



A SIDEWAYS VIEW...

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ART OF SIDE SADDLE...

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Side saddle, an equestrian discipline which allows a female rider to sit aside rather than astride her horse, is arguably one of the most graceful and captivating forms of riding. For most people, the words bring to mind 19th century ladies, elegantly attired, trotting down the fashionable Rotten Row in London's Hyde Park. However, over the past few decades, side saddle has experienced something of a resurgence and increasing numbers of modern women are choosing to ride aside, both for competition and pleasure.

Despite the fascination many people have with side saddle it can be difficult to know how to get involved. A good place to start is the New Zealand Side Saddle Association, which was founded in 1981 to preserve this style of riding.

'I would recommend finding a saddle to have a go in before making any serious investments in tack,' advises Judi Stewart, Secretary of the New Zealand Side Saddle Association. 'If you know someone with a saddle, ask them if you can have a try first. Some Side Saddle Association members do have access to a number of saddles that they will sometimes lend to people. There are also five NZSSA graded instructors across NZ who are happy to answer questions and help get people started.'

'Once you are sure that side saddle is going to suit you and your horse, you can purchase

your own saddle,' adds Judi. 'One or two of the cheaper side saddles are adequate for getting started and you might also be able to find a bargain on Ebay or TradeMe – but do get advice before you buy! Also, make sure that your saddle has either a safety bar fitted or use a safety iron, to release your foot in the event of a fall.'

Side saddle habits, the clothing specifically designed for riding aside, are slightly easier to get hold of. A few manufacturers in New Zealand, including Ridir, make riding habits to order and a decent quality outfit can be picked up for around \$500.

For those interested in braving the show ring, there are three classes of turnout to be

aware of when shopping for side saddle outfits: informal, semi formal and full formal. Semi formal dress is the most commonly seen and comprises a navy blue habit, black bowler, black boots, veil, collar and tie. Full formal is correct for the Horse of the Year Show and championships and includes a black silk top hat, a very well cut black habit, collarless shirt and stock, and a plain gold or silver bar pin. Informal is reserved for hacking, hunting and working hunter classes and consists of a tweed hacking habit, bowler hat, collar and tie, and long boots in the same colour as the bowler. A veil is worn with the bowler if riding on the flat but a hard hat with no veil is required for jumping. Juniors dress in a similar fashion to adults but instead of a bowler and veil, they wear a simple velvet hunting cap. 'It's definitely a sport for perfectionists,' laughs Judi. 'But riding aside, with both you and your horse turned out immaculately, is such a satisfying experience. That is why people become truly passionate about side saddle and keep coming back for more.'

According to Aveael Webb, who has picked up numerous champion -ships with well known veteran show horse, 'Remembrance' in side saddle classes, practically any horse and rider can make the transition from astride to aside.

'Most horses and riders are capable of becoming a successful side saddle combination,' says Aveael. 'Breed, type and age are irrelevant. All you need is a horse that is supple, calm, obedient and willing to go forward. Correct conformation can make for a better overall picture and is easier to fit a saddle to. However, it is not judged in the same way as it is in the Show Hack or Riding Pony rings.

'As far as learning to ride aside, you do need to be reasonably ready to sit to the trot as you obviously can't rise in a side saddle. It's also important to have a saddle that fits both you and your horse. Otherwise, you will slip around and won't feel safe and secure. In general though, most people take to side saddle fairly easily and don't take too long to get the hang of it.'

Aveael is also quick to point out that the show ring is not the only domain of the side saddle horse and rider.

'You can do practically anything in a side saddle,' smiles Aveael. 'Last year, I even went hunting and rode over several jumps. The opportunities are endless and it is so much fun. I would recommend giving side saddle a go to anyone.'



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