



Proper Girthing:

How NOT to Create a “Girthy” or “Cinchy” Horse!

By Heidi J. Potter

As we all know, horses are incredibly sensitive creatures. Here a few ways to help keep them happy while being groomed, tacked up and ridden.

- Clean the girth/cinch area thoroughly during grooming and check for any “hot” spots that may cause irritation.
- Check the saddle fit. Be sure it isn’t pinching or causing discomfort.
- Check the cleanliness and comfort of the girth/cinch.
- Tighten the girth/cinch in at least 3 stages. The first being just tight enough to hold the saddle on if the horse shakes his body. Tighten a second time after leading the horse to the riding area. Check and tighten if necessary before mounting.
- Remember to check a few minutes into the ride, before the first canter and before the first jump.

How to properly check tightness:

Many people will tighten the girth/cinch up to the point where they can’t tighten it any further. That way they are certain that it is tight. However, it may be too tight, which can ultimately lead to a behavior issue.

The proper place to check tightness is at the deepest part of the horse’s heart girth, not directly below the side of the saddle. Insert your fingers just below the rigging or billets and slowly slide them down to the centerline of the horse’s barrel. This is the deepest part of the horse and where the most pressure is received. Remember the shape of the horse’s barrel is more oval than round. It should gradually get tight enough so that your fingers cannot slide all the way down. If you can’t insert your fingers easily or there is extreme pressure all the way down the girth/cinch may be too tight.

Remember to train all staff and students how to properly prepare the horse for riding. This will help keep him a happy, willing partner.