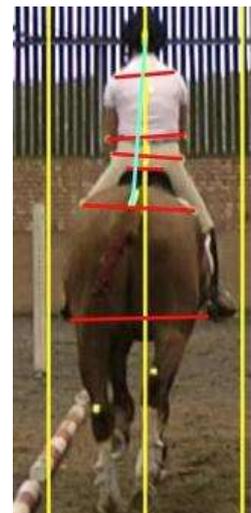




## **Saddle Research Trust referral scheme to help horse owners combat saddle related problems**

The Saddle Research Trust (SRT), in observing a growing need for an independent, expert advice service, has a referral scheme to support and assist horse owners in reaching a definitive reason for saddle related problems.

Riders often relate saddle-fitting problems and back pain to loss of performance. However, lameness is often the underlying cause, which can be difficult to recognise. This creates potential welfare problems for the horse, and can have implications for the rider as well. Riders can also be injured through riding on horses and saddles that do not allow them to sit in correct postural alignment.



*Examples of misalignment in the horse, saddle and rider interaction*

Since its inception, the trust has regularly received requests for help and advice from the horse owning public who do not know where to turn for independent expert advice. Sometimes, horse owners feel that they get caught up in an unending cycle of veterinary/ therapy / saddle fit assessments without resolution of the problem, often because of a failure to determine the underlying cause. This lack of a definitive diagnosis can be expensive but most importantly has the potential to result in a permanently damaged horse.

## About the Referral Scheme

In the first instance, the horse owner should apply to the independent SRT Advice Service [research@saddleresearchtrust.com](mailto:research@saddleresearchtrust.com) outlining the saddle-related problems that they are experiencing.

The case will be assessed by the SRT and if deemed suitable, referred to the SRT Veterinary Advisor. This referral will require the permission of the horse owner's usual Veterinary Surgeon. In complex cases or where this permission has not been forthcoming, the SRT will liaise directly with the Veterinary Surgeon on the owner's behalf in order to help reach agreement. The horse owner will be required to give permission for any data collected to be used for the purposes of research.

The independent examination of the horse, saddle and rider interaction has been specifically tailored exclusively for the SRT. The examination will be performed by Dr. Sue Dyson at the Animal Health Trust, Newmarket (AHT) and will comprise:

- Acquisition of the horse's history
- Comprehensive assessment of the horse in a stable (visual and palpation)
- Comprehensive assessment of the horse in hand (walk, trot, small circles), flexion tests, lunged (soft and firm surfaces)
- Assessment of saddle condition and fit
- Evaluation of the horse ridden by the owner and, if necessary, ridden by a member of the AHT staff and by Dr. Sue Dyson.
- Advice would be given on soundness of the horse, saddle suitability, horse / saddle / rider compatibility and future management.
- Video recordings and /or photographs may be acquired in order to be able to demonstrate any specific abnormalities

A written report would be provided for the owner and their associated professional practitioners (veterinary surgeon, physiotherapist, saddle fitter etc.).

The SRT has negotiated an exclusive low-cost, fixed rate for the independent examination of £335 (ex VAT), which the horse owner would pay directly to the AHT.

Following this assessment it may be suggested that further investigations may be required; any further work would obviously be at the discretion of the owner. Any subsequent investigation and treatment carried out at the AHT would be paid directly by the owner in the usual way.

## About the independent expert

Dr. Sue Dyson *MA, VetMB, PhD, DEO, FRCVS, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Specialist in Equine Orthopaedics, Associate of the European College of Veterinary Diagnostic Imaging.*



Sue is a world-renowned expert in equine orthopaedics, with a particular interest in lameness and poor performance in sports horses. She is a British Horse Society Instructor, has trained horses and competed to Advanced level Eventing, Grade A Showjumping, Medium level Dressage and has a passionate interest in sports horses.



*Sue competing at Windsor International Horse Trials*

Sue has an in-depth knowledge and understanding of performance problems in horses from all disciplines and has extensive experience in assessing and treating all types of horses and ponies from pleasure horses to high-level competition horses. She is highly skilled in the diagnosis of both subtle and complex lameness cases. She is also an expert in diagnostic imaging, including radiography, ultrasonography, scintigraphy and magnetic resonance imaging.

Recently, Sue has initiated a new, ongoing research project at the AHT, studying saddle performance in relation to lameness. There have been some startling – and rather worrying – findings from the horses, saddles and riders studied so far, including:

- 46% of horses were lame or had gait abnormalities
- 43% of saddles were ill-fitting
- 30% of saddles that were regularly checked were still ill-fitting
- 38% of riders had back pain
- 38% of riders sat crookedly

- 15% of saddles slipped

Horses with saddle slip syndrome were more than 50 times likely to be lame or have gait abnormalities. Clearly, many horses have lameness that goes unrecognised.

Sue regularly lectures internationally, has published more than 200 refereed papers in scientific journals and has authored several leading veterinary text books. In 2000, Sue was awarded the British Equine Veterinary Association John Hickman Orthopaedic Award for outstanding contributions to equine orthopaedics, in 2005 she was made an Honorary Member of the British Equine Veterinary Association and in 2007 was awarded the Tierklinik Hochmoor award for outstanding, innovative and lasting contributions to equine veterinary medicine worldwide.

Sue works extensively correlating the results of clinical investigation and diagnostic imaging, and responses to treatment providing evidence-based results. This meticulous approach to diagnosis also results in the recognition of new clinical conditions. Correlation of diagnostic imaging findings with detailed post mortem examinations helps to advance knowledge about image interpretation and to understand better how some lameness conditions develop, and thus how they may be prevented.

Sue is pleased to support this new initiative from the SRT and sees it as a valuable step forward in raising standards of welfare and practice in the industry. She believes strongly that it is the responsibility of the horse owner to educate themselves in order to provide better management for their horses: *"I have met so many great people, and absorbed their knowledge by osmosis. You've got to keep thinking, you mustn't have pre-set ideas, you must have an open mind, and you must be prepared to change your mind. If you keep looking and seeing, then you'll keep learning."*



*Dr. Sue Dyson assessing horses at the AHT*

*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.*

*For further information about the SRT and its work, please call Anne Bondi on 07775 912202 or email [annebondi@me.com](mailto:annebondi@me.com)*