

# THE POWER OF A PAD

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Let's face it, the world of saddle pads can be an overwhelming one, whether English or western. But in the end, it's all what is best for the horse.

There are a vast number of brands, shapes, materials and colors. Now, many people think a saddle pad can be the answer to saddle fit problems. Not true. Can it help? Sure. If you have a major pressure point, a certain pad can help but it may end up putting the pressure somewhere else, creating a separate problem. If there is a major saddle fit issue (reference 7 Days of Saddle Fit), the pad isn't going to help very much.

When a saddle fits properly, minimal padding is needed. Think about this: you don't put extra socks on when your shoes are too tight!

**Materials:** Wool, Felt, Sheepskin, Fleece, "Tacky-Too", Cotton, the list goes on and on. Different "cores" to the pads to relieve pressure points are also options. However, *the more natural, the better.*

- *Tacky Too bottoms: If you can avoid these, PLEASE DO!! You don't like rubber pulling on your arm hairs, right? Yea, that's what I thought. Neither does your horse. It's hot, and pulls on the horse's hair, and just plain uncomfortable. If the purpose is to eliminate saddle slipping one way or the other – your saddle does not fit!*

**Shape:** SHAPE MATTERS! The shape refers to the contour at the withers. You see pads (western and English) that are straight, with no curve to them. Could some horses use these and be ok? Yes. But most horses are not shaped like that. Contoured is the way to go. I have seen MUCH better results and happier horses with contoured pads (ones with shape to them, that mimic the shape of the horse's back).



**Shimmable Pads:** English or Western –

These can be helpful with minor saddle fit issues, mainly even weight distribution through the saddle support area. If the saddle is bridging – you can fill in the middle shim and nothing in the front or back sections, and even the weight out, and eliminating painful pressure at the shoulders and lumbar area. It can also help if the tree is too wide, hence needing shims in the front, and none in middle or rear sections. However, you may have to add shims in all the pockets depending on what the horse needs. Even in some cases, you could use the large single pocket (Thinline), or cut stitches out on the separated pockets to create a better shape for your horse’s hollow spots.

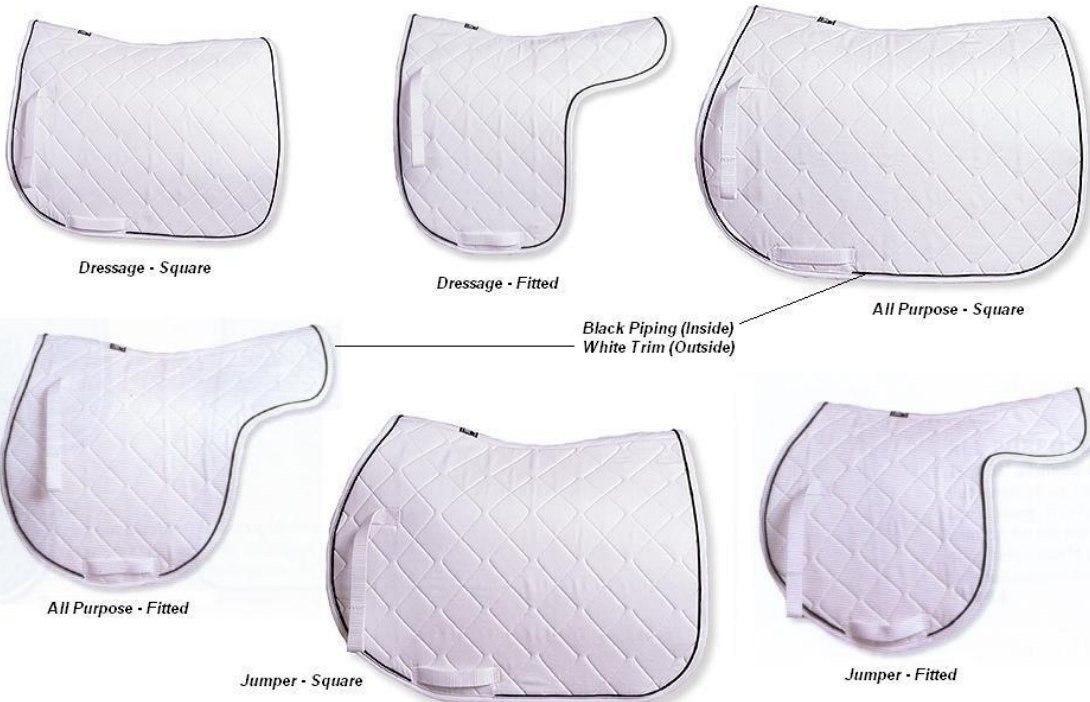


**ENGLISH:**

English saddles have padding in the panels, so you don't need a very thick pad to help protect the horses back. Too thick a pad can affect the fit of the saddle.

**Types:** Cotton (All-purpose/dressage), Shaped (hunter, equitation), square (dressage, cross country), baby (everyday schooling)

These different types should still have some shape to them.



**Half Pads:** Correctional styles, neoprene, sheepskin, memory foam. These are meant to help distribute the rider's weight more evenly or provide extra protection with the saddle. There needs to be extra room to allow for these pads, so sometimes it isn't the best option. Half pads are not a long term solution to poor saddle fit.



**Riser Pads:** This one gets me a little fired up. A riser pad is meant to go under the cantle of your English saddle, if the pommel is too high. However, if you read or remember details about tree width, if the pommel is too high, that means the back (cantle) is too low and the saddle is not balanced. Placing a riser pad under the cantle puts EVEN MORE pressure on the back, drives the tree points into the shoulder, and fills in the gullet channel.

OUCH!! If the tree is too narrow – look for a new one.

Riser Pad



## **WESTERN:**

With a western saddle, there isn't much protection for the horse's back against the hard tree or panel. Wool or other materials provide a thin layer, but a pad is most definitely needed for a western saddle.

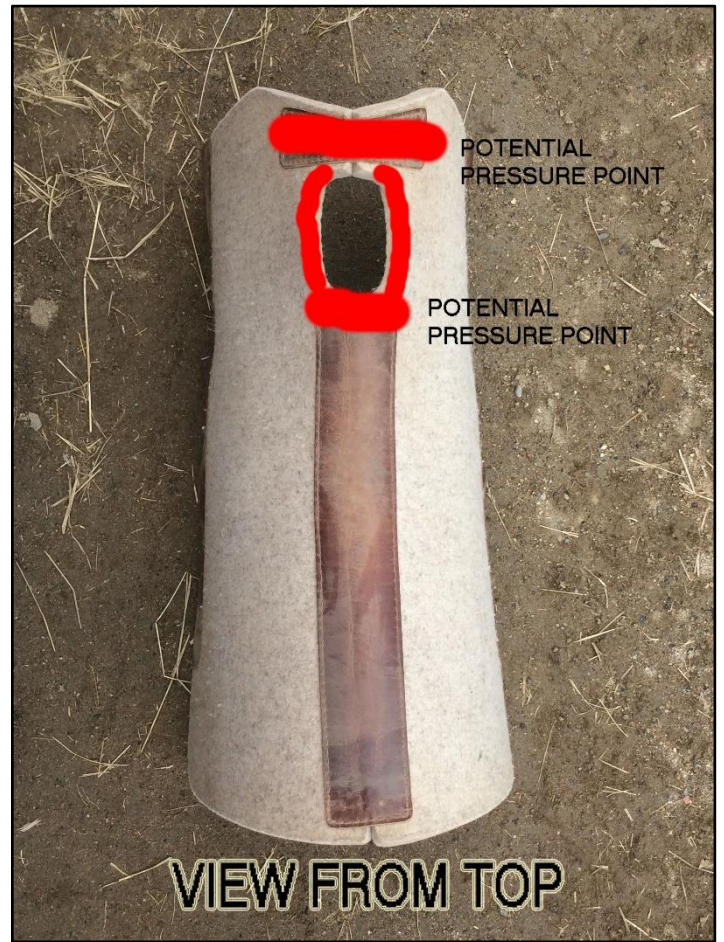
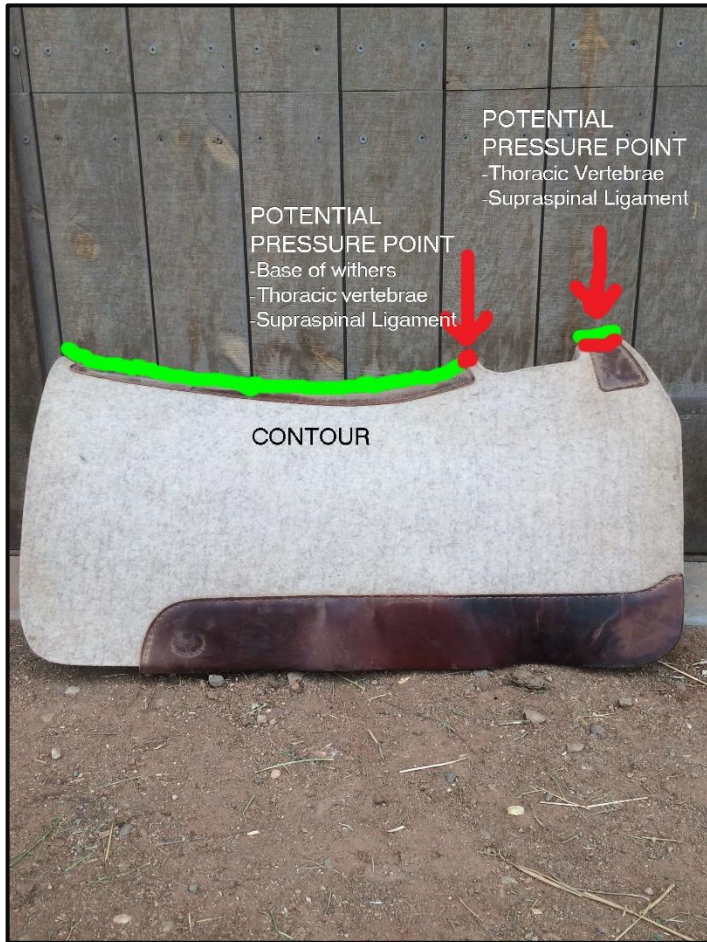
The panels (bars of a tree) are hard material, like plastic, wood or a poly material blend. There are usually covered in wool. However, it isn't enough protection against the larger weight distribution area.

There are western pads for essentially every discipline, so it just depends what you're looking for and need.



**THICKNESS:** Western pad thickness can be a tough choice. It will depend on the saddle you have, rider weight, and saddle fit. If the saddle fits properly, you may only need a  $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick pad. A 1" thick pad could be beneficial in some instances, but typically can be too thick. Sometimes people think "well my saddle has some pressure points, so I need a thicker pad to help". That's the opposite thing to do. Consider this: if your shoes are too tight, you don't put thicker socks on, right? Same idea with the saddle pads. If there are pressure points, don't put more padding on – use less. Now, if there are more issues than pressure points with the fit, consider a new saddle.

**WITHER RELIEF PADS:** These pads that claim to have a "wither relief" – I don't believe it. It's not truly a wither relief. It's just a hole in the pad, restricted by 2 pieces of leather on each end. If you have an extremely high withered horse, these pads will never give the wither "relief" – only pressure on the thoracic vertebrae under the leather pieces. Even horses with long withers can have pressure points. If you want/need wither relief – go with a contoured pad with no hole!



**ENDURANCE:** They need to be durable and moisture wicking. The more natural the better. Neoprene or rubber bottoms have the potential to become too hot. However, a lot of endurance riders like the rubber for ease of cleaning.



### **Articles to Read:**

There are a couple of informative articles highlighting pads and research behind some brands/styles of pads.

- [www.thehorse.com/115636/saddle-pad-science](http://www.thehorse.com/115636/saddle-pad-science)
- <https://twsaddlery.com/paradox-of-saddle-pads/>

All things said, these ideas may not apply every horse/rider/saddle. Everyone has a unique situation and has different needs.

### **Companies I like/recommend:**

Thinline & Christ – Terry Peiper of FIT RIGHT SADDLE SOLUTIONS in Crossville, TN is a representative and dealer of Christ and Thinline products. Visit her website and order – [www.fitrightsaddlesolutions.com](http://www.fitrightsaddlesolutions.com)

Specialized Saddles Fleece, TW Saddlery Contoured Western Pad

5 Star

Professionals Choice

Classic Equine

Any English pads that are of good quality and have the proper shape