

# English vs. Western Saddles: What Is the Difference?



It can be easy to think there's only way to ride a horse – especially if you aren't familiar with the craft. However, you can actually ride horses in one of two styles: English or Western. These styles greatly differ from each other, using distinct saddle designs to give your horse some show-day flair or provide more riding comfort, depending on the type of riding you want to do.

When looking at **saddles**, there are many options to choose from, which can feel overwhelming at first if you're a beginner. However, finding the right choice is very easy once you understand the difference between English and Western saddles, and Tractor Supply is here to help you navigate your options.

### **What Is an English Saddle?**

**English saddles** are used for a variety of English riding disciplines (or tasks), from pleasure riding to show jumping to dressage. You can also find constructions suitable for show riding, eventing and playing certain equestrian sports, such as polo. This style comes from the early European militaries, based on a need for practical and functional riding accessories for traveling and hunting.

For many years, bare horseback riding without a saddle was considered the traditional way to ride your horse. But as the design for English saddles evolved, especially with the rise of equestrian sports, they debuted high-quality materials, as well as added cushioning, for enhanced durability and comfort. As a result, English riding has become a more widely used method, one that many now refer to as the traditional way.

These types of saddles are made with durable leather or synthetic materials, giving them a lighter weight, and making them suitable for jumping, speed and agility. They offer a smaller and tighter fit than Western saddles, allowing for closer contact with your horse and better communication while riding.

These saddles are also made to sit lower on your horse, away from their back and shoulder movements, and come with a deeper, narrower seat to give riders upright posture during riding events. They're designed with **stirrups** that sit directly below your legs, keeping them straight and maintaining contact with your horse.

### **What Is a Western Saddle?**

When you think of the term, 'Western riding,' you might envision great open deserts and **cowboy hats**, just like those old movies. Well, you're actually not too far off, as the art of Western riding does stem from this time. Cowboys required more comfortable tools for long riding days on the ranch – thus, the **Western saddle** was introduced. Use Western saddles for many riding applications, including shows and trail riding, as well as ranch-based disciplines, such as roping.

Western options focus on comfort through long-term riding, featuring a heavier and wider design than other choices. Their specialized constructions also disperse your weight equally over your horse's back. The heavier leather construction allows you and your saddle to remain stable and secure, even while roping cows or doing other heavy-duty tasks that require pulling. The seats on these saddles are also made with textured materials, keeping riders secure and preventing them from sliding.

Western saddle styles usually include a higher cantle and horn design, which assist cowboys in roping cattle and doing other ranching tasks. They also come with a deeper seat for enhanced riding stability. The **stirrups** on these saddles are set more forward so feet rest flat, giving you better security and bracing on your horse. Alongside their saddle, Western riders may wear specific protective clothing, such as **chaps**, to keep legs safe from chafing or to prevent clothing from getting stuck in brush.

## **How Do I Know Which Saddle Is Right for Me?**

Because there are so many different saddles, choosing between English or Western options depends on the kind of riding you intend to do and what you feel most comfortable with. Do you need something general that provides a comfortable ride on the trail? Are you competing in a specific discipline? Additionally, many riders have been trained in either English or Western riding, so you'll want to choose a saddle that meets your experience level and comfortability.

### ***Choosing an English Saddle***

Different English saddles will come with varying designs and constructions, depending on the discipline you want to use your saddle for and your breed of horse. For example, dressage saddles have a deeper seat, high cantle and high pommel, with a stirrup bar directly under the rider. Show jumping saddles, on the other hand, come with a flat seat and cantle, a cut back and flat pommel, as well as a forward stirrup bar. These features make a difference in how you sit in the saddle, how comfortable your horse is and how well they can perform their tasks.

For pleasure, opt for a trail-riding or general-purpose saddle, which is more affordable and comes with easy horse fitting capabilities. But if you're looking to compete in a specific discipline, you may want more specialized saddles, such as ones made for endurance. You should ensure that your saddle fits your horse correctly, as the main purpose of English saddlery is to not disrupt your horse's movements.

### ***Finding a Western Saddle***

Western saddles feature a variety of designs and styles to accommodate many disciplines. For basic trail riding, you want something that's lightweight and padded, providing a comfortable ride for you and your horse. These include trail or endurance saddles. If you plan on roping with your horse, you need something that keeps you stable while also letting you use your hand freely to complete jobs, such as a roping saddle. These are built with a tall and secure horn, and offer a heavier construction to allow for easy roping.

For show applications, you need a show saddle, which puts appearance at the forefront of its design. Made to look great during show days, these saddle types often feature special patterns and decorative trims to make your horse stand out. You should avoid using show saddles for long riding or arena events, as their construction won't provide much comfort.

Other saddle types come with various designs and constructions to make easy work of ranching and other tasks. For instance, reining saddles feature a low and flat seat with a medium-height horn and dropped, double rigging, while ranching saddles come with a deep and hard seat, tall and thick horn, as well as double rigging.

## **Shop for English and Western Saddles at Tractor Supply**

Whether you're a beginner horse rider or want to update your existing accessories, we have the saddle options you need for a comfortable ride. We are here for those needing quality, durable riding supplies, making it easy to continue living Life Out Here. For more information our English and Western saddle options, visit your [local Tractor Supply today](#) or browse online.