



The SRT Referral Service

The Saddle Research Trust (SRT) has recognised a growing need for an independent, expert advice service to support and assist horse owners in reaching a definitive reason for performance issues related to the ridden horse. The SRT is able to offer a referral service to help resolve these complex issues.

Since its inception, the SRT has regularly received requests for help and advice from the horse owning public who do not know where to turn for independent expert advice. Sometimes, horse owners feel that they get caught up in an unending cycle of veterinary/ therapy / saddle fit assessments without resolution of the problem, often because of a failure to determine the underlying cause. This lack of a definitive diagnosis can be expensive but most importantly has the potential to result in a permanently damaged horse.

Riders often relate saddle-fitting problems and back pain to loss of performance. However, subtle or multi-limb lameness is often the underlying cause, which can be difficult to recognise. This creates potential welfare problems for the horse and can have implications for the rider as well. Riders can also be injured through riding horses and sitting in saddles that do not allow them to sit in correct postural alignment.



Examples of misalignment in the horse, saddle and rider interaction

About the SRT Referral Service

The SRT Referral Service is open to all horse owners. In the first instance, the horse owner should apply to the independent SRT Advice Service: admin@saddleresearchtrust.com outlining the saddle-related problems that they are experiencing. The case will be assessed by the SRT and if deemed suitable, referred to the SRT Honorary Veterinary Advisor. This referral will require the permission of the horse owner's usual veterinary surgeon. In complex cases or where this permission has not been forthcoming, the SRT will liaise directly with the veterinary surgeon on the owner's behalf in order to help reach agreement. The horse owner will be required to give permission for a) any data collected to be used for the purposes of research and b) for an anonymised case study to be published on the SRT website for the purposes of education.

The independent examination of the horse, saddle and rider interaction has been specifically tailored exclusively for the SRT. The examination will be performed by Dr. Sue Dyson at Rosssdales Veterinary Surgeons, Newmarket, and will comprise:

- Acquisition of the horse's history
- Comprehensive assessment of the horse in a stable (visual and palpation)
- Comprehensive assessment of the horse in hand (walk, trot, small circles), flexion tests, lunged (soft and firm surfaces)
- Assessment of saddle condition and fit
- Evaluation of the horse ridden by the owner and, if necessary, ridden by a member of the Rosssdales staff and by Dr. Sue Dyson
- Advice will be given on soundness of the horse, saddle suitability, horse / saddle / rider compatibility and future management
- Video recordings and photographs may be acquired to demonstrate any specific abnormalities

A written report will be provided for the owner and their associated professional practitioners (veterinary surgeon, physiotherapist, saddle fitter etc.). The SRT has negotiated an exclusive low-cost, fixed rate for the independent examination of £350 (no VAT), which the horse owner will pay directly to Dr. Sue Dyson.

Following this assessment, it may be advised that further investigations should be carried out. The decision to proceed with any further work is entirely at the discretion of the owner. All subsequent investigation and treatment carried out by Dr. Sue Dyson at Rosssdales will be paid for directly by the owner: professional fees payable to Dr. Sue Dyson; consumables payable to Rosssdales Veterinary Surgeons.

About the independent expert



Dr. Sue Dyson MA, VetMB, PhD, DEO, DipECVSMR, FRCVS, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Specialist in Equine Orthopaedics, European Specialist in Veterinary Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation, Associate of the European College of Veterinary Diagnostic Imaging.



Sue competing at Windsor International Horse Trials

After qualifying from the University of Cambridge in 1980 and following award of a Thouron Scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, Sue completed an Internship in Large Animal Medicine and Surgery at New Bolton Centre. Sue then spent a year in private equine practice in Pennsylvania, before returning to Great Britain to take a position in clinical orthopaedics in the Centre for Equine Studies of the Animal Health Trust, Newmarket where she ran a clinical referral service for lameness and poor performance, attracting clients from all over the United Kingdom, Ireland and continental Europe for 37 years. Now retired from the Animal Health Trust, Sue continues to see cases as an independent consultant.

Sue was awarded a Fellowship of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and the RCVS Diploma in Equine Orthopaedics. She was awarded a PhD by the University of Helsinki and is recognised as a Specialist in Equine Orthopaedics by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. She is a Founding Diplomate of the European College of Veterinary Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation.

Sue has lectured internationally and published widely on equine orthopaedics and diagnostic imaging, has been an examiner for the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and for the Royal College Fellowship, has acted as an advisor for candidates for the RCVS Certificates and as a co-supervisor of PhD student. Sue is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of many scientific journals and acts as a regular peer reviewer for many veterinary journals. Sue has been a long-standing member of Council of the British Equine Veterinary Association and is a past President. She has also been a long-standing member of the Board of the World Equine Veterinary Association and Vice-President.

A busy international lecturer, Sue has published more than 300 refereed papers in scientific journals and has authored several leading veterinary text books. In 2000, Sue was awarded the British Equine Veterinary Association John Hickman Orthopaedic Award for outstanding contributions to equine orthopaedics, in 2005 she was made an Honorary Member of the British Equine Veterinary Association and in 2007 was awarded the Tierklinik Hochmoor award for outstanding, innovative and lasting contributions to equine veterinary medicine worldwide.

Sue works extensively correlating the results of clinical investigation and diagnostic imaging, and responses to treatment providing evidence-based results. This meticulous approach to diagnosis also results in the recognition of new clinical conditions. Correlation of diagnostic imaging findings with detailed post mortem examinations helps to advance knowledge about image interpretation and to understand better how some lameness conditions develop, and thus how they may be prevented.

Sue has received many awards throughout her long and distinguished career:

- Richard Hartley Clinical Prize by the Equine Veterinary Journal
- British Equine Veterinary Association John Hickman Orthopaedic Award for outstanding contributions to equine orthopaedics

- Honorary Member of the British Equine Veterinary Association
- American Publishers award for excellence in professional and scholarly publishing
- Home of Rest for Horses Clinical Evidence Literary Prize awarded by the Equine Veterinary Journal
- Tierklinik Hochmoor award for outstanding, innovative and lasting contributions to equine veterinary medicine worldwide
- Associate of the European College of Veterinary Diagnostic Imaging
- BEVA Congress Voorjaarsdagen Award for the best clinical research presentation
- International Veterinary Radiology Association J Kevin Kealy Award for scientific contributions to veterinary radiology
- International Equine Veterinarians Hall of Fame
- American Association of Equine Practitioners Frank J. Milne State-of-the-Art Lecture
- Animal Health Trust Veterinary Achievement Award
- honorary member of Societa Italiana Veterinari Per Equini (SIVE), Italy
- University of Kentucky Equine Research Hall of Fame

Sue also holds the Instructors and Stable Managers Certificates of the British Horse Society (BHSI) and has competed at advanced level in both horse trials and show jumping, producing horses that have subsequently competed successfully at the Olympic Games and World Equestrian Games. She is a former veterinary advisor to British Eventing.

Having carried out extensive research studying saddle performance in relation to lameness, Sue has discovered some startling and rather worrying findings from the horses, saddles and riders she has studied so far, including:

- Over 50% of horses that are in normal work and believed by their owners to be sound are in fact, lame
- 43% of saddles are ill-fitting
- 30% of saddles that are regularly checked are still ill-fitting
- 38% of riders have back pain
- 38% of riders sit crookedly
- 15% of saddles slip to one side

Horses with saddle slip syndrome are more than 50 times likely to be lame or have gait abnormalities. Clearly, many horses have lameness that goes unrecognised and therefore unmanaged.

Sue is pleased to support this initiative from the SRT and sees it as a valuable step forward in raising standards of welfare and practice in the industry. She believes strongly that it is the responsibility of the horse owner to educate themselves in order to provide better management for their horses: *“I have met so many great people and absorbed their knowledge by osmosis. You’ve got to keep thinking, you mustn’t have pre-set ideas, you must have an open mind, and you must be prepared to change your mind. If you keep looking and seeing, then you’ll keep learning.”*



Dr. Sue Dyson assessing horses

The Saddle Research Trust was founded in 2009 to promote the welfare and performance of the ridden horse and to raise awareness of the widely underestimated issues involving the horse, saddle and rider interaction.

The SRT is a Registered Charity (number 1182661) in England.

For more information about the SRT, contact:

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