

# MINOR ADJUSTMENTS

## How does saddling feel to a horse?

By Joe Wolter

**W**e all know how to saddle our horse. We do it almost automatically.

But we usually don't think about how it feels to the horse.

Sometimes, changing one little thing you do can make a lot of difference to the horse.

At clinics, when people ask me to help them with their riding, sometimes I ask to see what they do before they ever put a foot in the stirrup.

A horse starts reading our signals from the minute we go to catch him. But a lot of times, we ignore *his* signals. As you're saddling, you might ignore a horse

being a little tense or moving around. But if he's doing this, the two of you aren't getting off to the best possible start.

I don't ever mean to imply that how I handle horses or saddle them is the *only* way, or even the best way. I just try to show people what works for me.

For instance, I hold my horse to saddle rather than tie him, so I can start feeling him out, checking his responses. Do whatever works best for you, but if you're having any horse problems, try being more conscious of how you handle him on the ground.

I hold my saddle by the cantle and carry it on my hip. With my left hand on the left jockey, I swing it in an arc from my hip to the horse's back. Aim an inch or two above the horse's hindquarters, so the stirrup glides into place, instead of hitting him.

2 By swinging it from your hip, the momentum carries it over. It seems easier on your back than lifting it up and over.

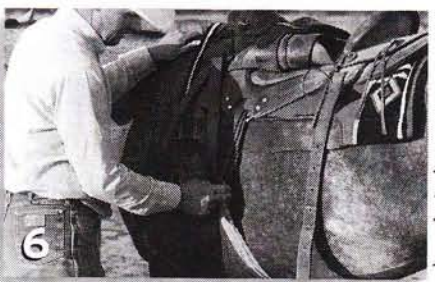
3 When I go around to untie my cinch, I move the horse's head toward me each time as I step around as a way to check him out, get him responsive.

4 Dad taught me to lift the blanket off the withers. Then, when you tighten your saddle down, the blanket isn't stretched tight across his withers, and possibly rubbing.

5 Let the cinch make contact before tightening it, so he's expecting it. Because of the way I leave my latigo when I unsaddle, I don't have to handle it before I run it through the cinch. When you unsaddle, just grab the latigo about halfway down, loop it back under the D-ring, and pull the top of the loop toward you enough to make it stay.

6 I figure cinches feel to horses like belts feel to us, so mine's never real tight. If a horse has good withers and a good rider, he doesn't need a real tight cinch. The back cinch just makes light contact unless I'm roping. When you aren't riding, remember to loosen the cinch more. ☺

Joe Wolter of Texas does clinics and demonstrations throughout the United States.



A lot of times we ignore the signals