

## Saddle Soap Opera

By Cindy Hale

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Somehow I've become the owner of four saddles. Don't tell my husband. If things work out as planned, I'll soon be down to a respectable number of only two saddles, and then he'll never know the difference. He is, after all, a man. To him, one saddle looks quite the same as the next one. I'm hoping money changes hands and saddles go to new homes before he can figure things out. If you're wondering how I ended up in this mess, it all began innocently enough.

When I bought Wally a couple of years ago, I also bought a nice used western saddle to go along with the new horse. That's because Wally was initially meant for Ron. I know. I laugh at that in retrospect, because Wally is not a beginner's horse. But at the time, I thought it would all work out famously, and Ron and I would ride off into the sunset together. Either that or I secretly had a death wish for my husband. But I digress.

Anyway, I began this saddle soap opera with two horses and two western saddles. But after a while, Ron determined he was not Roy Rogers. Then he issued the edict that I was to only have one horse (yeah, we all know how long that rule was kept in effect), so I figured I didn't need a second saddle. When I sold the other horse, the extra saddle went with it.

Naturally, within a year I acquired a second horse.

A second horse meant that I needed a second saddle. Why? Well, because. Isn't that reason enough?

Seriously, though, Joey is a smaller-framed, narrower horse than Wally. The saddle that Wally used had wide, full-Quarter bars. Joey needed semi-Quarter bars. Being a conscientious Horse Mom—and a compulsive tack shopper—I rushed out and bought Joey his own saddle. But I did use some restraint. I found a used one at the consignment tack shop. I paid for it with my credit card, something I swore I'd never do, because I hate racking up credit card bills.

Veronica may be smiling, but I know what she's thinking: "You can have this saddle back when you pry it from my cold, dead hands." About the same time, I re-evaluated the practicality of owning my expensive English saddle. I really didn't ride huntseat much on either of my two stocky Paints, and Ron had made it clear he didn't want me jumping anyone else's horses. So I decided to sell my English saddle to one of the girls I give riding lessons to, Veronica. She's naturally talented on a horse, plus she's a very intellectual rider, meaning she takes instruction well. But alas, she's cursed with riding in an antique of a saddle that's not much more than a slice of dry leather with a pair of stirrups attached. Buying a show-worthy English saddle was not within her budget, so I made her a deal and allowed her to make payments on my saddle. By the end of this month, she should have it paid off. In the meantime, I occasionally tease her that I'm about to repossess it. Ironically, she does not find that funny.

I was finally content that I had found a home for my English saddle and happy that both Joey and Wally had their respective saddles. But that didn't last long. After riding Joey in "his" saddle about a dozen times, I began to notice that my behind—literally my butt—was getting very sore on one side. It was the area right over where my computer is implanted. The battery-operated device is about the size of a thick book of matches, and it's attached to the wire leads that are affixed to my spinal column. It took some detective work, but eventually I surmised that the high cantle on Joey's saddle (a feature that was part of the trail saddle design) was continuously pressing against that sensitive area of my butt cheek. How glamorous a dilemma is that?

Now I had to try and re-sell Joey's saddle and get one that fit him and accommodated my weird butt issue!

Of course, I couldn't exactly go back to the consignment store and say, "You know that used saddle that I bought here two weeks ago? The one I gushed over and fell in love with? Well, funny thing. Now I need to sell it. Can I put it back on consignment?"

Instead I took it to the big tack store in town and put it on consignment there. They allowed me to do that because... I bought a brand new saddle there that fit Joey and my royal behind. Ka-ching!

Of course, I then went home with an ill feeling in my stomach. It would take a financial adviser to figure out precisely how many saddles I did or did not own fully and outright, how much money I'd spent, lost or gained, and how fast I needed to

pay off my credit card before I was swimming in interest fees.

A few days later the phone rang. The manager of the tack store wanted to buy the saddle I'd put on consignment—the one that bugged my butt—because her current saddle didn't fit her new horse!

"The only thing is," she said timidly, "is that I don't get paid until next week. So can I come by your house and pay you after pay day?"

"Oh sure," I said, "why not?"

It wasn't like I was making money in this entire saddle saga, anyway.

And thus, here I sit, waiting for the tack store lady to arrive with a fistful of cash and remove one less saddle from my collection. Next up on the agenda, Veronica will officially own my former English show saddle in a few weeks. Then the money that I've recently earned from my horse show judging duties will allow me to pay off the credit card bill that was incurred from my saddle shopping spree. Sure, in the long run I've lost money. Lots of money. But isn't that the way the horse world works? I find solace in knowing that ultimately it will all work out and my horses, my bank account and my butt will all be happy. The only question is, will Ron even be aware of the turmoil that I endured?

I hope not.

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