is or has caused her pain at some point in her life. I recently had a massage therapist come out and work on her twice in about three weeks, and it has made a world of difference. She had a lot of pain and tightness through her



shoulders and back, just from years of compensating for pain. I also have fitted her with an adjustable saddle, and almost have it perfect for her. She is wide and steep through her shoulders, so it has been a difficult task for me, but I am determined to make her comfortable. Now, if I get the saddle fitted to her and after a while she is still pinning her ears and biting the wall (or at me), there is something else going on that I need to figure out. She’s a tough one to fit, but if we get it, it will be amazing! Stayed tuned for more updates with J-lo, and be

prepared to see lots of pictures of this pretty little thing, as she will be my horse for most demonstrations.

| CONCLUSION |

These three horses have been very influential in shaping my knowledge of saddle fit, and all for various reasons. Charlie has been gone for almost two years, but not a day goes by that I don’t think about him. He was an incredible partner. Slammer is getting up there in age, and Kelsie’s goal is to get a new horse soon and start running barrels again. I can’t wait to see how well a fitted saddle will help with training and running smoothly. J-lo will be an ongoing project, but I need to fall back in love with the process of training and the ups and downs that come with it. Bring it on! I cannot wait to share it with you all!

Thanks for reading and stay tuned for the next update!