



Those Big Bouncing Boobs

By Di Rowling

Since time began, women's breasts have been shaped, flattened, highlighted, hidden, pointed and uplifted as fashion dictated.

We are currently in the 'age of the big bust' – with breast implants and cavernous cleavages abounding on the big screen, in magazines, and amongst the various social sets, and the advent of the Wonderbra. In fact – women's breast sizes on the average have increased from a 34B to a 36C.

While your average 'bloke' no doubt sees this as an enormous positive – these appendages are not necessarily a bonus for (female) riders!

Given that riding has an extremely high inbuilt 'bounce factor', the issue of big bouncing breasts (BBB) is one of the utmost importance to riders. The high percentage of female riders in many of the disciplines gives the issue even more weight.

This article evolved from being a serious look at the impact of large breasts on riding position, comfort and health issues from riders' perspectives, and the viable control measures available to the BBR (Big Bosomed Rider). While the matter is of great seriousness and importance to the

many BBR's out there (and sensible information WILL be presented), during the course of 'rider research' we were so soundly entertained, that the reader must excuse occasional forays into farce and humour, sadly the subject matter just WON'T stay consistently serious!

Large breasts have implications for riders in a number of areas. They can: affect rider position and general posture; cause back and neck problems; cause general discomfort for the rider; result in self-confidence issues; make well-fitting riding gear difficult to acquire; and even distract the judge.

THE BOUNCE FACTOR

The breast is made up of fat tissue and milk ducts attached to the chest wall by delicate ligaments (*Coopers ligaments*). These ligaments stretch over time and with age, which results in sagging (commonly referred to disdainfully as 'the effect of gravity'!). There is no real evidence that proves excessive bouncing causes more sag (despite what the bra manufacturers would have us believe), just as there are apparently no real statistics that suggest that regularly wearing a bra (even to bed like Marilyn Monroe was reputed to do) will keep those

B.B.B's continued..

breasts perky as the years advance. It seems that dispensing with the bra won't see us with prematurely bruised kneecaps!

For everyday activities, the main reason for restricting breasts in general is cultural and visual, not comfort, as a recent survey of 100 women in the UK showed a marked decrease in breast tenderness when they abandoned their bras for day-to-day activities over a six-month period. This will come as no surprise to most bra-wearing women, who find bras to be uncomfortable at best.

Conversely, however, the preference for harnessing big bouncing breasts (BBB's) during exercise IS for comfort as research shows that wearing a well-fitting sports bra reduces breast tenderness and pain caused by impact and movement during vigorous exercise. This is just as true for women with small and average-sized breasts as for the DD+ brigade. It is important that the bra is well fitting and the best way to ensure this is to be properly measured, easily done in a speciality lingerie department store.

A sports bra works by compressing the breasts and eliminating excessive motion to relieve the strain on ligaments.

Osteopaths and chiropractors cite over-large breasts as the potential cause of back and neck problems as a result of the weight of the breasts affecting posture. When you bounce up and down whilst riding, then the weight of the breast is increased as a result of the acceleration and the deceleration involved, which also increases the 'pull' on the back and neck, and stress on the shoulders where the bra straps sit. A well-constructed sports bra with wide comfortable straps can also help diminish this problem.

The common misconception that small breasts do not need supporting was shown to be completely inaccurate

A survey undertaken by the independent research company, Taylor Nelson, sought the views of 200 GPs on reasons for sore and tender breasts after exercising. Inadequate breast support on suspensory ligaments and excessive breast motion were stated as the most likely cause of this problem. Research carried out in 1995 monitored breast movement in a nude breast and then looked at the support offered by different types of bras, including sports bras, and how they affected breast movement. One hundred women were tested on a running machine set at varying speeds, wearing no bra, an ordinary bra and a sports bra. At top speed (the equivalent of a fast run), and wearing no bra, the breast movement was an average 70mm away from the control point on the body over a range of sizes. The common misconception that small breasts do not need supporting was shown to be completely inaccurate as even amongst A cups, breast movement ranged up to an average of 42mm away from the control point on the body when not supported.

The research was conducted using running as the criteria, but is even more important for riders,



Regardless of their overall body size, most riders who have large breasts have difficulty in finding jackets to fit - ones that fit the chest are invariably too large on the shoulders, arms and hips.

given that horse riding is seen as one of the highest impact sporting activities, along with running and trampolining.

Most women can attest to the universal difficulty of finding a comfortable bra of any description so letting the breasts run riot might seem a good option. Natural health practitioners often recommend 'letting 'em all hang loose' as well, suggesting that the bra can interfere with blood and lymphatic circulation in the shoulders, armpits and around the rib-cage, and restrict breathing patterns. However, whilst the non-wearing of bras is optional for everyday activities, when it comes to riding, some form of bounce-restriction is preferred by all for comfort reasons.

RIDERS GET UP FRONT AND PERSONAL

The Big Bosomed Rider is not an uncommon sight, and many of these 'well-endowed' women riders were delighted to provide their perspectives on the 'ups and downs' of big 'bazookas' as applied to the gentle art of the equestrienne.

Respondents came from all over, from local Australian riders competing in a range of disciplines at various levels, to e-colleagues from Canada, the US and UK. Riders were asked to share their ideas on how BBB's affected their riding and competing, and what they recommended to keep that bounce under some semblance of control. Responses ranged from the hilarious to the serious.

RIDING AND THOSE RIOTOUS BOSOMS

Patricia Ellis, vet and novice level dressage rider from Victoria, doesn't wish to boast, but points out that she has, "been 36 DDD for many years, and because BBBs are a nuisance, I've been underwired for years. Slipping shoulder straps are another great irritation, so I make sure I'm cranked up to the point that my shoulders are being cut off!"

Asked about BBB's and riding position, she replied, "I'd never thought about it but (jokingly) BBs now provide me with the perfect excuse for the deficiencies of my balance, seat and position."

Michael Wallis had the following to share: "Once while riding a youngster I had worn the wrong bra and the strap kept sliding off one

shoulder so I was trying to guide the horse while clutching one vagrant breast to the rib cage. The horse went really well, thankfully, but I can't say the same for the pain and inconvenience of having one's most prominent feminine assets flying willy-nilly. If one's best girly bits are making one wince with every stride, then naturally, balance, riding competence, seat, position, back, neck, and rider temperament are all seriously affected."

Author **Catherine Bird** says that as her riding has improved, her attitude to her BBB's has changed.

"I used to 'lead' with my boobs when riding, quite self-consciously I think. Now I'm happier with my centre of gravity, and if I am positioned nicely, the position of my BBB's is a good indicator to me as to how well I am riding."

Kathleen Brown cites BBB's as the culprits in creating stiffness in her lower back, which has resulted in her not being able to move well with the horse, as well as contributing to severe neck pain, shoulder pain and cramping in her lower back. Additionally, she says, "all horse clothing is made for some imaginary twig that has no chest, no butt and no thighs. Maybe there are some riders out there that maintain a pre-pubescent body and can slide into a drinking straw if required, but I work hard to keep fit, and unless I just cut 'em off - I HAVE BOOBS!!!"



When you bounce up and down whilst riding, there is an increased 'pull' on the back and neck, and stress on the shoulders where the bra straps sit.

Julie West from California says that having a DDD measurement has been a frustrating thing for her to deal with. "I wish riding teachers and others knew how much it interferes with posture and riding overall. I used to suggest my trainers strap on two 10-pound honeydew melons to the chest and see how it affects them and how it is different than just being overweight in the girth! I think most aren't even aware of the effect, so a lot of riding issues get misunderstood or are addressed poorly."

Lisa Christy, a hack rider from WA says: "Being a BBR has had some affect on my riding position, as I think I tend to round my shoulders inward and lean a little forward to contain my boobs, and being a BBR makes me feel that I look out

of proportion when mounted, i.e. top heavy. It's also difficult to get a hacking jacket that fits the bust, without being too big/long in the arms, etc."

Jenny Moncur, a 'social' endurance rider from Victoria, admits that, "BBB's are a problem for me. I am a short person, and I find that heavy boobs tend to make me top heavy, to the point that if my horse moves unexpectedly, I sometimes find myself pitching forward, while my legs shoot back."

"I couldn't ride for any distance without some sort of scaffolding as I get a rather painful dose of nipple-chafe. The most painful aspect of BBB's though, is the pull that I get just in front of my upper chest. After 80 km's at a reasonable pace, I have real pain and discomfort in the skin and tissues above my boobs. If I could stop the bounce, I think it would minimise the pain in this area. The last endurance ride I competed in saw me holding my boobs with one arm while I trotted the last few km's back to ride base. I didn't care who saw me, I just wanted to stop the damn things hurting!"

A WEIGHT ISSUE?

As is evidenced by many of the responses from riders who are not overweight, but who nevertheless have BBB problems, BBB's are not necessarily a weight issue. However, regular contributors Sheila White and Tania Churchill offer two perspectives on the 'weight issue' as applied to BBB's and body image:

Pleasure rider and veterinarian **Sheila White** notes: "Unless one is a lactating mother, most of the bigness of boobs is due to fat. Women riders suffering from big boobs often are considerably overweight and when they lose weight, the boobs shrink and are less of a problem. I know that big boobed riders may well consider surgery without first considering the obvious, which is to lose weight all over. Tackle weight loss and fitness together and one's riding will improve exponentially."

Tania Churchill, novice / medium dressage competitor from ACT, had some insights to share about sports and body image that were relevant:

"There are very few BIB (big is beautiful) ladies at the top levels of hacking, dressage and eventing, and I think this is because although judges probably don't mean to be discriminatory, BBB's 'spoil the picture'. High performance sport tends to create a few issues with body image, and although riding isn't as damaging as gymnastics, it is still an issue."

TAKING CONTROL

Over the years, the equivalent of equestrian women's 'locker room' conversations have revealed a gamut of suggestions and solutions to the BBB scenario, ranging from letting the BBB's run riot under the vestments, to layers of various sorts of bras, to Vetrap and other surgical strapping apparatus. True to form, female respondents for this article also had some really excellent advice for taking control of errant BBB's whilst in the saddle.

Karen Briggs from Toronto, Canada, equestrian journalist and rider says "Speaking as a 38C I've wished many a time for a front which was set up like those Velcro knee-rolls on some saddles. You know ...velcro 'em on for a social occasion ... velcro 'em off for riding!"

Susan Dudasik from the US has a suggestion for a 'climate control bra'. "We've been discussing the possibility of making a cooling bra which would have an ice pack insert under the cup as riders with BBB's often sweat a lot, and end up raw and uncomfortable."

Amber Heintzberger from North Carolina says in reply "I know a Grand Prix dressage rider who wears a vest under her shirt that has pockets for ice packs. The idea of a cooling bra sounds nice, but I'd be afraid of turning them into boobcicles!"

Madelon Lane, from Victoria recommends a sports bra with good, strong-but-elastic qualities in the actual boob part. "I find it better to get a cheaper sports bra (at the moment I have found the very best is rather cheap at Kmart - around \$15 - Gala bra's sports version), buy new ones more often, and keep the newest ones for riding. Just letting the BBB's run riot is quite painful and I don't want them around my knees yet!"

Julie West says that, "For support, the double bra method works the best for me, although it's not ideal. I layer my everyday underwire with a squashy sport bra over it. This minimises bounce-related issues, although makes breathing a little more difficult."

Kathleen Brown recommends, "a HEAVY DUTY sports bra - but so far no one can make them good enough. This rubbish about one bra being able to reduce bounce by 50%, 'bought it, didn't work!' Will have to go the next level soon... duct tape!"

Emma Hayward from Orange Grove (aged 10) says that, "I hope I don't get BBB's, they bounce everywhere and it looks horrible!" Hmmm!

THE REDUCTION OPTION

One hears more about breast enhancement these days than breast reduction, but many women who have disproportionately large breasts tell stories of the life-altering effects (both physical and psychological) of having a breast reduction. **Marnye Langer**, from California had a



There are very few BIB (big is beautiful) ladies at the top levels of hacking, dressage and eventing.

'growing' problem with BBB's from the onset of puberty: "I've ridden and shown since I was a child and when puberty hit, I didn't stop growing until I was a very uncomfortable 32DD. I always wanted a breast reduction and actually looked into it in my mid-20's, but decided against it at that time on the advice of my doctor (if I had children, I wouldn't have been able to breast feed after a reduction), and therefore developed coping mechanisms. After a proper fitting I discovered I needed a full coverage bra, that goes up fairly high to keep from 'spilling out' the sides, which contained some of the unwanted 'jiggle', and I also discovered that the bra needs to fit exceptionally well around one's middle so the straps don't hold up all the weight (revolutionary!).

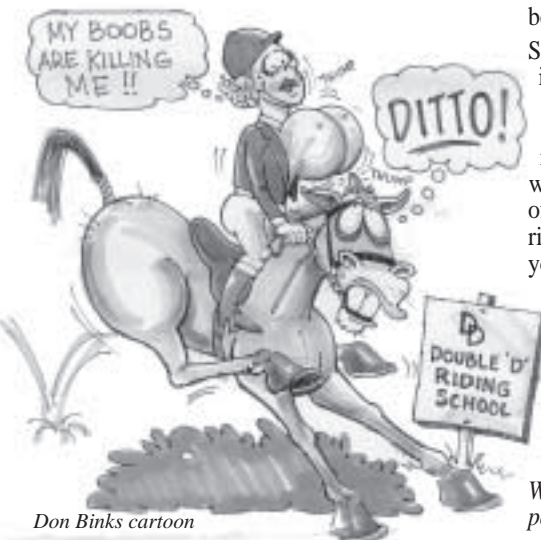
"In order to ride comfortably, I added a sports bra on top of my underwire, three fastener bra, and the set-up gave me shape (a sports bra alone just squished and then the whole mass just bobbed up and down -- yech!) and tremendous support. A snug, well-fitting hunt coat completed the picture and I was a very successful equitation rider - in fact, many people had no idea I was as big as I was. I NEVER wore t-shirts.

"For years, I coped this way. Then, in 1999 I eventually had a breast reduction after having had my child, and it was more life altering than I realised it could be. The surgery changed my riding enormously - I sit much more comfortably on a horse and my upper body position is much better. I can also sit trot without cringing!

So there you have the ups and downs of a big issue for female riders. Our breasts are here to stay and love them or hate them, bouncing or not bouncing, big or small, they feature in our riding pursuits. For those of you small busted women who may never have experienced any of the issues that big busted women face while riding, spare a thought for them the next time you slip on your little lacy number under your riding attire and remember size does matter!

On that note, just to prove that Hoofbeats is in no way sexist in its editorial policy, a future issue will focus on 'storage and support' issues for men and their 'bits' while riding, another topic for the equestrian 'locker room'. Feel free to contribute!

We would like to thank the riders who agreed to pose for these photos - especially our 'cover girl'.



Don Binks cartoon