

Assessment of the technical condition of saddles and their fit for recreational horses

Summary

The aim of the study was a comparative analysis of assessment of the technical condition of saddles and selection of all-purpose saddles for two breeds of horses used for recreation – Wielkopolski and Felin Pony. The analysis took into account how well the saddles were fitted to the horse's individual characteristics. The study also aimed to find a correlation between an individual horse's build and the technical condition of the saddle and the selection of a saddle for the horse. The test population comprised 40 horses and 40 all-purpose saddles. Each feature examined, for each horse and saddle, was assigned 1 to 3 points, which were summed up for each feature and analysed by Pearson's linear correlation. Nearly all correlations showed weak to medium strength. A high correlation was found only between the saddle fit and the symmetry of the back muscles of Felin Ponies. The study showed that the technical condition of 47.5% of saddles was acceptable (5 saddles, 12.5%), good (11 saddles, 27.5%) or ideal (3 saddles, 7.5%). The results indicated that 35% of tested horses (7 ponies and 7 Wielkopolski horses) had a perfect or good quality saddle, among which three Wielkopolski horses had a saddle in perfect condition. The fit assessment showed that in 92.5% of all horses the saddle was poorly fitted or mismatched to the shape of the back. Manual examination of the back of 16 ponies and 16 Wielkopolski horses showed the occurrence of back pain of varying severity. There were more Felin Ponies than Wielkopolski horses with a poorly fitted saddle. A poorly fitted saddle in the population was in most cases associated with back pain. However, the poor fit or poor technical condition of the saddle cannot be conclusively identified as the primary cause of back pain.

KEY WORDS: saddle fit, recreational horses, back pain, technical condition of the saddle