

The science of saddle fitting

Shorten your stirrups and tighten your girth...we could be about to ride another saddle fitting storm. Meet Gerry van Oossanen who's just launched "the most comprehensive saddle fitting course in the world."



MSFC courses have run successfully in Holland since 2006 and are now open to UK retailers.

A Dutch saddle fitting course that combines practical experience with academic study has opened its doors to UK retailers, saddlers, physiotherapists, vets and trainers.

The Academy for Master Saddle Fitting Consultants (MSFC, also the name of the qualification to be gained) and Equine Studies, is directed by veterinary scientist Dr Gerry van Oossanen who also runs a horse and rider rehabilitation centre in Dwingeloo, Holland.

The academy runs training courses in saddle fitting, saddle making and degree level equine sports therapy. The saddle fitting courses have been popular in Holland since

"So I decided to do something about it."

With the emphasis on understanding the science behind saddle fitting, the courses aim to enhance retailers' skills.

"A saddle fitter is much more than a saddle salesman," said Gerry. "To become a good salesman you need good commercial skills. To become a good saddle fitter, you need in-depth knowledge of the anatomy and biomechanics of the horse, of training influences, of pathology, of rider influence.

"You need to recognise the differences in trees and saddles and their fit. And of course, you must understand how a

The MSFC course puts into context all the new ideas and techniques that are constantly arriving in the saddlery world.

2006, but a quest to educate more people about saddle fitting and how it relates to back problems and horse welfare has prompted Gerry to promote them internationally.

"In my daily practise [as a therapist, see below], I see so many horses with extreme back pain and sometimes even neurological disorders caused by ill fitting saddles," she said.

saddle is built, which alterations are possible and how a saddle should fit the horse as well as the rider to prevent serious back problems.

"The MSFC saddle fitting course is unique and the most comprehensive in the world. It puts into context all the new ideas and techniques that are constantly arriving in the saddlery world."

Study from home

MSFC training is designed to be combined with a full time job and is suitable for retailers, vets, physiotherapists, trainers, stable managers and horse people considering a career change.

Helpfully for those with a busy job and/or family, theory study can be undertaken at home in your own time over the internet. The examination can also be done via computer at a time to suit each candidate.

The all-important practical element is achieved by candidates choosing to attend on any one of a number of planned weeks.

Subjects covered on the MSFC course include anatomy of horse and rider, biomechanics and scientific research, conformation, pathology, back and lameness checks, nutrition for condition,

different type of trees and saddles (including Western and treeless), saddle construction, influence and use of different girthing systems and therapeutic pads, recognising saddle faults, measuring horses by templates and weight tapes, finding the best fitting saddle or deciding when best have one made.

"Every subject is taught in theory and in practical lessons," said Gerry. "Candidates learn to read a horse's signals, conformation and condition; how to check a back for damage and a gait for lameness and when to call a vet.

"Recognising the influence of saddle fit is fundamental to understanding the subject."

Candidates who pass the theory and practical assessments receive the official diploma and can use the registered title and logo of Master Saddle Fitting Consultant.



"Recognising the influence of saddle fit is fundamental to understanding the subject," says Gerry van Oossanen.

About Gerry van Oossanen

Dr Gerry van Oossanen, director of the Academy for Master Saddle Fitting Consultant (MSFC) and Equine Studies, studied at Antwerp University and Utrecht University. She graduated in equine movement science (research subject: the triangle horse-saddle-rider) and has a Masters degree in equine physical therapy science. She is also a chartered animal physical therapist, certified acupuncturist and certified equine thermographer (Ohio State University).

A specialist in equine back and neck disorders, particularly in relation to saddles and bridles, and neurologic movement disorders such as ataxia, stringhalt and hypermetria, Gerry developed a 'back friendly' horse and rider rehabilitation training programme. She also teaches saddle fitting in relation to back problems to veterinary students at Utrecht University.