

A LETTER FROM THE DESIGNER/DEVELOPER OF SKITO EQUALIZER PADS:

A Saddle Pad For All Occasions

No such animal! Since I manufacture the equalizer saddle pad, I naturally consider it the best pad on the market. But will the equalizer pad solve all the problems? No! What are the problems? What are we trying to accomplish with a saddle pad or blanket? Why am I using a saddle pad at all? You be the judge. I will argue for the horse. As a horse I would want a pad on my back that:

- "absorbs sweat which helps keep me cool"**
- "keeps the saddle from pinching"**
- "keeps the saddle from chafing"**
- "keeps the saddle in place"**
- "evenly distributes the riders weight"**
- "absorbs shock"**
- "lets the rider feel my movement"**
- "and I want to look good!"**



Aren't you glad you are not a horse? Seriously, let's look at saddle pads from an analytical perspective starting with sweat absorption.

Fabric or fleece against the back must wick the moisture and do more than just hold the warm sweat in suspension as is the case with dense felts and all wool fleece. Look for breathable fabrics or fleeces that do not mat nor are so thick they make you unstable. Remember that thick piles can aggravate heat retention. Multiple layers of pads or blankets have the same effect on heat retention as winter layering for the human body.

Pinching cannot be lessened by padding. Get a saddle that fits. Saddles are like shoes. Thick socks in tight shoes don't help one whit. Imagine a narrow tree with a thick pad. The rider will end up perching on the pad and concentrating pressure where the tree pinches.

Movement of the saddle relative to the animal is conducive to chafing. Fishtailing of the hindquarters under the saddle appears to be most the common problem with additional padding placed under the cantle as a solution. Treat the problem, not the symptom. The symptom is off-contact at the back of the saddle. The problem, probably, is the front of the saddle has slipped down into the pocket at the base of the withers and behind the scapula, a position problem not apparent when the horse is standing still. Lift the front and center of the saddle but not by padding at the withers.

Saddle shift can be a result of any number of problems. I most often encounter saddle movement when there is a bridging condition, multiple pads in use, or general poor fit of saddle to animal. Some pads can help, but again are a treatment of the symptom. Saddle fit is the key which takes us to weight distribution.

Treeless saddles and flexible trees have certainly complicated the problem of weight distribution as normally addressed in tree design. This is too complex of a discussion to address here, so let's just look at your animal's back and see where it's able to accept the load of the rider and saddle. If the saddle is riding on the ribcage, spine, withers or loin, you probably have an unhappy animal. Look at your existing pad or blanket for a telltale sweat pattern and uniform compaction of fleece or fabric. Look for the point dirt accumulates as a probable area of minimal contact. Full contact of the tree or bars is the essence of good weight distribution.

Weight distribution means shock distribution. More surface area to absorb shock means a more comfortable ride for animal and rider. When looking for a shock absorbing pad use the drop test of a weight on the pad and check for rebound. The weight should hit like a sack of

potatoes, not a tennis ball. Be careful with thick pads that do absorb shock but might put you a mile from the horse.

The sense of oneness with your horse is not accomplished with thick or multiple pads. The least padding that accomplishes the job is the best, much like government.

Style is last because it should be. There are a multitude of pads in all colors but the consideration for aesthetics should be only after form fit and function.

There is no one formula to decide the best saddle pad. There are too many variables, not the least of which are baseless opinion. The analysis of saddle pads, saddles or any item for that matter, is essentially the same process, an exercise in deductive reasoning. Ask yourself what you expect from the item you will purchase. Will the design of the item meet your needs? Will the materials perform as advertised? Do you know what the materials are? Imagine a content label on everything you buy. (I am not advocating universal content labeling, only the obligation of the consumer to educate themselves and free society from the victim syndrome.) Are you relying on testimony, advertisement and hype, or do you actually understand the product including design and materials? When in doubt, don't kid yourself.

It only costs you money and a cranky horse.

Happy trails!
Tom