

How to Measure for and Fit a Body Protector

Body protectors are a mandatory piece of equipment for event riders in the cross country phase of a horse trial. They can also be an asset to riders who are just learning to jump horses or for those who are schooling young or challenging horses.

Body protectors should be fitted over the type of clothing you intend to ride in. Because a body protector is meant to fit closely to your torso, most riders generally wear one over lightweight clothing, such as a ventilated riding shirt or jersey, with heavier garments and outerwear worn on top. However, if you intend to wear your body protector over heavier clothing, be sure to measure for and try it while wearing these garments.

Various manufacturers ask for slightly different measurements on their size charts: chest, waist and length. However, the chest measurement is most important no matter what brand of body protector you wish to try. This is because most body protectors allow the length to be adjusted through tabs at the shoulders, and most can be adjusted at the waist too.

Follow these basic steps to determine the size body protector you should try. You'll need a soft fabric tape measure, a pen and paper to record your measurements.

- 1) Run the tape measure around the widest point of your chest. Make sure the tape is snug, but not tight, and level.



The chest measurement is the most important in determining body protector sizing.

- 2) Run the tape measure around your natural waist. Make sure the tape is snug, but not tight, and level. See photo at right.

- 3) Some manufacturers, such as Airowear and Tipperary, require a measurement of the length of your spine. Sit in a chair or a saddle and run the tape measure from the base of the back of your neck to the base of your spine. Take the reading at a point about two to four inches above the seat to avoid interference of the back of the vest with the saddle during riding.



Take the spine measurement at a point where the body protector will not touch the saddle.



This measurement is only a guideline as most body protectors can be adjusted at the waist.

Checking the Fit of Your Body Protector:

Follow these guidelines to be sure that your body protector fits and is adjusted properly.

- 1) Before putting on the body protector, loosen all closures and flex the body protector. With it on, fasten the chest and waist closures to achieve a snug fit. Make sure you have room left within the fasteners for further tightening or loosening. If your body protector is at the end of the range of its ability to be tightened or loosened, consider trying another size or type of vest.

Note: Some body protectors, such as those from Charles Owen and Airowear, will warm up and begin to conform to your body as you wear them. If this is the case with your body protector, be sure to readjust the closures ten to twenty minutes after putting it on.

- 2) With the body protector fit securely around your chest and waist, check the front length. The body protector should reach to your breastbone and cover your bottom rib. The shoulders and neckline of the body protector should lie flat against your body; if this fit cannot be achieved – if the vest pulls away from your body – then you may need to try a shorter length. Some styles allow you to adjust the length of the protector through tabs at the shoulders.

- 3) Check the back length by sitting in a saddle and simulating all of your riding positions. You should have approximately two to four inches between the saddle and the base of the body protector in the back. If the body protector comes in contact with the saddle, it could push upwards near your neck or interfere with your riding.

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④ Other manufacturers, such as Charles Owen and Wool Wear, ask for a measurement that runs from the front of your natural waist, over your shoulder, to the back of your waist.



⑤ Compare your measurements with the manufacturer's size chart for the body protector you would like to try. Choose the size that most closely matches your measurements. If your measurements fall between a size range provided by a manufacturer, then choose the size smaller; body protectors should fit snugly against your torso.

The effectiveness of the body protector depends on achieving a correct fit, as described in "Checking the Fit of Your Body Protector" sidebars of this article. You can also order custom body protectors that are made according to your measurements.

Note: Inflatable jackets and vests, such as the Point Two Pro Air Jacket and the Hit-Air Advantage, are designed to be worn along with and on top of a body protector.

An over-the-shoulder measurement is taken from the front of the natural waist to back of the natural waist.



Checking the Fit of Your Body Protector:

Different body protectors will fit you differently depending on the style and manufacturer. Achieving the best fit for you is most important. You may have to experiment with different brands or styles to find the most suitable body protector for you to use. If you cannot achieve an appropriate fit, consider ordering a custom body protector made to your measurements. Be sure to consult a Dover Saddlery product advisor or a knowledgeable trainer if you have any concerns about fit.

Body Protectors in Competition

- To reflect your team or stable colors, you can order custom color combinations for your body protector. Charles Owen offers custom colors in the JL9 Body Protector and the Ultra-Lite Body Protector, and Tipperary offers custom colors in the Eventer and the Competitor XC.
- You can coordinate your skull cap cover with your body protector by ordering a custom cover.
- Remember to purchase and wear a medical armband in competition.



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