

German side saddles of the 20th century

Historical ladies' side saddles of German origin can still be found in attics, flea markets and of course on the Internet. Staunch supporters of the elegant art of side saddle, know that such saddles, which usually come in imposing dimensions and with a cosy "dip", do not meet the demands of modern equestrianism. What most are not aware of is that many of these saddles come from an era in which Germany was not only very progressive in terms of riding, but also technically advanced and as a result often feature surprisingly modern details.



fig. 1 Princess Friedrich Sigismund of Prussia on Raubvogel; saddle by J. Loesch or W. Beck & W. Bressel, Berlin.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, side saddles were mostly made by resident saddlers of the royal courts. If there was a desire for a particularly luxurious model, for example as a wedding present or for coronation celebrations, the saddle was often ordered in Paris¹. In the 19th century, however, the demand for side saddles began to increase. The evolving



fig. 2: Side Saddle by Johann Michael Mayer, Munich, 1894, with small third pommel, french cut-back and shortend on the offside.



society fell in love with equestrianism and the prestige that came with it. The leaping-head, believed to have been invented in France around 1830, made riding a lot easier for women and, above all, made it safer. The trend of the 18th century that women rode in men's saddles and preferred side saddles only for certain occasions was passé. A society that was becoming bourgeois could not accept women in trousers as aesthetic. This and the fact that the gentleman's saddles of the 19th century, which had almost no knee rolls, offered little support for the rider, meant that preference was given to the side saddle, in which the lady simply sat more firmly.

Saddle couture from the kings saddler

Thus companies and craftsmen began to specialize in the construction of side saddles. One of the oldest known saddleries in Germany to build side saddles was the purveyor to the court, Johann Michael Mayer in Munich. Founded in



fig. 3: Mechanism for fixing the leaping head, J. M. Mayer.

1848, Mayer's company quickly gained an excellent reputation as coach and saddle manufacturer, which made him the purveyor to both Maximilian II and Ludwig II. This side saddle with a hinted third pommel from 1894 shows how detailed his work was (fig. 2 and 3). Aesthetically extremely well-proportioned, this custom-made product excels with a very modern, offside short-end and an impressively simple, but wonderfully crafted mechanism that fixes the leaping head. The thread used to stitch the tendrils on the seat and safe was originally in a flamboyant Hermes orange. This saddle is an extroverted couture piece for a fashion-conscious rider

and makes some of the impressively modern British Mayhews from the same period, look like some ready-made industrial design.

J. M. Mayer was merged with Kieffer in 1912, who continued the construction of traditional side saddles. Kieffer wisely stuck with the previous practice of ordering the saddle trees from P. & A. Bautz in Berlin.

The heart of the Prussian cavalry beats in Berlin

This saddle tree manufacturer, who always labelled his trees with the date and name of the customer, and for decades advertised with the Prussian-style slogan "every order is carried out fairly and on time", supplied most of Germany's leading saddle makers (fig. 8). The quality of the Bautz trees was outstanding and corresponded to the popular horse type of the time. What each saddler made of it stylistically, however, was open. So most German saddlers initially stuck to the traditional dipped seat, which favoured the old English riding style in the backwards position, even though Caprilli's forward position was already widely discussed. There are certainly saddles from Passier, Loesch and Beck & Bressel that have surprisingly horizontal and modern shaped seats.

What these saddles no longer offer today is a fit that meets the requirements of modern horse breeding. The ideal lady's horse of the 1920's was a light-weight warm-blood or thoroughbred with an imposing height, good withers, long



fig. 4 Saddle by Georg Passier, Hannover, 1909. The Champion & Wilton stirrup bar is covered by a well designed cover.

back and high set-on neck. However, the shoulder of this type of horse was usually much steeper than it would be today and thus these horses had a significantly different saddle and girth position than our current warm-bloods. Side saddles from the 19th and early 20th century do not suit most of today's variety of horse breeds, which are commonly used in equestrian sports.



Why didn't most German saddle manufacturers pick up the 'modern, flat seated' design ?

The military regulation and Caprilli

The decisive factor why ladies' saddles from German manufacturers were almost never built as flat and short as the English ones were the military riding regulations of the German cavalry. They dictated the straight seat over the fence. The rules and customs of the cavalry shaped German equestrian sport for a long time. It was not until the 1920s that the 'forward jumping position' according to Caprilli began to be used at the Hannover cavalry school. But this was the time when women began to switch to the men's saddle.

Example for England: the German competition side saddle

A specialty of the German saddlery was the „Turnier-Damensattel“ — the competition side saddle. Riding training was a topic of great interest in the cavalry empire. While horse-shows before the First World War were rather cultivated, socially important 'closed events', after the war, officers from noble families having been banned from anything which has to do with military, their traditional profession, felt, that "Germany should at least regain honour in sport" ². Since this motto, which originated from Prince Friedrich Sigismund of Prussia, also appealed to well-riding women, more and more officers' wives found their way from



fig. 5 Patented cane-tree saddle of the Deutscher Offizier Verein, Berlin, after 1914. The tightly cut, almost futuristic-looking off-side skirt is typical for the modern German side saddle. The stuffing of the pommels, which were innovative at the time, are made of rubber, which completely dissolved 100 years later, making the saddle unusable.



fig. 6 Saddle by Beck und Bressel, Berlin, ca. 1930: innovative design elements, but equipped with a huge and, above all, long seat at the conservative customer's request. The front-arch of this saddle is made for an extremely narrow horse. Such saddles are more common. Unfortunately, they hardly ever fit modern horses.

the hunting field to the showgrounds (fig. 1). In the meantime also in men's saddles, but many class conscious female riders remained true to the side saddle. The increased demand for compliance with the classic riding theory, the definition of which had been written down in the Heeresdienstvorschrift (HDV) 12, led to the realization that the offside flap and the balance strap hindered the fine use of the whip or riding-cane³. As a result, as early as 1912, light, flat saddles with tiny off-side skirts, some with an outside-girthing system that managed without any balance straps, were made. For hunting⁴, it was customary to attach it in a way, that the buckles were not in the way (fig. 5, 6, 7). Saddles with an outside-girthing system and a horizontal seat were built in Berlin in particular and were considered in 1931 "the best there is today"⁵. It seems, that the narrow and short offside flap was picked up in the 1920th by the British brand Mayhew and then taken over by other English manufacturers⁶



fig.7 Side saddle by J. Loesch, 1912. On the extremely reduced right saddle flap only a square leather strap hangs with a lateral guide on which the buckles of the saddle girth rest. This particular saddle was mainly used by it's rider, the wife of the Landstallmeister Celle and later Wickrath, for hunting behind the pack.

Selection of German saddle-makers, which produced ladies' side saddles

Beck und Bressel, Berlin
 Dallmann, Celle
 Deutscher Offizier Verein
 F.A. Döring & Sohn, Berlin
 Flechtner
 J.W. Franck, Frankfurt
 Joseph Hosterbach, Düsseldorf
 J. F. A. Junge, Hamburg
 Richard Junge, Hamburg
 Georg Kieffer, München
 Kutsch & Sohn, Gumbinnen
 J. Loesch, Berlin
 E.D. Markmann Hofsattel Fabrikant, Berlin
 Johann Michael Mayer kgl. Hofsattler, München
 G. Passier, Hannover
 Julius Riese, Berlin
 Carl Schröder, Insterburg
 Szameitat Reform-Sattel-Gesellschaft m.b.H., Hamburg
 A. Waldhausen, Köln



fig. 8 Label from P. & A. Bautz Saddletree-Makers, Berlin, 1912

... but for hunting, riders were looking to Britain

The trapezoidal pommels, often associated with modernism became quite common after the First World War (fig. 10). However, they are more often found in products from saddleries that were based in the Anglophile north of Germany, such as Passier (Hanover), Junge (Hamburg), Dallmann (Celle), but also Waldhausen, Cologne. The disadvantage of the trapezoidal horns is obvious: they were (and are) rather unsuitable for very small riders and make the saddle heavier on the nearside. However, saving weight was the declared goal of those who manufacture saddles for sport. Incidentally, this pheno-





Fig. 9 Advert of A. Waldhausen, St. Georg 1926, showing Champion & Wilton style saddle with ,blocked head'.

menon can also be found in England. Owen saddles from the 1930s, in particular, often have narrow horns. The trapezoidal shape was patented by Mayhew in 1891 and was intended to improve leg guidance⁷. But this also depends on other factors⁸. If these are met, the size of the contact area between the thigh and the fixed head might become less relevant, depending of course on the anatomy of the rider

As far as stirrup safety suspension is concerned, German saddles made after World War I occasionally have patents based on the Champion and Wilton principles. Especially among saddleries based in the Anglophile north. Apparently northern German customers preferred the English style of hunting and kit.

The Second World War ended the production of ladies' side saddles in Germany. The daughters of equestrian families, who had previously preferred riding and hunting in the traditional way, were often drafted as horsetrainers at the riding and driving schools of the Wehrmacht. These young women saw no reason to switch back to the elaborate side saddle. Their equestrian role models were women like Käthe Franke, who was highly successful in both saddle tapes and all disciplines, and Irmgard von Opel, who won the German Jumping Derby in Hamburg in 1934 as the first woman in history – in the man's saddle.

¹ Die königliche Jagdresidenz Hubertusburg und der Frieden von 1763, Staatliche Kunstsammlung Dresden, Edition sächsische Zeitung, Dresden 2013. In 1720, August the Strong ordered a "side saddle made of gold-embroidered crimson velvet with a caparison" for his daughter-in-law thus adding himself to the ranks of the many baroque royals who purchased richly decorated saddlery from France.

² Ein Reiterleben, Prinz Friedrich Sigismund von Preußen, Franz von Herzberg-Schöneiche, 1929, Verlag Tradition Wilhelm Kolk, Berlin

³ St Georg 1926, Ausgabe 5, S. 51

⁴ Hilda Dollmann, Das Reiten der Dame, Verlag Paul Parey, Berlin 1931 particularly points out the rising trot in the side saddle, S. 8.

⁵ Dollmann, S.7

⁶ Nick Creaton, Saddlery Museum, www.nickcreaton.co.uk.

⁷ British Patent No. 21,796 of December 12, 1821, followed on August 16, 1892 by the patent application in the USA under the number US 481073 A. United States Patent and Trademark Office.

⁸ Editor's note: The leg guidance depends on the support that the flat seat and position of the fixed head offer the riders right thigh. The waistline on the left side of the seat, also prevents the pelvis from being pulled to the left. The best position of the leaping head allows the left thigh to hang down in an angle of 45°.

Photos: fig.1 Menzendorf, from : 1931 H. Dollmann, Das Reiten der Dame; fig. 2-8, 10 B. Keil.



Fig . 10 Side saddle by Dallmann, Celle. The tree of this saddle was made in 1914 by Bautz, Berlin for Passier, Hannover. It is likely that the specialists at Passier built the saddle and it is possible that the final finish was carried out in Celle. The structural similarity to the Passier pictured above is striking, even if the execution differs significantly in terms of detail and quality.