

SADDLE FITTING TIPS FOR THE AKHAL-TEKE

Being not only a professional saddle fitter, fitting saddles all over the world, but also the proud owner of the most beautiful Akhal-Teke gelding, I have become very familiar with the fitting challenges of these unique horses.

Before becoming the owners of Almaz approximately 2 years ago our experiences in fitting Tekes were limited to fitting saddles to some of Lorna Winn's horses in preparation for them to be used on Alexandra Tolstoy's horses for her 2,700 mile journey from Turkmenistan to Xian, China in 2004, and also to some of the endurance horses owned by Maria Baverstock.

Owning and riding a Teke of my own has given me more of an insight into saddling them and also highlighted a few things that I would not have previously thought of. So here goes... The Saddle Exchange list of, in our opinion, the most important things to consider when fitting your Teke!

Tekes may look narrow.... Their backs are not!

Almaz looks very narrow from the front, as do, in my experience most Tekes. They are however wide at the top of the spine (similar to some thoroughbreds and Arabian Horses), they have well sprung ribs (unlike a Thoroughbred but more like the Arab) and have a large wither pocket, again more like a Thoroughbred.

What this means is that they can be challenging to fit, in our opinion, in a traditionally flocked saddle. Consider what you have: a high, narrow wither, with very little beneath it to support the panel of the saddle.

The saddler is left with the option of:

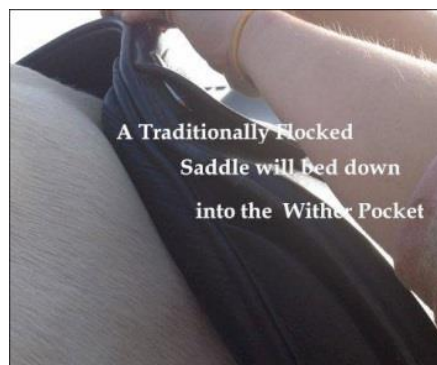
- a) fitting a saddle with a tree width to match that of the wither pocket. The result of this is that the shoulder movement is restricted as the saddle is technically too narrow for the horse and the saddle may bridge, resulting in classic damage of a notch being worn in the muscle behind the scapula, resulting in shortened stride and a reluctance to be mounted and difficulty moving down hill and maybe a buck after a jump.
- Or b) fitting a wider saddle, with larger front gussets, which give more room for flock, such as a Thoroughbred panel, which is the shape of a large wither pocket.

They then fill it with flock so it fills the wither pocket and therefore holds the saddle off the wither. The problem with this option, which can work initially, is that as the flocking compacts and beds down (after all, it's a bag of wool!) more flock is then required to keep the saddle off the wither and from lifting at the back and tipping the rider forward out of balance. This means regular flocking appointments and over time results in a panel that is rock hard to the touch with little or no concussion properties. This is then extremely uncomfortable for the horse and rider and can result in issues very similar to the consequences of a saddle which is too narrow. A saddle like this that is left unflocked will eventually rest on the wither, transferring the rider's weight on to this sensitive area, unequipped to carry weight; and will move around, slipping back or to one side, wasting the muscle and compounding the problem as it reduces muscle in the wither pocket, therefore making the saddle even more too wide.

What we have found works both on Akhal-Tekes, and more frequently ex-Racehorses and veteran horses lacking in muscle, is a thick panel made of slow release memory foam, often referred to as a gel panel. It does need to be of sufficient thickness however to fill the wither pocket, unlike some saddles on the market with extremely thin gel panels which, although they possibly may work on a flat backed Native type, afford no protection at all when fitting this shape of horse and will act akin to a saddle which is too wide or lacking in flock.

The type of gel panel we recommend warms up with the horse's body heat and will then fill the wither pocket while remaining firm but soft and yielding. Once removed from the horse it cools and returns to its original shape, much like a memory foam mattress.

Our favoured system for fitting an Akhal-Teke, Thoroughbred or Veteran horse is however our ReactorPanel, flexible panelled saddle which has panels that sit either side of the wither and do not sit into the wither pocket at all. This is especially useful in cases of wastage due to a previously ill fitting saddle and combined with the right work allows the horse to muscle up quickly underneath.



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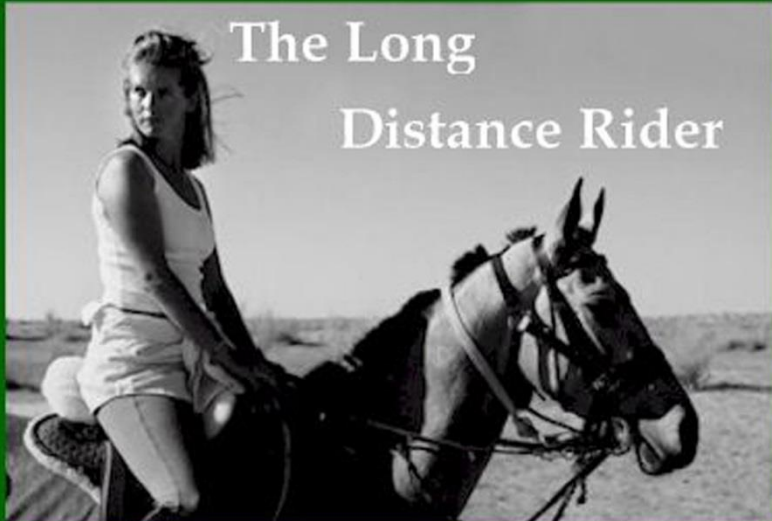
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Now to come to another point I discovered when riding Almaz for the first time...



Akhal-Tekes drop away quickly under the leg... They also have a forward girth groove.

When Almaz came to me he had the classic wastage of the wither pocket due to being fitted in a saddle which was too narrow. I would also like to add that this was not due to the person who I purchased him from. She had booked me to fit her a new saddle when she bought him due to the fact she felt his saddle did not fit. That is how I met him... but that's another story !

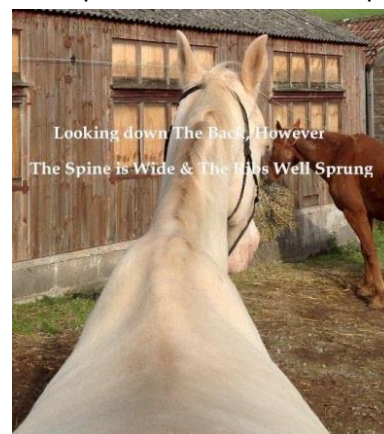
I tacked him up in a correctly adjusted ReactorPanel Saddle, which also fits my 16.3 Hanovarian cross! - but added a thick sheepskin numnah to make him more comfortable. Being not terribly tall with short legs I then discovered I could not get my leg on at all. We have, in the last 2 years, launched a new range of Mono-Flap saddles, inspired by Almaz and my lack of leg.

So in short, if you have a Teke and have short legs, a monoflap, close contact flap works well and a semi lined sheepskin as opposed to fully lined numnah.

Because the girth groove on Tekes can be quite forward, combined with a well fitting panel, a point strap is often a good idea so that girthing can line up correctly. A horse with a forward girth groove when saddled in a saddle with the standard 3 straps will often move around and be unstable.

So in Summary, things to check..

1. You should have at least a couple of fingers' width clearance between your horse's wither and the saddle when you are mounted. Stand in your stirrups, put your finger under the front of your saddle and see if the saddle then drops on to the wither when you are stood upright? This is what happens in rising trot. Stand up and down in the stirrups and check that there is still good clearance and no excessive movement. If it moves or drops to the wither it does not fit.
2. From the ground put your weight on the pommel: does the saddle lift at the back? Put weight in the seat and then lift the flap: is there a gap through the middle of the saddle? (This is known as bridging.) If it lifts at the back or bridges, it does not fit.
3. Turn your saddle upside down and measure the width of the gullet. Is it wide enough to clear your horse's spine? If it's too narrow it could catch the spinal processes during circles or lateral work.
4. Do you feel balanced or feel pain during or after riding? Please assess your saddle in trot. A saddle which is too narrow can initially tip the rider back before muscle wastes and the saddle sits on the spine. A saddle which is too wide will tip the balance forward and can slip back. Again if the saddle is resting on the wither and the horse has wasted muscle across the saddle area it may not move around. So look at and feel the muscle tone: does it change when you approach the saddle area?
5. Does your horse pin his ears when you approach with the saddle, move around while you try and mount or snap at you or the air while you do up the girth? Is he or she unhappy, moving slower or crabbing sideways while going down hill? Does he have a shortened stride in front, buck on landing, jump hollow or suddenly start to refuse to jump? These could all be saddle related, so it wise to have your saddle checked.



If you have any further questions or would like to discuss this matter further please feel free to call or email me personally.

Gini Wooward, Director, Saddle Exchange Saddling Solutions.

<http://www.facebook.com/IRAQEABQz9AQEXftWa2OEUmw72I8E-YQZ01IiamEFKCHFwIA/www.saddleexchange.com>

Alexandra Tolstoy riding in a ReactorPanel saddle fitted by Gini



Jessica Meares, of Khan Tekes Australia, sends her Greetings From Australia! A Tale of Two Tekes...

I remember being fascinated by the gleaming desert horses in my favourite books as a child; that such an equine beauty existed was unfathomable. As unattainable as a unicorn or a Pegasus; I daydreamed that one day I might find an Akhal Teke to love and call my own...

I went on with my equestrian life, a little girl's delight when my first pony arrived on my 6th birthday. From ponies I graduated to my Grandmother's crossbred mare and then on to Thoroughbreds, the first of which I led home from the Dongara Racecourse after he failed to impress his trainer! I did all the usual things with my horses, pony club, riding lessons, hacking, show jumping, one day eventing, trekking, gymkhana (mounted games), bush rides, bareback gallops along the beach, polocrosse, even mustering cattle in far north Western Australia. I dabbled in anything relating to horses and loved every minute of it, even the unavoidable spills and thrills.

A couple of years ago I realised I was missing something in my life. The realisation of a long held dream which I'd never seriously thought possible, but now was almost within reach. I began researching the Akhal Teke breed with a passion. Devouring all of the information I could find, mostly online, the good, bad and ugly, resolving to believe only a small portion of what I read but taking it all in regardless. When I had read everything I could find about the breed in general, I began trawling Akhal Teke Stud websites. There I came across a 6 month old buckskin colt named Pirli Asman.

I immediately felt my search had come to an end and contacted Michele Van Kasteren via email. We exchanged correspondence on Pirli and Akhal Teke horses in general and before long I put a deposit on Pirli. My dream was fast becoming a reality! Four months later I was in Germany, visiting the weanling colt I had fallen in love with from just one photo. In person, our connection felt even stronger and even as a rather timid youngster, he was quick to respond to my gentle advances and we became friends.

Over the days I spent at Asman Teke Stud I rode two of Michele and Peter's horses, their stallion Syr Darya and mare Altaia. Both amazed me with their beautiful temperament, movement and, of course, beauty. Syr gave me my first experience astride an Akhal Teke and I believe the massive smile I wore that day expressed perfectly the wonderful impact he had upon me! I'm sure Michele will attest to that statement too! His dappled dark bay coat glowed like polished mahogany when I groomed him before rides and his glossy lustre seemed to shine from within. All of Asman Teke Stud's horses impressed me; the broodmares were friendly and inquisitive, the stallions sensitive and gentle and the colts exuberant but respectful. I met both Gosulja and Prianik, Pirli's dam and sire, and I could not have been happier with my choice. I knew Pirli was to be the horse of my heart.



The first picture I ever saw of Pirli

(photo by courtesy of Michele van Kasteren)



Soon, Pirli was on his way to Australia via the UK and after a gruelling 7 week journey my special yearling arrived in late 2012, the first Akhal Teke to ever set foot in Western Australia and one of only a very few in all of Australia.

Since his arrival, Pirli has been exposed to so much in his short time here, always taking every new experience in his stride with a minimum of fuss. He has already won several ribbons including a Champion sash from only two in-hand outings, and he has generated some animated discussions with the surprised judges! He has swum in the Indian Ocean, been ponied off other horses, had sleepovers with helicopters at the local Rodeo grounds when we were evacuated because of a bushfire and is always a pleasure to handle for the vet, dentist and farrier. Pirli has a very high play drive and has entertained me constantly with his broad repertoire of comical antics. He is charismatic and charming and never fails to attract a following, always politely greeting his admirers

with a gentle, velvet nose. My own "non-horsey" mother refers to him as her first grandchild!

Earlier this year, after his second birthday, Pirli was backed. He accepted saddle and rider without incident and his natural balance under saddle astounded me right from our very first step. From there, we began our journey together in my trainer's own style of natural horsemanship. We are in the process of establishing a solid base with ground work so that when the time comes for Pirli to begin his ridden career, it will simply be a matter of mounting up and riding into the sunset. He has already proven himself to be a clever jumper, clearing a 6 foot round yard fence with ease



Pirli explores his new home



Pirlu and Kenar meet for the first time

reach their full potential in their favoured disciplines, hopefully a mixture of endurance, eventing and breed shows. I look forward to a future filled with Akhal Tekes and a lifetime of learning about this amazing breed that has so completely captured my heart.

I also look forward to meeting Akhal Teke breeders, owners and riders from around the world in the coming years. I certainly welcome the opportunity to host any AT enthusiasts who ever find themselves in Western Australia, so please do contact me if you are ever heading our way down under!

when he first began his new training regime with our trainer, Lou Francis. It took some time for Pirlu to accept that he must work with someone other than myself but once Lou had gained his trust he made progress in leaps and bounds.

Three months ago my second Akhal Teke arrived, this time from the United States of America. A lovely, athletic young mare called Kenar... but that is another story!

Akhal Tekes remain a virtually unheard of breed here in Australia, even among the equestrian community, but there is a lot of interest wherever Pirlu and Kenar go. I will strive to build a positive reputation for this versatile breed in Western Australia

by allowing my horses to



First ride on Kenar after she arrived

Khan Tekes Australia Khantekesaustralia@live.com.au
<https://www.facebook.com/KhanTekesAustralia>



Points Competition

Jenny Barnes runs an annual Points Competition for UK Akhal-Tekes and part-breds. (*See Page 3, What's On, for an outline.*) We hope that this will give owners an incentive to get their horses out there to promote and, above all, enjoy them.

Jenny writes: I hope we will go places with our AT horses and have fun and get pleasure from them.

We do not have to set the world alight and be high achievers - just enjoy! - and let other people know what an amazing breed they are.

The first competition produced a runaway winner in Susi Sadler's Rudi, who won more than double the points of the nearest rival. Susi won a voucher for £20 from Wye Valley Country Stores. For more details see www.team-teke.co.uk/competitions.html, or contact Jenny via post at Linhay, Birtsmorton, Malvern, Worcs, WR13 6AP, tel 01684 833662, email jenny.f.barnes@gmail.com. Jenny is still taking late entries and allowing points to be counted retrospectively.

2012 RESULTS

- 1st : RUDI Susi Sadler 524 points
- 2nd: MUALIM Maria Baverstock 263 points
- 3rd: LINHAY LALE Jenny Barnes 223 points

FROM THE ARCHIVES

K I Gorelev was the zoo technician of a commission sent by the People's Commissariat for Agriculture to Turkmenistan to conduct the first registration of Akhal-Teke horses in the Turkmen SSR in 1926 – 7. In his fascinating, detailed – and sometimes hair-raising – report, he describes

The Reproduction, Raising, Care, and Keeping

of the horses as practised by the Turkmens.

There are still mares that are outstanding not only in terms of blood but also in terms of conformation. The Turkmens would not let such mares be bred for anything in the world by a stallion from another breed or by just an average stallion. Disregarding the distance, they will take her for dozens and sometimes even hundreds of verst to a stallion that has become famous in racing or to one who has proven his superiority through his offspring.

The mares go for mating usually from the age of two on. Sometimes one also permits the stallions from the age of two years on, but then one gives them no more than five mares. The mating is carried out exclusively “by hand”. The mare’s hind legs are sometimes bound, depending on their compliance; other precautionary measures are not taken. The owner himself usually brings the stallion, leading him by a little halter with only one rein, with the nose-strap replaced by a chain that is called a *rišme* and holding a *kacma* (whip) in his hand. Normally two matings are carried out, the second on the following day.



Breeding stallions renowned in Akhal-Teke horse breeding breed up to five mares a day. During a breeding period the feeding rations of these outstanding stallions consisted of 15 and more pounds* of oats, mixed with ca. 15 eggs and *sary-jag* (mutton fat drippings), spread on *curek* (bread), and plenty of alfalfa.

The breeding season lasts from March to July. Foaling occurs during the same period: the percent rate of foals from bred mares was 48% at the time of the survey. The foal, when it is destined for sale, is weaned at 5-6 months.

In the reports of the Transcaspian Stud Farm 13, the head of this stud farm, T. A. Mazan writes:

“The Turkmens do not give foals less than one year old the least bit of attention. Only from age one year on do they begin to feed them better and to train them for racing. While still less than one year old the foals eat, as a rule, what they want to; the Turkmens keep less feed ready for the winter and, for this reason, foals that are left to themselves not infrequently starve.”

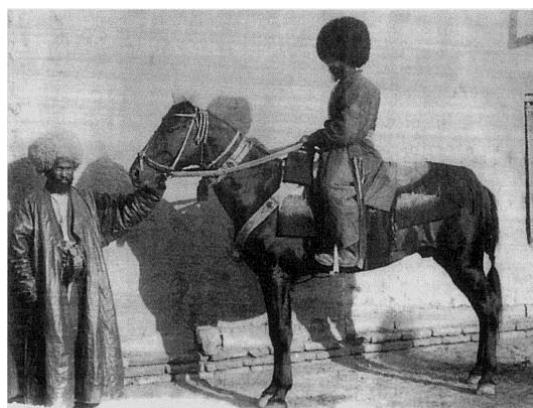
Today, since the price for a weanling has reached 1200 rubles, the Turkmens care very solicitously for their foals, covering them with specially made horse blankets like the fully-grown horse. Naturally there are such cases of “foals that not infrequently starve”, as T.A. Mazan describes it. Yet, notwithstanding, the rules for feeding the foals before weaning have changed little, for the Turkmens consider giving oats to foals to be harmful. In their opinion, giving oats at this age, no matter what the amount, makes the future racehorse weak in the legs and promotes the formation of steep pasterns and makes them generally heavy. The only supplemental feeding allowed by them, if one doesn’t take into account that the foal, along with its dam, eats as much alfalfa as it wants to, is the ½ - 1 pound of *curek* that is given in the evening. One gives camel milk to the weak and the ill to drink and *curek* that is spread with *sary-jag*. Those are the rules in general for the foals. But there are also individual horse breeders who supplement *curek* with *sary-jag*, independent of the health of the still suckling foal, and who also give ½ a pound of oats mixed with two eggs.

With the advent of the autumn cold one gives the foal oats. At the age of nine months one begins with ½ a pound daily and slowly increases the amount of oats to 1 ½ pounds (½ pound in the morning and 1 pound in the evening). It receives ample alfalfa. When the amount of oats has reached 1½ pounds a day, one begins breaking the foal; however, it is accustomed to breaking in earlier. At first one leads it on a rope.

Then one lays a load of two bales of alfalfa on it so that it can get used already to a load on its back, and afterwards, at nine months, a boy begins riding the foal. Furthermore, the amount of oats is gradually increased to five pounds and the foal readied for the autumn racing. A boy, as said, rides on the nine-month-old foal, so that it can get used to a rider. The owner himself rides on the yearling, who often has reached a stately weight of five – six pud**, and is not ashamed to ride him 12-15 verst to the bazaar and just as far in return. One can explain some of the faults of the Akhal-Tekes by the way the foals are reared, especially by the early riding by heavy riders but also by the mating of mares at the age of two years.

Thanks to the constant close contact of the foals with humans (since they are near the tent of the owner the whole time, in the family circle) the majority of the Akhal-Tekes are very good-natured, sensible and calm while being ridden under normal circumstances. However, one also meets horses that are somewhat aloof and do not allow anyone but the owner to approach them.

The ration for two-year-olds consists of six to seven pounds of oats and ample alfalfa. The amount of oats for those three years and older is up to twelve pounds, depending on the appetite of the horse and on the wealth of the owner; one always gives an unlimited amount of alfalfa. One gives oats twice a day, mornings and evenings. One gives alfalfa in the amount that is consumed, in small rations and at small intervals.



In general, one must state that the Akhal-Teke horse eats very little. It is always given clean feed, oats that have been winnowed well. One gives the horses water before giving them oats, three times a day. There is no keeping of horses on pasture in the literal meaning of those words, since there are no pastures, but the horses graze sometimes along the ditches or in the gardens; if there are none of the latter, they stand staked near the yurt and are fed with green alfalfa that has been cut for them. Tying of the horses in the alfalfa fields, as the Uzbeks do, is not practised. The Turkmens have no horse stalls; they are replaced

by felt blankets (*koşma*): short and lightweight in summer, long and heavy in winter; they cover the horse from head to hocks. The horse blankets serve as protection: from heat and insects in the summer, from cold, rain and snow in the winter. The Akhal-Teke horse, covered with one or two horse blankets, stands in summer, when the temperature reaches up to 75°, without a roof over it, under the burning rays of the sun and the hot winds, and in the winter, with strong winds, in sun and rain, bound to a long tether, tied to a stake near the tent, with hobbles on 2-3 feet, surrounded by high brush. The Turkmens do not clean their horses, as one can tell from the rubbing down with the horse blanket when it is taken off.

The horses are also not bathed in water, apparently out of fear of colds. Instead one carries out a kind of bathing of the horse in sand, which takes place as follows: the Turkmen rides during the heat of day to a place where the sand is free of any contamination or plants, takes the horse blanket and the saddle off and has the horse roll around in the hot sand. Afterwards the Turkman brushes his horse off with a braided bunch of grass, and the coat begins to shine.

The Turkmens shoe the horses seldom, if they even do it, then in the Asiatic manner with a round iron without spikes.

The treatment of the horses occurs in the most primitive manner. One resorts to the most absurd quack methods, from which the horses often die. We have as an example: the puncturing of sores, cauterization of sprains and lameness, strewing ashes over wounds, laying of human waste on the wounds, etc. and finally: hanging amulets around the neck as a “preventive measure”.

*1 Russian pound == 14½oz, or 409g ** Approx 90 Kg

*From The Akhal-Teke Horse Breeding of the Turkmen SSR, K. I. Gorelev, Ashkhabad, 1928
English translation by Sara M. Drake PhD*



Akhal-Teke Album



Anthony Foster's Pyrrhus, aka Mischa, is destined for a polo career

Salimrashid makes his first foray into dressage



Stre-e-tch Ikonique, by Kambarbay, prepares for the day

Beth Dee and Midoak Magic Ikon enjoying the sun at Kenilworth



Life among the roses for Xanadu

Father and daughter: Dominik and Ayazgul head for home



Cover: Gini Woodward's Almaz, Photo: Lady Bury
Back Cover: Jenny Barnes' Linhay Lale



Water is a Turkmen's life, and a
horse is his wings
Turkmen Proverb



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