

How to Ship a Saddle

By Dusty Johnson

Well, now you have built that “ultimate saddle”, and you must get it to a customer a long distance away...or to a trade show showcase. You know how to mail a billfold, a belt, a purse, but a saddle is another matter altogether. I have had saddlemakers new to the trade call to ask how I do it. Let me assure you it is much easier than it appears.

I have shipped hundreds of saddles over the years and it is easier today than it has ever been. I now only restore the silver parade saddles made over forty years ago and have shipped more than 220 in the past ten years without a single problem. Most have been shipped domestically, but quite a few have gone overseas as far as France, Germany, Australia and China. Admittedly, shipping to foreign destinations is more challenging, but the packaging methods remain the same.

I prefer to use UPS® ground service, though DHL® and FedEx® will provide similar service, insurance and delivery options.

Let's begin, as some eager horse is awaiting your masterpiece.

Step 1:

Take good photographs of the saddle and all of its parts.

Step 2:

Obtain the following:

(1) Wardrobe Box from your local U-Haul, Ryder truck rental location, etc. Do not use standard cardboard packing boxes, such as U-Haul's “EZ Wardrobe Box”. They are not heavy-duty enough. Only the “Short Wardrobe Box” will do. Note: A “Short Wardrobe Box” measures 20 x 24 x 34 inches. It is best if you cut the height to a finished size of 30 inches, as anything over 32 inches will almost double the shipping cost!

(3) Bed Pillows – the cheaper, the better (\$3). I usually find them at the local discount store or thrift stores. If you feel like Diamond Jim Brady buy six, but it is unnecessary.

(1) Roll of Shipping Tape. Good shipping tape has nylon fibers running throughout and cannot be torn but must be cut. Package tape is usually clear or smoky in appearance. It does not have the same tensile strength and has a lower amount of adhesion. Please do not use duct tape under any circumstance. It will not hold!



Step 3:

Fold the box and securely tape the bottom across the seam and the edges of the flaps. Be sure to run one piece of tape 90° (perpendicular) to the main seam and a bit up the edges.

Step 4:

Put the pillows in the bottom, placing all three near the edge where the fork will sit.

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Step 5:

Lower the saddle down into the box with the horn and forks resting on the pillows. The only part that needs padding is the area around the horn and forks. Curl the fenders and stirrups into the sheepskin. Miscellaneous items (breast collar, tapaderos, extra latigos, etc.) may be also dropped inside the skirts with the sheepskin.

Step 6:

Take a photo of the inside of the box with everything in it and two pictures of the outside when sealed. This for insurance purposes – “just in case”.

Step 7:

Place documentation inside that has your own name, address and contact information and the same for the recipient of this beautiful piece of workmanship.

Step 8:

Close up the box and seal it completely on all seams with the shipping tape. Be kind to your shipper and leave the handle openings available for use when carrying this heavy box. It will insure that it is handled more delicately!

Step 9:

Write the shipping address and your return address **boldly** on the top of the box and cover these with clear packing tape to insure that they do not get smudged.

Step 10:

Contact the shipper and arrange for pickup (or save a little bit by taking it to their shipping center). Currently, shipping within the continental U.S. will probably be approximately \$50 if you follow these instructions.

Shipping a saddle is really that easy! If you are concerned about condition you might wrap the entire saddle with a thin blanket to prevent any abrasion against the cardboard. Really, there is no need for other packing (bubble wrap, blankets, carpet pieces, sponge pads, etc). Remember, these things are made to be used on horses and are, therefore, not delicate! I have shipped over 200 silver parade saddles worth many thousands of dollars using these exact methods and have never had a problem with damage.

Keep a copy of this shipping method in your files and do not hesitate to ship your wonderful artwork directly to your client or to any leather show you wish to enter in. Have fun and feel free to contact me if you have any questions about shipping.

I hope to see your saddle at the next show.

Happy Trails ↑



Dusty Johnson has written some of the best selling books

and DVDs in the leather industry. They may be found at his website, www.pvsaddleshop.com, and through leather suppliers nationwide. His shop has recently returned to Prescott, Arizona, where he continues “saving historic parade saddles for posterity”. Saddles from the Dusty & Sharon Collection may often be seen at the Phippen Museum of Western Art in Prescott. He can be reached by email at dustyjohn@aol.com.