

Knowhow

Making sense of commonly misunderstood subjects



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Editor

Dan happily rides century rides in unpadding shorts

Saddle soreness

How do I get a comfortable saddle?

Saddle discomfort is a common problem. To avoid it, you need a saddle that's the right shape and width for your bum and your preferred riding position. And that saddle needs to be set in a position that suits you and the way that you ride. Padded shorts can help but are unlikely to solve underlying issues by themselves.

THE RIGHT SADDLE

The only infallible way to choose the right saddle is to try different ones on your bike. Some shops have saddle libraries – see cyclinguk.org/article/how-choose-right-saddle for a link – enabling you to try different ones to see what works best.

The right saddle will support your weight on the bony parts of your pelvis rather than the soft tissue in between, avoiding pain and/or numbness. Your pelvic bones are narrower at the front than at the back, where your sit bones are. So the saddle width required also depends on your riding position. Leaning forward on a road bike calls for a narrower saddle than sitting upright on a commuter.

The need for padding differs by usage, too. On a Dutch roadster, with almost all of your weight on your bum, padding and/or springs are helpful. On a road bike, with more of your weight borne by hands and feet, a harder saddle may suit.

The more you lean forward – especially women



Photo: Alamy

– the more perineal or (ouch!) genital pressure you can expect. That's why sportier saddles in particular have cut-outs and channels: to relieve pressure. For a given riding position, they may be the difference between comfort and pain.

THE RIGHT POSITION

Your riding position isn't set in stone, however. If you move the handlebar closer and higher, using a shorter and/or taller stem (or a different frame), you'll sit up more: the wider part of your pelvis will then bear your weight. Part of saddle comfort is *handlebar* position.

Saddle height matters as well. Too high and you'll rock your pelvis, causing chafing or other undercarriage discomfort. If that sounds like you, try lowering your saddle in 5mm increments. (To ensure your saddle is high enough, the heel-on-pedal-method works fine. See cyclinguk.org/guide/make-bike-fit.)

For saddle angle, start with it horizontal. Tilting the saddle nose down a few degrees (or maybe more) can help if the handlebar is notably lower than the handlebar. Tilting up is less common but might work for a more upright riding position. Whatever you do, never persevere through pain. ●

Sit bone width

Bike fitters may steer you to a certain saddle width after measuring your sit bones with pressure pads. You can check this yourself with corrugated cardboard, a felt-tip pen, and a ruler. Put a laptop-sized piece of cardboard on a low, flat stool. Sit on it, wearing bike shorts or not-too-thick trousers. Hold the sides of the stool and pull yourself down onto it. Stand up. There will be two indentations in the cardboard. Draw a cross in the centre of each. Measure between the crosses. That's your sit bone width. If it's less than about 100mm, you should fit narrower saddles. If it's 100-120mm, you should fit average-width saddles. If it's over 120mm, look at wider saddles. As a rule of thumb, buy a saddle that's at least 20mm wider than your sit bones. But if wider is more comfortable, get that instead.

Saddle up!

One of these might (and only might) work for you.

Madison Flux
£39.99



Charge Spoon shape suits lots of bottoms. freewheel.co.uk

Specialized The Cup Gel £50



Plush perch for upright commuters. specialized.com

Rido Lt-series
£68.50



Unpadded but shape suits some. rido-cycling.com

ISM PR 1.0
£130



Like other ISM seats, the split nose relieves pressure. ismseat.com

Brooks B17
£134.99



Brooks' best-selling leather saddle. brooksengland.com