

Buyer Beware on Dangerous Stirrups

Bonnie Martin July, 2009

I've known for a couple of years about the dangers of the thin walled aluminum trail or endurance stirrups and how easily they bend, crush, and could trap a rider's foot. I had a mare who took a bad step in the round pen doing ground work, and she crashed to the ground completely smashing the stirrup. It happened so fast that a rider would not have had time to get a foot out of the stirrup at all and would have probably been dragged around by a panicked horse. I'd told some people about the danger of that kind of stirrup and let it go at that.

Last year when I purchased a Dixieland Gaited Saddle, I ordered the leather cover endurance stirrups. I wasn't paying much attention to the "buyer beware" saying and didn't think to inquire as to what material was under the leather. I should have because I ended up with an expensive set of tin can stirrups. I wasn't very pleased with myself but still didn't do anything about it until after I was riding a young mare last month who decided she wanted to drop to the ground and take a leisurely roll. I had time to get my feet out of the stirrups and get her up before she went all the way over. However, gentle as her roll was, the stirrup was completely bent out of shape. O.K. time to do something, I finally decided.

I e-mailed Dixieland Gaited Saddles to give the owner, Cynthia Wright, a heads up on the safety hazard. Below is a copy of the e-mail I sent.

Hi Cynthia,

I'm really enjoying the saddle I got from you last year. It fits several of my horses that I'm riding which is a BIG plus.

There is a safety issue with the covered trail stirrups that you need to be aware of though. I didn't realize that they were aluminum stirrups that you cover or I never would have purchased them.

I had a pair of plain stirrups like that before and had a mare fall when I was ground working her and crushed the stirrup flat. It would have been a major wreck if someone had been riding with no time to get a foot out.

I was on a young mare a few weeks ago and she decided to drop to the ground to roll. It caught me totally by surprise but I got my feet out of the stirrups before she slowly started over to her side.

I've attached a picture of the stirrup. I got her up pretty quickly and she didn't get all the way on her side, but the stirrup crushed pretty badly anyway. No way I will ever ride in that kind of stirrup again. Too much of a safety issue. There are too many ways a horse might end up on its side, and

our stirrups need to be sturdy enough not to crush so easily. Thought you needed to be aware.

Not a rude e-mail, no requests or demands for refunds, just a notification of a dangerous safety hazard. No reply to my e-mail, so after eleven days I called to make sure the message got through and wasn't hanging out there in cyberspace somewhere. Well, it had made it through all right, and I guess she had time to think how she was going to respond. I was totally caught off guard by her defensive attitude, especially when she said that she "wasn't responsible for people's safety".

I was trying to explain to her that she at least ought to tell on her order form what the material under the leather was, but she talked over me and refused to listen. Very enlightening conversation with a business I formerly thought had integrity.

That unsatisfactory, enlightening conversation with the owner of Dixieland Gaited Saddles has inspired me to start a campaign to let businesses and potential customers know about the danger of the thin walled trail stirrups. One of the arguments Cynthia tried to use on me was that people wanted the metal stirrups because they are lighter in weight than other trail stirrups, but I have found with just a little research that E-Z Ride makes a molded nylon stirrup that is much safer and also slightly lighter in weight than the dangerous aluminum ones they also manufacture.

My quest to inform the riding public would be greatly helped if everyone who reads this would do a little investigation of his/her own and then pass the word on too. Some of the tack sellers I've contacted have already pulled the dangerous metal stirrups off their shelves and websites, and I am still in the process of contacting others as well as the manufacturers.

I think it is inexcusable of a business to continue to produce or sell a product that they know could cause serious injury or death when there are safe alternatives. However, the power of the consumer can work to get these defective products in the trash can or hanging on a restaurant wall where they won't hurt anyone.