

## Brooks Saddles: Breaking the Pain Barrier

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Probably one of the most important choices you will make when outfitting your bike is selecting a saddle. Get it right and you won't even notice it's there. Get it wrong, however, and...I don't need to explain how painful *that* mistake can be!

About six months ago, the standard fit saddle on my Smith and Wesson Custom gave up the ghost. I replaced it with a Bontrager MTB saddle from my local bike shop. Right from the start, this saddle was less than comfortable, and I think it has been partially responsible for some uncomfortable chafing in some unmentionable places.

I regularly visit an internet cycling forum and have gotten to know a number of the other members. Quite a few of these riders have leather saddles from Brooks of England, a company that has been manufacturing saddles and other accessories since 1866. I have read many accounts and testimonials from riders who have been using these saddles for years, completing rides of up to 600 kilometres. Some still use the same saddles they bought more than 20 years ago. The vast majority of Brooks users swear by their saddles. The secret is that, as you use the saddle, the leather gets 'broken in' and, for want of a better term, 'made to measure', that is, shaped to suit the owner. Another benefit of the leather saddle is that it breathes. Because there is no plastic 'bed' or body to the saddle, it can be much cooler, reducing discomfort in the seat and crotch area.

I liked the sound of this, so I contacted Brooks, explaining who I was, what I did and asking if I could trial one of their saddles as a patrol saddle. Andrea Meneghelli responded and offered to help. As a result of this offer, on my arrival at work on Christmas Eve 2006, I found a package waiting for me. Inside were two 'Team Pro' saddles in black leather with copper rivets and copper plated rails. Quite appropriate, I thought! Also included in the parcel were maintenance kits, which comprised of a tensioning spanner, a cloth and a tin of 'Proofide', a polish type substance. To obtain the best results from a Brooks, you have to treat it right. Look after it and it will look after you. The instructions say that the saddle should have an application of Proofide rubbed in with the cloth and then, after it has dried, be buffed up with the cloth. This I duly did and then fitted the saddle to my steed. My crewmate Mark Jenkins was given the honour of preparing and fitting the other saddle.

A Brooks saddle is a thing of beauty. The skill of the craftsmen that produce these saddles is obvious. However, as I stated earlier, a Brooks is a saddle to be developed. Some riders are lucky and find that the saddle feels absolutely perfect right from the moment they park their tails on board. Others have to work at it for a while. My saddle felt firm but not uncomfortable. My first duty saw me ride 16 miles throughout the day. The chafing and discomfort I felt with the previous saddle was gone. This is still early in my saddle's life, however, and I hope that the comfort level will continue to improve as the saddle breaks in. I will submit updates on my progress as the year develops. With both Mark and I riding on identical saddles, I hope to be able to report on his impression of the saddle also as a balance.

A Brooks may not be the saddle to suit all public safety cyclists. If you share a bike, for instance, another saddle may be a better choice but, if you have sole use of a bike, it could be the one for you.

Brooks's website can be found at [www.brookssaddles.com](http://www.brookssaddles.com).

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