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## **Saddle study reveals high degree of lameness in sports horses**

Hind limb lameness is the biggest cause of saddle slip in horses and there is a startling frequency of lameness in the general sports horse population, reveals a new study on the relationship between lameness, saddle slip and back shape.

Saddle slip is usually blamed on poor saddle fit, a crooked rider or asymmetry in the shape of the horse's back but the first phase of a long-term research project, which was first published in 2012, showed that in fact hind limb lameness is frequently the culprit.

The second phase of the study, conducted by Dr Sue Dyson, Head of Clinical Orthopaedics at the Centre for Equine Studies at the Animal Health Trust (AHT) and Line Greve, PhD Student at the AHT, has gone on to look at the frequency of saddle slip and the reasons for it, in a large cross-section of the sports horse population.<sup>1</sup>

Of the 506 normal, working sports horses assessed, 46% were classified as lame or having a stiff, stilted canter. Saddle slip occurred in 12% of cases, predominantly in those with hind limb, as opposed to fore limb, lameness. There was minimal asymmetry of back shape in the horses studied but 37% of the riders sat crookedly, possibly as an effect of the saddle slip rather than as a cause.

"Given these figures, horses with hind limb lameness and gait abnormalities are more than 50 times more likely to have saddle slip than other horses," said Line Greve. "Furthermore with nearly half of those studied being lame, many horses with lameness are clearly going unrecognised. This study has reinforced our previous work and suggests that further education of riders and trainers is needed, to help them identify saddle slip as an indicator of lameness."

The full results of the study will be presented at the second Saddle Research Trust International Conference, to be held in Cambridge on 29th November 2014 at Anglia Ruskin University. The conference is supported by World Horse Welfare (WHW) and is approved by the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA). Advance tickets are £100 but you can take advantage of 15% discount if you book by 1st June, £75 for SRT, BEVA, WHW members and students or £150 on the door. Email [research@saddleresearchtrust.com](mailto:research@saddleresearchtrust.com) or telephone 07775 912202 to reserve your place. To find out more and to download a copy of the programme visit [www.saddleresearchtrust.com](http://www.saddleresearchtrust.com)

<sup>1</sup>*The interrelationship of lameness, saddle slip and back shape in the general sports horse population, L. Greve and S.J. Dyson, Centre for Equine Studies, Animal Health Trust, Lanwades Park, Kentford, Newmarket, Suffolk, CB8 7UU, UK.*

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### **Notes to editors**

- Further information from Bright Bay, +44 (0) 1986 784562, 07768 958911, email: [brightbay@btinternet.com](mailto:brightbay@btinternet.com)
- Image attached. *This saddle has slipped to the right in association with right hind limb lameness.* High resolution version available on request.
- The Equine Centre of the Animal Health Trust, a UK based charitable organisation, is dedicated to enhancing equine welfare through improved understanding and treatment of disease in horses, especially related to lameness and poor performance. Led by Sue Dyson and Rachel Murray, its work is world renowned for advances in equine orthopaedic injury and diagnostic imaging.
- The Saddle Research Trust was founded in 2009 to promote the welfare of the ridden horse and to raise awareness of the widely underestimated issues surrounding saddles, equine backs and performance. Trust Director, Anne Bondi, is currently undertaking a Doctoral Research Programme at the University of Sunderland, studying the interaction of horses, saddles and riders. The SRT facilitates collaborations between its Research Associates and promotes objective scientific research in order to further its aims.