The Theraflex Pad is a self inflating, auto-balancing pad that:

• Evenly distributes the weight of the entire saddle tree
• Improves saddle fit
• Alleviates pressure points
• Provides anti-slip performance
• Protects the horse’s back
• Allows the horse’s back to flex and move more freely
• Allows the skin to breathe, and COOLS the horse through evaporative process
• Insures No pressure on the spine or its ligaments
• Improves air flow and release of heat
• Allows right and left balance for the rider
• Improves the feel of riding by facilitating close contact
• Improves the horse’s comfort and performance

This revolutionary non-slip, custom fit pad is designed to work with most English and Western saddles. The baffled air cells (through micro-porous filters) inside allow the pad to fill gaps that occur between the horse’s back and the saddle, providing optimum weight distribution and eliminating pressure points. The Theraflex Pad slowly reshapes as the horse goes from standing to moving thereby continuing to create a perfect interface between the moving back and the static saddle.

**Cleaning and Care**

1. When not in use, store upside-down in a clean, dry place with valves open.
2. DO NOT place anything on top of the pad when storing. (Example: store on TOP of saddle, NOT underneath).
3. If dusty or dirty, wipe with a DAMP cloth or brush. If washing is necessary, hang the pad over a rail, then wash using a water hose directed from the side with mild soap. Drip and air-dry. If heavy soaking or power washing is required, REMOVE AIR CELLS first.
4. If hair builds up, vacuum or brush off with a soft brush.
5. If air cells are inadvertently punctured or damaged, repair or replace. If this happens when riding and/or before repair can be made, keep the valve on the other side open and the pad will act as a normal pad without the benefit of the fitting and cushioning features. Repair or replace as soon as possible for maximum benefit.
Theraflex® Saddle Pad

Directions

Please read from beginning to end so you are properly educated about the use of the pad. For your greatest opportunity for success, we highly recommend your viewing it and absorbing the information. The first few times you use your Theraflex Pad, it is worth taking the time it takes to get familiar with it and to learn how to place it under your saddle. Pretty soon it will become second nature to you.

1. Make sure the air cells are inflated and the VALVES are OPEN. When you open the valves, they draw air into the pad automatically. This is also how you should store your Theraflex Pad, with the valves open so it is ready for use next time.

2. LEAVE the VALVES OPEN and put the pad on your horse. (Please note: while we formerly recommended closing the valves when you put the pad on your horse, Linda has now discovered that people have generally had a tendency to leave TOO MUCH AIR in the pad, which results in feeling like one is riding a “bubble”. Therefore, she now suggests that we leave the valves open, and close them later in the cinching process). Place the pad a little forward so you can slide it back and keep the hair flat underneath. Position the front of the pad just behind the scapula cap (shoulder blades).

3. Place the saddle on top of the pad and center it from front to back and left to right. The saddle should sit in the middle of the pad, not too much out in front nor out the back... just right. The space down the middle of the pad should be in line with the horse’s spine and with the gullet of the saddle. You want everything equal and straight. Make sure that the valves are not under the front of the saddle. This would be very uncomfortable for the horse!

4. Using the front strap, pull the pad high up into the gullet of the saddle so the valves are touching (no more than 1 inch apart is a good guide) and even in height. As you ride, the pad will settle and widen at the front to find its perfect place.

5. Cinch/girth up as usual. We recommend three stages of tightening the cinch/girth mainly for the horse’s comfort and acceptance. Not only is this more respectful of the horse’s comfort, it allows you to release air from the Theraflex Pad before the final adjustment. DO NOT SQUEEZE ALL THE AIR OUT OF THE PAD, or it cannot do its job.

6. After the second cinching, CLOSE THE VALVES. When you move your horse around just a bit at this stage, it will help the pad’s air chambers to settle into just the right “custom fit” for your horse’s particular shape. Then tighten the cinch for the third time. The Theraflex Pad should now have the ideal amount of air in the air cells to interface between your horse’s back and the saddle. Especially when used with a very lightweight saddle, it is a good idea to press down on the back / cantle area of the saddle to make certain too much air has not settled there. In the case of very, very lightweight saddles, you could also press down in the center of the saddle to be sure that the air is equalized and to avoid too much left in. During the release of air, make sure your horse is standing quietly and straight rather than crooked. This will make sure that the pad interfaces properly with the saddle at rest. Note: some horses could spook at the soft hissing sound of the air releasing, in which case you may want to simulate the sound and desensitize him beforehand. See Troubleshooting for more info.

7. IMPORTANT: Play with your horse on the ground before mounting up to make sure he becomes familiar with the new feel of the pad. Whenever you change something on a horse, Make No Assumptions...this is an important Parelli principle. This pad may have a different feel from the pad your horse is used to, and some horses don’t do well at first when things change. Take some time to play with your horse on the ground at all gaits and even jump him over a little log. If he goes to buck, ignore it and keep focused on getting him to do what you asked. Within a minute or so the horse is usually fine and settled. See Troubleshooting for more info.

8. Mount up and enjoy the ride! (Note: see the Troubleshooting section about too much air or too little air in the pad)

9. After you are mounted, and the horse is standing square while you sit squarely, if one side feels high, equalize by opening the high side valve slightly to release a quick burst of air.

10. Keep your pad clean & store it with the valves open. Do not allow sweat and hair to build up or the pad’s anti-slip effect will diminish. Simply wipe off sweat and hair after each ride with a damp cloth. Open the valves and hang the Theraflex Pad by the front strap, or place it upside down over the top of your saddle or on its own rack. Leaving the valves open makes sure the pad keeps its shape and its automatically ready for your next ride.
Theraflex® Saddle Pad

Troubleshooting

Your horse reacts negatively to pad the first time
Some horses are very sensitive and emotionally have trouble with changes of any kind. In rare cases this horse may buck when feeling the Theraflex Pad for the first time. This is why it’s important to play with your horse on the ground before riding (savvy Parelli students do this every time before they ride!) and to persist until the horse is no longer bothered. In most cases this only takes a minute or two, sometimes even less but how you handle it is important:
1. Instead of just sending him in circles, focus on asking your horse to do something such as Squeeze Games over jumps or transitions while on the circle, etc.
2. You need to have an attitude of “Get busy, you have things to do!” This focuses the horse mentally and quickly calms them down emotionally.
3. It’s common for people to worry and retract their leadership when the horse is having some trouble, but that is when they are looking to you for reassurance. If you act like nothing is different, they’ll settle quickly. If you make it an issue, they will get worse.
4. If for any reason your horse has an extreme reaction, turn the horse loose in a safe place and give him time to work it out. Make sure your stirrups cannot get caught on anything or tie them up.

Horse might spook at hissing sound of air releasing
Prior and Proper Preparation Prevents...you know what. Again, a very sensitive, reactionary horse may be startled by the sound of the air coming out of the valves. Before taking the pad to the horse, use desensitizing techniques such as making a soft hissing sound while moving around your horse, stopping and starting it to mimic the sound it makes from the pad. Get to where you can drape your arm over your horse’s back and make the sound. Once he pays no attention, you can confidently introduce the pad.

Pad slips down/back/forward/goes crooked
There are a few things that can cause this:
1. Your girth/cinch is too loose so the pad floats around underneath the saddle instead of sitting securely between horse and saddle. You don’t want to overtighten the cinch, but don’t have it loose either.
2. A rider who drives with their seat can cause the saddle or the pad (or both) to slide forward. This is valuable feedback for improving riding technique. Horses don’t like it when you drive with your seat as it causes them to hollow their back in defense. Have a quiet seat and ride with Fluidity.
3. A rider who braces in their stirrups can sometimes cause the pad to slip backwards. Once again this is valuable feedback as bracing in the stirrups causes a horse to put more weight on its forehand. The rider’s seat should bear the most weight with feet resting in the stirrups, not bracing.
4. When the pad goes crooked, this can tell you about crookedness or tension in the horse or the rider. Again, it is interesting feedback and will change as horses and riders discover more harmony and better skills. Slight crookedness in the pad is not an issue, but major displacements will require you to re-saddle. Check also that you have the pad positioned symmetrically when you first saddle. (Note: A crooked pad is not usually caused by uneven muscling because the air dissipates to even that out, however the uneven muscling is usually caused by crookedness in the horse’s posture.)
5. It might have too much hair build-up or dirt on it.
6. With a double cinch saddle, the front cinch is set forward, so make certain that the back cinch is tight enough to equalize pressure.

Too much air in the pad
This will make you feel like you’re riding on a bubble. You can’t feel the horse and may even feel a little unstable. Let some air out in one or two very short bursts and it will feel a little softer and more connected to the horse. Be careful not to let too much air out or the pad will not perform.

Too little air in the pad
This makes the pad dysfunctional as the air will not have enough effect. The Theraflex Pad actually does not need a lot of air in order to work, but it does need some air! If you have let too much air out by accident, simply start again. You can accelerate this, if the horse is not cinched, by blowing into the valves to reinflate the air cells.

Rub marks/ruffled hair on the horse
This is a sign of disharmony between horse and rider. Friction is caused when the rider is stiff and prevents the saddle from moving with the horse. Sometimes the location of the ruffled hair can provide valuable feedback. If the horse is rubbed on one or both sides of the shoulder area, it tells the rider about stiffness in one or both of their shoulders. If the horse is rubbed at the back of the saddle or pad area, it can tell you about stiffness in hips or heels. In a hollow backed horse, it’s important to make sure the saddle isn’t sitting down so low that the pad now runs into the horse’s hip. This can also hap-
pen if over-shimming in front and putting the saddle out of balance and on too steep and angle. See diagram below. The saddle and pad should never interfere with a horse's shape and sometimes ground work with cavaletti or “Hill Therapy” is necessary to redevelop muscles on the horse's topline before riding again. A weak topline is a weak back and compromises the horse's comfort and health when ridden. See articles on Parelli.com, in the May, 2007 issue of Savvy Times Magazine.

Dry spots
A dry spot can tell you about no pressure or too much pressure. When the whole back is sweaty and an area is completely dry there are three things to consider:
1. There is no contact with the horse's skin at all, as is the case down the spine of the pad.
2. There is excessive weight being exerted from the saddle on this area. It is common to see dry spots on the shoulder area which tells you that the saddle is riding in a downhill position, too low at the front. This is most likely to happen on a horse with a downhill posture and when the rider leans forward or braces in their stirrups thus putting even more weight on the front. The solution is to use shims to compensate for the lack of structure and muscling in the horse's shoulder and upper ribcage area, to give clearance for the shoulders and shift the weight off the forehand.
3. The horse is using his back differently, for the better, and pushing his muscles up into the pad. In this case, the dry spots are temporary and usually disappear after two or three rides. If it doesn't, you need to address your shimming pattern and perhaps even your riding patterns such as bracing in the stirrups or riding up forward on your seat bones.

While dry spots have to be addressed to determine the cause and alleviate it, they are not painful to the horse in the way a saddle is that restricts the use of its back.

Poorly muscled toplines are so common in the ridden horse because the saddle is not designed to fit a horse in motion, it is shaped to the horse's back when at rest. At this time the muscles are flat and the back is DOWN. As soon as the horse moves he will naturally try to lift his ribcage and withers, but when the saddle prevents this he will alter his posture, keep his back dropped down and adjust his way of moving to avoid pinching, discomfort and even pain.

A poorly muscled back should be of great concern to the rider as it indicates major saddle problems and will lead to soreness in the back, lameness and eventual breakdown. Note: Dry spots can lead to white marks if not addressed.

White marks
There are two types of white marks that can occur on a horse—white flecks of hair and solid white-colored scars. The white hairs are usually temporary and are evident on soft tissue areas, such as the area behind the shoulders. They usually do not cause any pain, but are evidence of too much weight on the front of the saddle which puts weight on the horse's forehand. This is damaging to the front legs of the horse.

White scars occur on the shoulder blade itself and may be seen in one part or on the entire range of movement of the shoulder blade. The cause is pressure from the saddle where the skin is pinched between the bone of the shoulder blade and the saddle. These scars are usually permanent and are caused by a saddle that presses onto the shoulders because it is too narrow or downhill.

Skin Indentations
After a ride you may see indented patterns on your horse's skin in the shape of the air cells or the outer rim of the pad itself. This is nothing more than what happens to your skin from the elastic in your underwear or if your shirt is crinkled under your belt, and you are more likely to see it in well padded horses!