



HOOF BEATS NORTH



The Newsletter of Competitive Trail Riding in Alaska

March / April 2008

Bald Mountain Butt Buster Update

The date for the Bald Mountain Butt Buster is August 15, 16, in Wasilla. A website has been created by the non-profit group Competitive Trail Riders of Alaska. The website will have dates and other information about CTR and trail riding in general. The address is www.freewebs.com/ctralaska.

There will be a CTR clinic on May 31st and a fundraising Poker Ride on June 29th. These are both fundraisers for the Bald Mountain Butt Buster CTR. Both events will be held in the Wasilla area. There will also be a raffle going on for a rifle. Contact Nancy Williams at rio@mtaonline.net for more information about any of these events.



Report From NATRC National Convention

I attended the NATRC National Convention in Denver, Colorado February 14-17, 2008. The event was held at the Renaissance Denver Hotel, and was hosted by NATRC Region 3 members.

I arrived on Thursday, in time to sit in on some of the National Board of Directors meeting. Many issues and items were discussed. One of the major things to come out of the meeting was the approval of the NBOD to provide liability insurance coverage through Equisure for NATRC members. A new category of membership was created, called the Platinum Membership. Those individuals who renew their membership under the new category will have the added benefit of the insurance. More on this elsewhere in this newsletter.

I was joined at the convention by Rachel Sears and her daughters Shelby and Hannah. On Friday, we attended the seminars and lectures. The presentation by Dr. Gary Pallaoro entitled "What A Lame Excuse for a Trail Horse" was very interesting, and by the use of short video clips, allowed us to watch a lame horse move and try to decide which leg was lame. The Judge's Panel in the afternoon was interesting as well, with judges discussing how they handle various judging situations. Then we all got to stretch and bend in the "Yoga for Equestrians" presentation. In the evening, we were treated to live entertainment in the form of the band Rob Soloman and Cypress Road. They were quite good!

The Saturday lectures started off with a very in-depth discussion by Dr. Dane Frazier of equine metabolic diseases, such as tying up, thumps and exhausted horse syndrome. That was followed by a very entertaining, lighthearted, actually hilarious, presentation by Steve Ancell entitled "Getting Back on Trail." He had the audience laughing hysterically with his

From the Editor.

How cruel can Mother Nature be, anyway? To give us a wonderful warming, melting trend, leading us to believe that we might be in for an early spring, and then to blast us with another month of snow, ice and cold weather! How cruel is that?! But the horses are shedding like crazy, and that usually means spring is coming. But my question is, WHEN?! Maybe someday soon we will be able to say it is really spring.

Despite the weather, I have been able to get out and ride on a fairly regular basis, and I hope you all have been able to do so also. There are a lot of horse activities already scheduled for this summer and we need to get those fat furry beasts in shape in order to enjoy these events to the full. I am including an incomplete list of trail events elsewhere in this issue. I'm only listing the ones I know about. And I'm sure there are many more that I don't know about. If you know of an event that isn't listed, drop me an e-mail and let me know about it so I can pass it on. See you on the trail!

Laurie Knuttila

own inventions for keeping riders on trail! Then Dr. Frazier was back with a very good presentation on the use of electrolytes for distance horses. The final lecture of the day was a presentation about myofascial release techniques for horses.

That evening, we enjoyed a very good meal, followed by the presentation of the Year-End Awards. Alaska was well-represented, with Rachel there to accept her National Championship award. Her daughters were also presented with their team award ribbons.

The convention was well-run and the lectures were very educational. I would have liked to see more vendors present, but that was my only complaint. The ones that were there were very friendly and helpful and I did come away with some new gadgets and tack! All in all, it was a good experience and a nice mid-winter break!

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History of Competitive Trail Riding in Alaska

As promised in the last issue of this newsletter, here is a mostly complete history of CTR in Alaska. There may be a few gaps here and there that we could not fill in. This project taxed folks' brains all across the state!

Competitive trail riding started in the Fairbanks area in the late 1960's when Sandy Rosenberg and Gail Mayo, as leaders of the Pony Express 4-H Club started holding rides. They did not put on a ride every year, but they did have several rides. The rides were held in the Goldstream area around where Ivory Jack's Restaurant is now, the Farmer's Loop area, and in the Two Rivers area. The rides were judged early on by Dr. VanPelt, and then later by both Dr. Van Pelt and Dr. Bob Dieterich. Gail said that there was always a problem deciding who would be the horsemanship judge, since everybody knew everybody and nobody wanted to create a conflict of interest. Jamie Dieterich, Bob's wife, began serving as the horsemanship judge starting in the early '70's. Dr. Dieterich and Jamie judged the ride every year from 1974 until 1988.

Barbara Buck wrote about CTR in the Fairbanks area: "I personally have been involved in competitive trail riding since 1969. At that time there were several people who were doing a lot of riding all over the state. . . We started having competitive rides with ribbons for finishers in 1969 with the help of 4-H and other local horse clubs. We tried to have vet checks and points along the trail to be watched just like the real thing, following rules we had acquired from NATRC information that had been passed on to us."

Competitive rides were sort of hit and miss, not being held every year through the early 1970's. In 1974, Gail and Sandy managed a ride, sponsored again by the Pony Express 4-H Club, in Goldstream. A rider list from that year includes Anne Luick, Joan Kopenen, Laura McManus, Meredith and Beth Nava and Edie Vaughn (Sands). The ride was divided into Heavyweight, Lightweight and Junior.

A 1976 rider list showed that a Pony Division had been added, in addition to the other divisions. Some of the riders were Barbara Buck, Bev Nester, Gail and Robin Mayo, and Tina, Manya, and Inga Deehr.

From around 1975 or 1976, the ride was held in Two Rivers, until 1986. Beginning in 1987 the ride was held in either Two Rivers or the Goldstream/Ester Dome area, usually alternating two years in Two Rivers and one year in Goldstream.

It was around 1978 that the ride name changed from the Pony Express ride to the North Star ride. It was still being sponsored by the Pony Express 4-H Club, who continued to sponsor the ride until 1981. After that, the newly formed Interior Alaska Trail Riders Association (IATRA) took over sponsorship and continued to sponsor the ride until 2000. Gail

Mayo continued to act as ride manager until the early '80's, when others began to step up, including Bev Nester, Joni Ellsworth, Julie Southwood, Pat Sackinger, Barbara Buck, Nancy Bessette, and others. In 1979, while Jay Hammond was the governor of Alaska, Bev Nester acquired a large trophy and got Mr. Hammond to endorse it as the Governor's Cup Trophy, to be awarded to the horse and rider with the highest combined score. That year, it was awarded to Junior rider Robin Mayo and her horse Mr. Fire Eyes. During this time period, a lot of the trail work was done by Barbara Buck and Bev Nester.

In 1980 and 1981, the North Star Ride was held in Two Rivers, with Bob, Jamie and Dr. Cook Bittner doing the judging and Barb and Bev doing the trail work. Talk of sanctioning the ride with the North American Trail Ride Conference had been going on for a couple years and the ride had been adjudicated according to NATRC rules, even though it was not sanctioned. Bob and Jamie had been pursuing their judges' apprenticeships by going "Outside" and judging rides in other states. Bob had become a sanctioned veterinary judge in 1981 and Jamie was working on becoming a sanctioned horsemanship judge. In 1982, the sanctioning of the ride was approved by IATRA and the ride was NATRC-sanctioned for the first time. A sanctioned horsemanship judge from the Lower 48, Bev Tibbitts, was hired to judge the ride. This allowed Jamie to continue her apprenticeship. Bev held a clinic on CTR, and there were 22 riders that year. Some of the adult riders included Joan Kopenen, Bobbie Holst, Mary Sackinger (Gleason), Bev Nester, and Jan Bowen. Some of the Juniors included Robin Mayo, Dee Jennings, Michelle Sharfenberg and Karen Babcock.

The ride continued to be sanctioned by NATRC every year thereafter, with NATRC-sanctioned judges coming up from the Lower 48 to do the judging. Bob and Jamie Dieterich moved away from Alaska in 1989, but returned to judge in 1996. No rides were held anywhere in Alaska in 1997 and 2001.

In 2002, the ride name changed to the Chena Lakes Challenge and was held in the Chena Lakes area, near North Pole. It was also held there in 2004 and 2005. In 2006, the name was again changed, this time to Challenge of the North and was held in Two Rivers that year, as well as in 2007.

Meanwhile, in the Anchorage bowl area, competitive trail riding was getting started. The early history of CTR in that area is sketchy, but it appears that the Alaska Morgan Horse Association held CTR's in the early 1980's, and began sanctioning them with NATRC in 1983. That was the first year that two sanctioned rides were held in the state. Bob and Jamie did the judging honors at both rides. The Fairbanks ride was held in the Two Rivers area and the ride in the Anchorage area was held in Palmer at the Lazy Mountain

Past Winners of the North Star Competitive Trail Ride Governor's Cup Trophy 1979 through 1999

1979 – Robin Mayo and Mr. Fire Eyes
1980 – Walt Holst and Tezador
1981 – Robin Mayo and Mr. Fire Eyes
1982 – Joan Kopenen and Greyling
1983 – Joan Kopenen and Greyling
1984 – Laurie More (Knuutila) and Stormy
1985 – Laura McManus and Zar
1986 – Lynn Durgan and Zar
1987 – Laura McManus and Zartifa
1988 – Laura McManus and Zartifa
1989 – Laura McManus and Zar
1990 – Laura McManus and Zar
1991 – Walt Holst and Ara Bay Alagant
1992 – Walt Holst and Ara Bay Alagant
1993 – Ruth Fenwick and Baskin Fame
1994 – Susan Dent Fisk and Ms. Frangelica
1995 – Ruth Fenwick and Baskin Fame
1996 – Laurie Knuutila and CR's One and Only
1998 – Susan Dent and Ms. Frangelica
1999 – Roger Hale and Navajo Bey

Recreation Area. Riders from all over the state supported each other by attending both rides. The rides in the Anchorage/Mat-Su area continued to be sanctioned by NATRC after that.

In 1986, the Matanuska-Susitna Recreation and Equestrian Association put on an NATRC-sanctioned ride, calling it the Blister Buns Classic. It was managed by Elaine Hanson. The ride was held in the Buffalo Mine area, with Bob and Jamie Dieterich judging.

The Blister Buns ride continued until 1992, mostly being held in the Knik River area in Palmer. Around 1992 the MREA was disbanded, and in 1993, the Arctic Foxtrotters Association took over sponsorship of the ride, renaming it Hoof 'N' Prayer. Judy Beckhorn-Ross managed the ride, and Chary Crowe did the trail work. The ride was held in the Elk's Lake area, around Buffalo Mine.

The Arctic Foxtrotters Association continued to sponsor the ride in 1994, and 1996. The location of the ride moved between

the Palmer area and the Anchorage area. In Anchorage, the ride was held at the Hilltop Ski Area. In 1995, a CTR clinic was held but no ride. 1997 and 1998 did not have rides in the Southcentral area either. But in 1999 and 2000, the Hoof 'N' Prayer ride returned, sponsored by B&B Stables, with Judy Beckhorn-Ross as the ride manager. The 2000 ride was held in the Point McKenzie area. 2001 saw only a CTR clinic, and 2002 there was no ride. But in 2003, Sullivan Water Wells sponsored the Hoof 'N' Prayer ride, Diane Sullivan managed it and it was held at Snowy Mountain Ranch, near the Buffalo Mine. That was the last ride in the Valley until 2006, when the ride name changed to the Bald Mountain Butt Buster, and Nancy Williams was the ride manager. The ride was held outside Wasilla and the trail took the riders high on the flanks of Bald Mountain. Nancy was not able to manage the ride again in 2007, but she and Diane Sullivan will be back with a 2008 version in August 2008.

NATRC Platinum Membership Benefits

The NATRC Board of Directors approved the new Platinum Membership at the February Convention. This membership will provide members with a \$1,000,000 Personal Excess Liability insurance policy through Association Resource Group (ARG). Coverage is for claim brought against members of NATRC (Platinum) arising from the use and/or ownership of a horse and for horse-related accidents involving third party bodily injury or property damage. Coverage will apply when engaged in any horse-related activity, and coverage is in excess of any existing valid and collectible insurance. There is no deductible. Professional Liability is not included, and business exposures are excluded.

Other optional insurance benefits include:

- ◆ Equine Mortality and Major Medical: Protection, peace of mind, and coverage for association members that include exclusive and affordable rates and coverage for association members.
- ◆ Professional General Liability Insurance: Designed to protect horse professionals from alleged negligence, error or omission from third party claims arising from the professional's insured activities.
- ◆ Director's & Officer's Insurance: Covers claims which result from actual or alleged breach of duty, neglect, error, misstatement, misleading statement, omission or act committed solely in the course of club activities.
- ◆ Event/Show Insurance for Equestrian Events: Stay ahead of the competition with our liability policy for special events, competitions and rides. We have a very competitive policy for USEF sanctioned events and others.
- ◆ Equine Farm Insurance (Goetz Insurance): This policy is designed to meet the insurance needs of today's horse farm owner. The farm policy offers both flexible and comprehensive protection regardless of how you operate your horse farm (individual, partnership, or a corporation).
- ◆ Horse Club/General Liability Insurance: This policy provides horse clubs with General Liability coverage. The coverage was designed with horse club activities in mind. We can cover meetings, clinics, schooling shows, parade days and more.

Automatic Benefits:

To receive your discounts when calling the following companies please reference that you are a member of ARG.

- ◆ Hertz Car Rental: Reference #CPD #1747926
- ◆ Accuconference Conference Calling: Customer Service 1-800-989-9239
- ◆ Wicked Smart Apparel: email Dave at Sales@wickedsmartapparel.com
- ◆ Hotels.com: Visit our website www.associationresource.net then follow the Hotels.com link seen on the member benefits page.
- ◆ IMS Printing & Signs: email JJ at jjheim@imscolorado.com

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NORTH AMERICAN TRAIL RIDE CONFERENCE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

You can also renew, join or purchase items online at www.natrc.org
Memberships run from January 1 – December 31.



NATRC offers six membership plans (check plan desired):

(Current single adult or family memberships can be upgraded to include Platinum benefits. See upgrade options below.)

- FAMILY membership.....\$60.00 per year – Household of 1 or 2 adults and children under the age of 18 as of Jan. 1 (two votes)
- PLATINUM FAMILY membership.....\$100.00 per year – Household of 1 or 2 adults and children under the age of 18 as of Jan. 1 (two votes)
- PLATINUM UPGRADE to current Family membership\$40.00

- SINGLE ADULT membership\$50.00 per year – Single adult member (one vote)
- PLATINUM SINGLE ADULT membership\$70.00 per year – Single adult member (one vote)
- PLATINUM UPGRADE to current Single Adult membership\$20.00
- UPGRADE from current Regular Single Adult membership to Platinum Family Membership...\$50.00
(\$10.00 for change to Family + \$40.00 for Platinum Family Upgrade)

- JUNIOR membership\$35.00 per year – Single junior member under age 18 (no vote)
- ASSOCIATE membership\$50.00 per year – Equine-related groups or businesses only (no vote)

- SINGLE LIFETIME membership.....\$600.00 – Any person of any age (one vote)
- PLATINUM ANNUAL UPGRADE to Single Lifetime membership.....\$20.00 annual fee
- FAMILY LIFETIME membership ...\$800.00 –
Husband and/or wife at the time membership is obtained and children under age 18 as of Jan. 1 (two votes)
- PLATINUM ANNUAL UPGRADE to Family Lifetime membership.....\$40.00 annual fee
- HOOF PRINT subscription only.....\$15.00 per year US and \$20.00 foreign

All NATRC memberships include: Rule Book (upon request), the NATRC newsletter Hoof Print, eligibility to compete for NATRC annual high score awards and championships, rider and horse mileage awards, and reduced ride entry fees. New members also get a club patch. The Rule Book can also be downloaded at www.natrc.org

NOTE: All membership fees include both national and regional dues – when you join NATRC you are automatically a member of your respective region. Please list first and last names of all competing family members. We especially need to know if members of the family have different last names.

Name (s) _____

Phone (____) _____ Email _____

Street _____ City, State, Zip _____

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How did you find out about us? _____

NATRC Specialties*

- () Patch (incl. w/new membership) \$1.75 each
- () 10" Decal \$3.00 each
- () 4" Decal \$2.00

NATRC Manuals*

- () Rule Book (inc. w/membership if requested \$2.00)
- () NATRC Riders Manual \$18.00 (incl. S&H)
- () Judges' Manual \$5.00
- () Management Manual \$4.00
(plus P&H \$1.00 per manual)

*All prices subject to change without notice

Make checks payable to NATRC (U.S. funds only) and mail to:

NATRC, P.O. Box 224 Sedalia, CO 80135

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Saddle Pads and What Manufacturers Don't Tell You!

By Mike G. Easton

Content Review:

Dr. Joyce Harman, D.V. M., Equine Research Specialist

Marketing of saddle pads has become big business. All one has to do is make a web search and you will find over 15 pages of manufacturers. Each pad company puts various marketing emphasis on their products. Emphasis ranges from comfort, fit, durability, ease of cleaning, cooling, compression protection, performance, close contact, blood flow to animal's back and the list goes on. Pad manufacturers "bias" their marketing labels to sell pads—bottom line! For instance, one manufacturer uses the term "wool like" on their label; another very expensive blanket/pad combination has the symbol used by the American Wool Council on the wear leather and yet close examination of the item shows it has a synthetic backed fleece, open cell foamed backed inner core and wool blend weave on top; another uses technical flattery - ...two layers of air cells and ultra shock foam core producing lock down effect that eliminates slippage... Therapeutic is another big leader such as open cell medical memory foam, medical felt and ... increase oxygen, energy, and muscle recovery. And all of the claims of being 100% wool only cloud the marketing hype.

Another glaring example of manufacturers of foam pads contradicting themselves is when they were interviewed for an article for *Equestrian Retailer*, July 2004, Vol. 7, No. 2. They give their bias on the benefits of neoprene products and then later state, "Manufacturers advise riders and trainers not to leave neoprene pads on horses for long periods of time because they build heat and moisture." And this makes no difference whether the pad is perforated or waffled. It is impossible to channel air as they like to make one believe.

You can see that with catchy terms a saddle pad purchaser can easily be misled when trying to find the best compression protection, wicking and durability possible for their horse. Hopefully we can help you to understand some of the physical properties of pad materials simply by looking and feeling the pad's surface and knowing where to find correct information.

Saddle Fit

Before addressing the aspects of saddle pad materials one cannot over emphasize the importance of good saddle fit. If the saddle does not fit correctly, sores will take place. Additional padding is only a temporary fix and will not solve the problem. In most instances if you are having problems with a pad staying in place you have to take a hard look at how the tree in your saddle fits the conformation of your horse. Because of expense, it is not practical to be changing saddles all the time so it is then necessary to find correct pad material that will stay in place, provide maximized compression protection and cooling.

Saddle Pad History

Historically, saddle pads ranged from animal hides, to woven animal hair, to crude felts, to exotic linens, to woven blankets and today's modern industrial materials. Old timers remember the hair, felts and blankets. Not much thought was given to saddle fit and if a horse became sore many riders added another layer and cinched a little tighter. It is important to remember that when ranchers used horses on a regular basis the horses were changed often, so sores was never a major concern.

It appears that the 1960's began the era of synthetics. Dr. Robert Miller, DVM and noted author commented that early in his California practice in the 60's, some of his clients started complaining about white spots and wither sores which had not occurred previously. Then one day he happened to spot an advertisement in a magazine for foam pads. Further investigation revealed his clients had switched to the new pads. Most of the early foams were closed cell mattress or seating type materials never intended for compression protection with severe impact.

It has not been until the last 20 years and the desire for perfection in saddle fit to enhance performance that much thought was given to saddle pads. But as popularity of recreational riding and showing gained momentum more effort was put into the study of saddle fit and related accessories. Dr. Joyce Harman, DVM, an equine specialist, has spent the last fifteen years studying saddle fit. Dr. Harman wanted to know how saddle fit affected performance and what constituted good fit. However, as she studied saddle fit she realized the need to also assess what impact pad material had on saddle fit results. Her new book discusses findings with English style saddle fit and what to look for with pad materials. At some future date her findings on Western saddles will be available.

Materials

The primary materials used in saddle pads today are open and closed cell foams, synthetic felts, needled felts, pressed industrial felts, woven blankets, gel packs, synthetic cloth, and air bladders. What is interesting about all of these materials is NOT ONE of them was ever originally designed to be used as a saddle pad.

Foams are petroleum and rubber based materials designed for sound proofing and impact resistance for the automotive and aerospace industries. Felts were used for bedding, bearing cushions, lubrication wicks, sound proofing and cushioning in the same industries. Gel packs and air-bladder materials were designed for severe impact blows and mild weight distributions for auto racing, mattress industry and football helmets. Within the last 15 years another material, known as Tacky Tack was developed as shelving material for the food industry. Memory foam is another product that has

just recently cropped up and is nothing more than a tight-grained open cell foam with low compression rating used in the mattress industry where impact applications are limited.

Now one would think that these would provide exactly what would be needed for saddle pad materials. Maybe and maybe not, but first a more detailed description of each.

Foam pads consist of two types of materials: 1. **Closed cell** – cellular rubber [neoprene] and 2. **Open cell** – polyurethane. There is also a closed cell, cross-linked polyethylene foam, but it is seldom used in pads.

Close inspection will reveal that the *closed* cell foam has a very tight fine grain. Whereas, the *open* cell foam has small holes and a grainy look generally. The closed cell foam normally has a more elastic and smoother feel. There are of course exceptions to these descriptions, but we are generally referring to what is used in saddle pad construction. Color is normally black, white or gray.

With either of these foams it really does not matter if you know the difference because the compression ratings are about the same. Neither has wicking ability and both trap heat. If it is open cell foam used as filler just remember that compression protection is extremely poor. Closed cell foams tend to send pressure points through to the horse's back, but can be supportive if under a heavy saddle. Open cell foams will bottom out but do not interfere with saddle fit by being too thick.

Gel Pak Pads are simply heavy mil vinyl/plastic bladders that are filled with a non-hardening gel material. The intent behind development of this product system was to find a material base that would lessen severe impact from a sharp force. In other words it would gradually give with the impact. Evaluation of this material when used in saddle pads works fine when used for only a short time period (30 minutes). But with any movement after that period of time they will bottom out. This leaves no compression protection below any pressure points that might exist in a saddle. This happens because the gel is pushed aside.

The other major down-side to pads with gel paks is the plastic bladder as it traps heat and has zero wicking ability. These Gel Paks are normally bonded between other synthetic products. And even if they were bonded with a better grade of felt no real benefit is gained because compression protection is no better than the felt by itself and it adds unnecessary weight.

Air bladders or air cell pad material simply are different forms of creating an air mattress. They will conform to conformation of animal and saddle bars, but they are harder to keep in place because of constant ripple effect, like in an air mattress or waterbed. They will work with limited riding (30-45 minutes) but for a hard days work they trap heat. Air can have very limited compression protection because of the bottoming out effect similar to Gel Pak pads. Air also becomes quite hard under the pressure of the saddle, and though it gives an even surface the pressures are higher than most other materials. Most of these types of pads have to be bonded with some other synthetic material and those that are not are very tacky when sweaty. Manufacturers try and convince you that airflow keeps them cool under the saddle. Again this is not possible with a saddle that fits correctly.

In the felting world there are two types of felt: 1. **Needled** felt and 2. **Pressed industrial** felt. Generally most synthetic felts are needled. "*Needled*" simply means it is made with heat, steam and vibrating pressure from needles that lock the fibers over the top of each other. "*Pressed industrial*" felt is made by heat, steam and oscillating pressure that locks the wool fibers together by sticking fibers to each other. In this case fibers are able to lock to each other because of the outer surface structure of each individual fiber. It requires a separate technical article to show why this process works.

Needled felts are easy to spot. They have horizontal and vertical holes evenly spaced on both sides of the felt. Because of high concentrations of synthetic material in them they are generally shiny, slippery and not soft feeling. Their color ranges varies from black, to dark grays, to motile grays with lots of color thread showing, to white, such as medical hospital felt. Most neoprene pads with colored felt on them are 100% synthetic or needled felt with high concentrations of synthetic material and a cloth cover. Another clue is that when you see felt pads sewn around the edges or another material sewn on top, you can bet it is a synthetic or needled felt, because they will not hold together with much use without this sewing effort.

Manufacturing costs of these pads are substantially less due to cheaper costs in synthetic materials. But from the retail point of view when you compare the cost of synthetic pads there is not much price difference.

Pressed industrial felts (PIF) do not have the holes. They are softer to touch, much more supple and depending on grade have no shiny synthetic material. Color ranges are dark gray to off white in the natural state, but with the better grades of PIF one can find all other dyed color spectrums. Color normally gives you clues as to the actual virgin wool content and grade of felt. The more virgin wool in the felt, the lighter the color is. The same is true for touch. The more virgin wool content, the softer the feel will be when touching.

There are about 15 grade specification numbers utilized by the felting industry. Most saddle pad makers use an F15 grade. This F15 felt has a dark gray, almost a charcoal look. It contains 55% maximum virgin wool and 45% reworked wool content. This felt is used solely as a pad and/or bonded with one of the foams. (Note: Reworked wool comes from yarn previously processed for some other application, normally in the garment industry, and has been blended with synthetics. Felters use it to control density, consistency in thickness and cost. The synthetics can then end up being as high as 20% in any given pad. So color is the only clue a buyer has to tell whether or not the felt is really 100% wool as labeled.

(EXCEPTION) There is a company that uses F11 and F10 grade wool felt. The F11 felt has 92% minimum virgin wool and 8% reworked content. The F11 is very light gray, very soft, smooth finish and very supple. The F10 felt has 98% virgin wool content, and 2% reworked wool. The F10 is a crème white and very soft with a smooth finish. These felts are dyed

with a vegetable based dye to come in a variety of colors, red, blue, hunter green, brown, black, etc. The exceptional features of these felts make it very easy to visually tell them apart.

So what difference does it make when someone wants a wool felt pad and why would they look for a F10 or F11 felt as opposed to a F15 felt. International Felting Standards shows that the F11 felt has a compression rating of 6 psi and 200 psi tensile strength as opposed to compression rating of 2 psi and 75 psi tensile strength for the F15. Additionally, based on research from Felt Manufacturers Council of America, the higher the virgin wool content of the felt, the better the wicking ability is. So if you really want a pad with superior rating find the company with the F11 and F10 felt.

What To Look For In A Pad!

The most important of all the pad attributes to look for is *compression protection* and *cooling*. How does the purchaser know whether the manufacturers label and claims are true? Answer: They don't without careful investigation and lots of costly trial and error in purchasing pads.

Cooling

When we look at all the research done over the years with exercise physiology and anatomy for humans and equines, we know that the mechanisms for cooling during activity are sweating and breathing. To prevent over heating during exertion the body must receive airflow or some means of water internally or externally for cooling to take place.

So let us apply this knowledge to saddle fit and cooling.

When a saddle is fitting correctly, the bars of the saddle tree should conform evenly to the natural conformation of the back. And there should be a flair or rocker at the front and back of the bars to allow the shoulders and loins freedom from pressure. The saddle maker then adds leather skirting to the top and a wool sheepskin or synthetic fleece material to the bottom. Very few saddles today have natural sheepskin on the underside unless it is specifically requested. Assuming this material has been fitted and placed correctly the saddle should conform to the horse's back for a nice fit. The logical question to ask then is how can cooling take place under a saddle if it fits closely to the back?

Answer: It cannot without the support of material that will wick the sweat, which is the primary heat-carrying agent.

Common Sense Time

Closed cell foams and synthetic based materials will not wick. Try mopping up five gallons of water with a neoprene or synthetic pad. So a good question to ask oneself is, "If my saddle is fitting correctly and no air flow or water can penetrate between back and saddle, how can I cool the saddle back area with a neoprene or synthetic pad?" Answer: Not Possible! Another good question to ask is "Would I wear plastic or foam underwear or socks?" Answer: Not on your life! The argument that a sweaty back lubricates and is good for the animal is sheer ignorance.

There are quite a number of manufacturers that contend their air-channels and waffle-type foams cool. This is simply not true because the animal hair, skin and fat layers push into holes in the material. This can easily be seen through close examination of the back after using one of these types of pads. Again, always remember the tight fit saddle concept. Other points to consider are that when any foam-based pad becomes wet from sweat they also become sticky or slick. When this happens the animal hair and skin is constantly being pulled or stretched creating the frictional heat which can create gall points and sores.

The only true method of cooling is by using a pad material that will wick. In today's equine market the only two materials are wool or cotton. Wool is the winner here. It will absorb up to 3 times its weight in water, cotton will only absorb its initial weight, and wool has compression protection six times that of comparable thickness of cotton. No official data really exists on the attributes of various materials on its abilities to cool.

Recently we took a trip to the Hell Roaring Wilderness area in Montana. As a part of the trip we wanted to obtain actual data about cooling with various types of pad materials. We purposely used a saddle that was extremely much too narrow in the front, knowing it would pinch and rock on the huge, flat backed draft/Quarter Horse cross horses and mules.

The trip into camp was 21 miles. Once at camp we did numerous day rides that amounted to 3-6 hours at a stretch. In order to secure a range of data we took rest temperatures of each animal before starting each ride, while riding, cinched at rest (lunch break and fishing – one hour) after exertion and at end of day just before unsaddling.

Trip Data:

Digital read out temperatures were taken at the tightest point of the shoulder and saddle. At rest the readings consistently ranged from 98.5-99 *degrees*. During exertion the felt pads stayed consistently at these same temperatures, but the F15 felt generally ran a degree higher than the F11. During exertion the neoprene, neoprene-felt pads, synthetic fleece and Tacky Tac used with a blanket were always 3 *degrees* hotter, and after one hour during lunch breaks these pads never cooled down. Finally, at the end of a day's ride the temperatures initially established had not changed.

The pads represented materials from some of the major known manufactures that the outfitter had been experimenting with in an attempt to find pad material that would cool to prevent galling, have superior compression protection and longevity. Some of the pads he had been trying were Cowboy Choice-Closed Cell Foam/Felt, Wrangler 20x- Closed Cell Foam/Synthetic Top, Justin-Closed Cell Foam, Equibrand-Closed Cell Foam/Felt Top, Reinsman- Tacky Tac Bottom, Synthetic Top, Toklok-Needled Felt, Slone-F15, 5 Star- F11, Tacky Tac – Tacky Tac w/ Blanket Cover, and Coolback-Synthetic Fleece. This seems like a lot of brands, but one has to realize that on any given trip as many as 45 head of

mules and horses can be saddled or packed. Plus this outfitter had been searching for years to find a pad that would assist in compression protection and cooling.

The findings were exactly as we suspected. Open and closed cell foams, layered felt foams; synthetic felts and fleeces did NOT cool and trapped heat. Temperatures were significantly higher. The felt pads were the only materials that kept consistently lower temperatures. In one case with one of the solid neoprene pads one horse's back was so tender after use that it could not be used for two days.

The data speaks for itself and we only mention the name brands because out of these, Slone and 5 Star were his only wool felts. The rest of the pads were all neoprene or neoprene/felt combination pads (synthetic or F15 felt tops) and synthetic fleece.

Compression Protection

Compression protection with pad materials is easily measurable and is a direct function of tensile strength and rebound resistance in terms of pounds per square inch. The chart below represents data taken directly from the American Materials and Testing Institute, International Felting Standards, Automobile Testing Institute and material manufacturers.

Data:

Felt /Foam Grades Compression Rating (PSI) Tensile Strength (PSI)

F10 Felt 8.0 psi 225

F11 Felt 6.0 psi 200

F15 Felt 2.0 psi 75

Open Cell Foam 2.0 psi 75

Closed Cell Foam 2.0 psi 40

Memory Cell Foam 1.5 psi or less 40

Tacky Tac 1.5 psi or less N/A

Synthetic Fleece 1.0 psi N/A

(Note: These are the foams and felts typically used for saddle pad materials.)

Gel Paks and Air Bladders measurements at "bottom out points" are generally 1.5-2.00 or less and because of the material flexibility it is hard to get accurate ratings. Tensile strength is not an issue because it is normally bonded or sandwiched with some other material(s).

Conclusion:

Good ol' common sense really needs to prevail with saddle padding. Remember - First if the "shoe don't fit, the shoe still won't fit with lots of socks." If the saddle doesn't fit, no padding in the world will solve the problem. In fact additional padding can, in many cases, shift the problem elsewhere or create additional cinching and soiling. It also must be pointed out that with a good custom saddle, thinner padding can be the answer.

Over the long haul with or without good saddle fit, high quality wool felt materials are the best bet. If your intent is to only ride for 30-45 minutes and activity will be minimal; likely no harm will be done using foam, tacky or neoprene material, but can be very uncomfortable to the animal.

Bottom line is if you spend \$5000 for a horse, \$3000 for saddle and \$60 for a pad something is not computing. If you wouldn't wear the material on a hot or cold day WHY in the world do you think it would be good for them?

Points to Ponder:

- If the saddles don't fit they can push pads out the back.
- A saddle tree may be warped if it pushes the pad out the back and to the side.
- If you wouldn't wear that stuff for underpants or socks why put it on the animal!
- Synthetic pads have the highest profit margin for makers.
- Sweat pouring off a back is like you standing on ice with tennis shoes on a hill!
- Do you like having bandages pulled off your hairy arms? So how do you think tacky material feels to an animal?
- Wool felt pads are easily cleaned!
- Synthetic fleeced saddle skirting is slick and will present problems with most pads.
- Don't be fooled by Patent Pending in advertising.
- Synthetic foams are not UV light resistant and break down.
- Synthetic foams break down from heat and salts of the animal.
- Fire or strong acids are the only thing that will harm wool.
- All pads will contract and spread disease when not cleaned if infection exists.
- Pinch pads with thumb and fingers. If you can feel the other digit it likely has bad compression protection.
- Buy for function first, then looks.
- Don't be fooled by gimmick terms and pictures.
- Ask construction specifications of retailer and manufacturer.

Places to Ride

In this issue, I'll take you on a tour of a loop of trail that begins and ends at the Pleasant Valley Store at 23 mile Chena Hot Springs Road. When parking at the store, ask permission to leave your rig in the parking lot. I've never been turned down, but they may ask you to park in a certain area.

From the store, head west (back toward town) along the edge of the field. After several hundred yards, cross the highway at "Martha's Vineyard" subdivision and ride along Burgundy Street. Follow it all the way to its end. At the end, you'll ride past a house that is right next to the road. Then the road becomes a trail. The trail may be somewhat soft, depending on the season and rainfall. Continue on the trail until you come to a fork. One fork goes to the right and the other goes straight ahead. In this description, we'll take the right fork and in a future column, we'll go straight ahead.

The right fork trail is a beautiful ride through huge, old growth forest. The footing is solid, with no soft areas at all. You will meander along the base of a steep hill and go up and down some very gentle inclines and declines. The footing is good enough for any gait, and it's a great place for an exhilarating canter. There are a few side trails off both sides, but they are either places where someone has gone in to cut wood or they lead into swampy areas. Stick with the main trail.

After approximately .6 miles, you'll see a main side trail going to the right. It is obviously used by four-wheelers. If you take that right fork, after about .6 miles, you will come to Chena Hot Springs Road. When you reach the highway, cross over and ride past what I call the "Two Rivers Business District" (the equipment rental store, and the laundromat) and back to Pleasant Valley Store. That makes for a very easy, short ride of just under 3 miles.

If you continue straight instead of taking that right fork, you will continue to ride through more old growth forest on good, solid trail. After about 1.1 miles, you'll see an extremely steep four-wheeler trail that goes up the hill to the left. Unless you are up for a white-knuckle ride, don't go there! Keep going straight. Not too far past that trail, you will come to a swampy section of trail. You can skirt the deepest holes by staying on the left side of the trail. The swampy part is not too long. You will get back on solid trail after several hundred feet.

You'll ride on solid trail for a short distance and then the trail will fork again. The right fork leads into a serious bog. We have Barbara Buck to thank for the left fork, which stays on solid ground and

circumnavigates the bog and an unfriendly landowner. Barbara originally brushed out the trail and it was pretty primitive for many years. But it has since become a more major trail, being used by other trail users, including four-wheelers.

"Barbara's Trail", as I call it, will lead you back to the main trail after a short distance. You'll see the two trails come back together, with the main trail coming back in from the right. Shortly after you rejoin the main trail, you'll come to a more open area, where the old growth forest has been cut down on the right side of the trail and tall brush has regrown. You'll see "No Trespassing" and "Private Property" signs on the right. Then you'll see a trail going to the right, while the main trail goes straight ahead, back into heavy forest. Do not keep going straight or you will find yourself in another serious bog. Take that right hand trail. It may be somewhat soft, depending on the season and rainfall.

Once you take that right hand trail, stay on it all the way out to Chena Hot Springs Road. It is approximately 1.2 miles. The trail is mostly solid, with a few short boggy spots. Depending on the season, you may have to stop and partake of the blueberries along the way. They will mainly be on the left side of the trail.

Once at the highway, go to the right and ride for a very short distance. Then cross the highway where you see a road on the opposite side. Once across the highway, go right and ride along the highway until you come to a gravel road that goes left. Continue straight along the highway. You'll see two trails straight ahead, one next to the highway and one angling slightly away from it. The inside trail, originally known as the "Glacier State" trail but now referred to as the Chena Hot Springs Road Trail, runs parallel to the highway but back away from it a little way. It is a more pleasant ride to take the inside "Glacier State" trail than it is to ride right next to the highway. The Glacier State trail, or Chena Hot Springs trail, which was built by the State of Alaska with a grant obtained through the efforts of Bev Nester, will lead you back to the Pleasant Valley Store.

The entire loop of trail is approximately 8 miles and is a moderately technical trail, just because of the swampy spots. It's a good trail to use to introduce your inexperienced horse to bog, since the boggy spots are not that long. Other than that, it is an easy trail with good footing for most of the way. There is no water anywhere, except for puddles if it's rained recently. Next time we'll take that straight-ahead trail out of Martha's Vineyard. See you on the trail!

Trail Events Calendar

May 17 – IATRA-sponsored Leaf-Out Ride, Fairbanks. Contact Walt and Joanne Bruner at 488-9776.

May 31 – Competitive Trail Riding Clinic, Wasilla. Contact Nancy Williams at rio@mtaonline.net

June 1 – AQHA-sponsored Trail Trial, Movinfree Farm, Fairbanks. Contact Chris Worker at cworker@acetekk.com

June 7 – IATRA-sponsored Cleary Summit to Chatanika Gold Camp day ride, Fairbanks. Contact Dick Sullivan at 479-2358.

June 14 – IATRA-sponsored Lee's Cabin Overnight ride, Fairbanks. Contact Lowell North at 457-3706.

June 21, 22 – IATRA-sponsored Midnight Sun Ride at Stiles Creek Cabin, Fairbanks. Contact Lorinda Lhotka at 455-7320.

June 28 – IATRA-sponsored Amanita Loop Day Ride, Fairbanks. Contact Lowell North at 457-3706.

June 29 – Competitive Trail Riders of Alaska-sponsored Poker Ride, Wasilla. Contact Nancy Williams at rio@mtaonline.net.

July 12 – IATRA-sponsored Bruner's Day Ride, Fairbanks. Contact Walt and Joanne Bruner at 488-9776.

July 19 – IATRA-sponsored Linda Sims Ride and BBQ, Fairbanks. Contact Lowell North at 457-3706.

July 23-30 – IATRA-sponsored Roosevelt Lake Pack Trip. Contact Lowell North at 457-3706.

August 15-17 – NATRC-sanctioned Bald Mountain Butt Buster Competitive Trail Ride, Wasilla. Contact Nancy Williams at rio@mtaonline.net.

August 16, 17 – IATRA-sponsored Compeau Trail Water Project, Fairbanks. Contact Lowell North at 457-3706.

August 16 – AQHA-sponsored Trail Trial, Fairbanks. Contact Chris Worker at cworker@acetekk.com