

Choices in Saddle Panels

When you're buying a saddle, a consideration in your decision making process may involve the way in which the saddle's panels are filled.

Saddle panels are designed and intended to distribute weight and pressure evenly along a horse's back. Much discussion has gone into the creation of saddle panels, and two main schools of thought have developed. One school favors wool flocked panels and one school favors foam filled panels. Air filled panels are also popular with some riders.

Historically, saddle panels have been flocked with wool fibers. Long strands of wool, wool fibers blended with synthetic fibers, or synthetic fibers alone are placed by hand into a canvas lined panel. Foam is a modern innovation for saddle panels. It can be either synthetic or natural latex, and it is placed into the lining of the panel to fill out the form.

Advantages of Flocked Panels

- Flocking, especially that made of natural wool, conforms to a horse's back.
- A skilled saddle fitter can adjust the flocking of the panels to best fit your horse. Adjustments can be done regularly as the horse's muscles develop or the shape changes due to diet or other factors.
- When the flocking becomes compressed over time and use, a saddle fitter can replace it fairly inexpensively to breathe new life into the saddle.
- Wool is breathable and for this reason some people feel that wool keeps a horse's back cooler.
- Synthetic flocking is believed by some to provide loft and durability, whether used alone or combined with wool fibers.

You can find flocking in many saddles, such as the Steffen Peters Advantage Dressage Saddle.

Advantages of Foam Filled Panels

- Foam does not shift or compress.
- Foam is resilient.
- Foam can be appropriate for a saddle that is used on multiple horses as it won't conform to any one horse's back.
- Foam tends to be available in thinner panels that some riders feel provide a closer contact.

You can find foam filled panels in many saddles, such as in the Hermes Corlandus Dressage Saddle, which uses natural latex foam, and the Circuit Premier Master Saddle.

Combination Wool and Foam Panels

Some saddle manufacturers have combined the benefits of both flocking and foam into their saddles, as described here:

- AMS Panels are designed for riders who prefer the versatility of a flocked panel but who wish to also have their horses enjoy the benefit of foam. AMS panels consist of a synthetic flocking material stuffed into a smooth, breathable neoprene lining that helps reduce bumps and pressure points against the horse's back. AMS Panels are found in the Anky Euro XCH Dressage Saddle and the Pessoa A/O AMS XCH Saddle.
- Bayflex Panels consist of a memory-flex polyurethane material designed to provide superior padding for a variety of sports applications. With excellent memory retention, the foam retains its original shape yet self adjusts to the horse's back to minimize pressure points. The foam also maintains its temperature and therefore minimizes hot spots. You can find Bayflex Panels inside many Pessoa saddles, such as the Pessoa A/O XCH saddle.
- Comfort Fit Panels found in Marcel Toulouse saddles enable riders to enjoy the benefits of both foam and wool flocking. The wool is stuffed into a foam panel lining and can be adjusted for the horse. The foam panel lining is intended to help reduce pressure points.

CAIR Panels

The CAIR Panel System replaces traditional panel fillings with air as the cushioning agent for the horse. Each saddle panel has two independently sealed Air Panels, with the air acting as a fluid medium to constantly adapt to the horse's working muscles to eliminate pressure points. The CAIR Panel System is found in Bates saddles, such as the Isabell Dressage Saddle, and in many Wintec Saddles, such as the 2000 All Purpose Saddle.



Wool Flocked Panels



Foam Panels



CAIR Panels



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