



# **THE BALANCE SADDLING SYSTEM USER'S MANUAL**

© The BALANCE Saddle Company Ltd. 2018

**Edition 6**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>BASIC PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>THE COMPONENTS USED IN THE BALANCE PADDING SYSTEM. ....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>‘TYPE A’ BALANCE WOOL FLEECE-LINED PADS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>‘TYPE B’ BALANCE PRO-COMPLETE PADS.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>COMMON PAD COMBINATIONS .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>ALTERNATIVE PAD COMBINATIONS.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>USING THE SAME SADDLE FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES ON THE SAME HORSE.....</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>WHAT MODEL OF BALANCE SADDLE DO YOU HAVE? .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>PREPARING YOUR BALANCE SADDLE AND PADS BEFORE THEIR FIRST USE.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>SETTING UP THE SADDLE/PAD COMBINATION FOR THE FIRST TIME. ....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>THE GIRTHING ARRANGEMENT.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>THE BALANCE ENGLISH HUNTING BREASTPLATE .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>FITTING THE BREASTPLATE.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>WASHING INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PADS.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>YOUR FIRST RIDE IN YOUR NEW SADDLE.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>‘RUNNING IN’ YOUR NEW SADDLE.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>CLEANING YOUR SADDLE.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>ONGOING PROGRESS WITH YOUR BALANCE SADDLE.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>WHEN TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU USE YOUR SADDLE AND PADS.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>TROUBLESHOOTING.....</b>	<b>434</b>
<b>TO CONCLUDE .....</b>	<b>47</b>

## BASIC PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER

Congratulations, you have chosen a saddle that, when used correctly, can keep your horse comfortable for the rest of his ridden life.

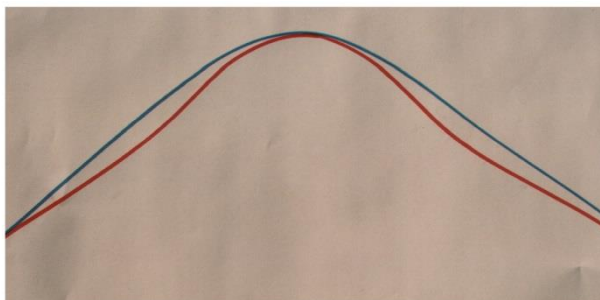
Here are some important points to remember.....

Your BALANCE saddle **should not** look as if it 'fits' your horse in a conventional way. It needs to look wider than the horse's current shape, when he is standing still.

However, it must not be so wide that it rests on the withers, but *should* tip forward and down a little, when you press lightly on the pommel.

This allows room for the horse to lift his back up out of his static posture (narrower) into his moving posture (wider).

The diagram below, and the pictures to the right show the changes in the horse's posture/width that happen between the static and dynamic (moving) state.



The red line shows the shape of the horse when he was standing still and the blue line was taken when his back was lifted, to mimic his moving posture/width.

If your horse has a strong healthy back with good muscle like the horse in these pictures, the difference between the width of his back and the correct width of the saddle, only needs to be small.

However, if the horse is under-developed or muscle wasted in his back, the difference between the width of the saddle you use and the width of his back can be bigger. This is not only for the saddle to allow the difference in width when he moves, but also to allow room for him to recover muscle mass.



In the picture to the right, the horse has a lack of muscle along his back, and a weak posture. He needs a **Remedial Approach** to saddling. There are different methods of Remedial Saddling. For example:



- 1. is to stop using any saddle for a period of time, while the horse continues to be encouraged to move in a correct, efficient way every day. This allows and stimulates the muscle to recover or develop in the whole horse, including the saddle area, and any poor posture habits to change. There may be times, when additional help is needed from other forms of supportive or corrective therapy to help the horse to recover during this time. When back profiles, and quality of movement etc. suggest that the horse is closer to his natural, healthy and well-developed condition, a well-designed saddle can be chosen by the horse, in a width that provides some clearance, but still provides room for the back to widen and lift when moving, as described on page 3 and potentially, also allow for some further increase in recovered width. The **BALANCE Equine Pathway Programme** was designed to support this Remedial method. For more information, please refer to the BALANCE website.*
- 2. is to continue to ride the horse as normal, but in a width of saddle that is slightly wider than his static posture. This allows the use of a small amount of extra padding under the front, so that he can use his muscles and back better and start to recover. However, the horse owner needs to be prepared to go through anything up to three saddles in increasing widths, as his body shape changes, before the horse recovers and stabilises into his natural, healthy shape.*
- 3. is to continue to ride the horse, for only for short periods and away from the demands of a competition schedule, in a saddle that is initially, quite a bit wider than his current shape, in combination with a layered padding system, that makes it safe and comfortable to use. As he recovers and widens, his improved body shape will lift the saddle higher off his back and the layers of pads can be reduced, to keep the saddle balanced and working well. The work demands can also increase.*

Remember, that even when dealing with a muscle wasted horse, the saddle should **never be so wide** that it rests on the withers before the pads are placed underneath. However, the amount of clearance can be as little as 1cm **before the pad system is added**, provided that:

- the rider pays attention to the way the saddle sits at the end of a riding session.
- the riding sessions are kept relatively short (less than an hour) to avoid tiring the horse.
- the rider is not braced into their stirrups or tipped forward all the time.
- the riding is in a relatively controlled environment and not on challenging terrain like hills!
- the rider is fit and not overweight.



Here is a picture of the horse on page 4, after his back and posture had recovered to a healthier state!

Remember, that in order for the horse to get the benefits of a saddle that has design features that are good enough to support the principles of the BALANCE Saddling System, it **must** be used in conjunction with an equally well designed and appropriate padding system.

The ways in which the BALANCE pads are used with the saddle depend on how close the horse is from perfect in body condition and posture.

As well as allowing a horse to recover from lack of muscle, a BALANCE saddle and pads can also be used to assist in the recovery of poor posture, such as dropped back or a high croup. These postural problems also need correct and supportive riding, to assist the change (and with some horses, additional therapeutic help is also required), but the removal of an uncomfortable saddle can dramatically help horses with dropped back postures and croup high postures as shown below.



Please do not be too quick to label this kind of shape as conformation (which suggests permanence). It is often more accurate to say that these horses have undesirable postures (temporary), because it is amazing how often the whole-body shape of a horse can change once negative influences are removed.

## **THE COMPONENTS USED IN THE BALANCE PADDING SYSTEM.**

***The BALANCE Padding System, combined with a BALANCE Saddle, creates the Constructive Saddling approach known as The BALANCE Saddling System. The pads have been designed specifically by BALANCE for this purpose and are, therefore, the only pads we can confidently recommend to help you get the best results from your BALANCE saddle.***

There are two types of pad that we use:

**‘Type A’** are the saddle pads that go directly against the horse’s back. These pads are the same thickness throughout their length and therefore do not affect the front to back balance of the saddle. They can be regarded as innocent in their impact on the horse. As such, they can be used with other makes of saddle/methods of saddling.

They are deliberately made to be generous in size, in order to avoid the problems caused when the saddle panels sit on top of the bound edge of pads. They are shaped to accommodate the top-line contours of the horse and are made from high quality, natural materials that are well proven to provide comfort for the horse. *If you compete in classes that require very little pad to be seen around the saddle (e.g. showing classes in the UK) you may feel that the ‘Type A’ pads that we produce as part of our standard Padding System are great for everyday use, but are too large to actually show in. The company who make most of our Type A pads (Griffin NuMed) offer a custom service for such situations that you can take advantage of, if necessary.*

**‘Type B’** pads are the pads that sit *between* the ‘Type A’ pad and the underside of the saddle. All of these ‘Type B’ pads have an influence on the way the saddle sits on the horse and therefore, it is important to pay attention to the type and combination of ‘Type B’ pads you use under your saddle.

Most ‘Type B’ pads are made from a gel-foam material originally known as Pro-Lite, so they are called **BALANCE Pro-Complete Pads**.

See further information about these pads later in the Manual.

*Please note: We also have a Wool-Fleece-Lined, version of the Base Pad. Some horses prefer the feel of this Base Pad, which is why we offer it as an option (see Page 11). The Wool-Fleece Base Pad can also work better than the gel-foam version under saddles that have foam panels. Foam saddle panels, combined with foam saddle pads, can create a very bouncy feel that some (but not all) horses dislike.*

A combination of these ‘Type B’ pads will customise your BALANCE saddle to the individual horse and allow fine tuning when he changes shape.

## 'Type A', BALANCE WOOL FLEECE-LINED PADS

These are made from a high-quality cotton quilt, lined with a short, but extra dense pile (more fibres per square inch), pure wool fleece on a knitted backing. The fleece extends all the way down the front of the saddle to provide comfort in the highly active and mobile area behind the top of the shoulder blade.



These pads have hook/loop strips on them, so that the appropriate 'Type B' 'Add-On' pads can be attached directly to them.

The saddle pads come in two thicknesses. The regular thickness wool pad has a diamond quilt stitching pattern (see below). It has Hook/Loop strips at the front only, to which a JB pad can be attached.



***Do not use this regular thickness pad without one of the 'Type B' Base Pads unless your horse is very wide and with good, strong back muscles.***

In this case, he may only need this wool pad and a ¼" (6.5mm) JB pad or a Large ¼" (6.5mm) JB pad. However, most horses prefer something thicker than this between their backs and the underside of their saddle.

**WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU DO NOT USE THE STANDARD (one layer) ½" JB PAD DIRECTLY ON TOP OF THE REGULAR THICKNESS WOOL PAD.**

*...because, the gel foam material used inside the Pro-Complete JB pads has a square edge. At ½" (12.5mm) thick, this could potentially create uneven pressures (feel) close to the edge, that some horses can detect unless a pad, thicker than the regular weight, diamond quilt BALANCE pad, is used.*

*If you use the regular thickness wool fleece pad and need ½" of lift at the front of the saddle this is best achieved by using the Large ¼" JB pad with the standard ¼" JB laid on top of it.*

**Remember that the BALANCE saddles are always used with some additional padding under the front. Therefore, you should always have more than a 'Type A' pad under your BALANCE saddle!**

In contrast to the regular weight diamond quilt 'Type A' pads, the Extra Thick versions of the wool pads have a parallel (duvet style) stitching pattern (see below).



The Extra Thick Wool pad gives extra cushioning for muscle wasted or weaker backed horses when used with one of the 'Type B' Base Pads (and if necessary, additional JB/Remedial Pads (described later).

They can also sometimes be used for horses with wide and/or better muscled backs, *without* a 'Type B' Base Pad but always with the use of one or more Type 'B' JB/Remedial pads attached directly to them, which is why you will see that there is a hook/loop strip along its length.






Our standard Wool Fleece-Lined pads in either Regular or Extra Thick, are available in either saddle shaped (numnah) pictured left, or square, pictured right.

As you can see from the pictures above, our pads are made with what we call our 'Correct Contour' pattern, which has a lift at the front to allow for the natural contour of the withers, and is suitable for most horses. However, we can also provide our standard pads in an Xtra Hi-Wither pattern, for very high withered, damaged horses. The pads also have a small lift at the very back of the centre seam, to keep the binding clear of the spine.







## 'Type B', BALANCE PRO-COMPLETE PADS

These pads are made of closed-cell, gel-foam inside a fabric cover. The 'gel-foam' material has been specifically chosen by BALANCE to work with the BALANCE saddles. It provides:

-  Cushioning for the horse when he does not have sufficient muscle mass to protect his bony structures from the pressures exerted by the rider's weight on the saddle.
-  Reliable and prompt recovery from the repetitive compression and release that happens between the horse's mobile back muscles and the saddle. This helps to keep the saddle stable. **Slow recovery foams are not appropriate to use under a BALANCE saddle.**
-  Some protection from friction.

The shape of the pads ensures a correct match with the saddles. They also have the following advantages:

-  They will not flatten (or bottom out), even after many years of hard use.
-  They are shaped to avoid unnecessary bulk under the rider's leg.
-  They are quick and easy to put on and use.
-  They look neat.

### **The Basic Pro-Complete pads are as follows:**

#### The Base Pad Options.

Base Pads match the shape of the panels of the saddles.

Two thicknesses are available.

- a 1/4" (6.5mm) thickness along the length with an extra 1/4" bonded to the front, internally.
- a 1/2" (12.5mm) version with an extra 1/4" (6.5mm) bonded onto the front internally. The hook/loop strip should always be on top, as shown.



## The JB pad options.



The **original/standard JB Pads** look like the picture to the left. Each have a single thickness of gel-foam inside and the hook side of a hook/loop fixing system on the underside to attach to the top of a Base Pad, or to the top of a Wool Fleece Saddle Pad

Two thicknesses are available

- a 1/4" (6.5mm) JB pad,
- a 1/2" (12.5mm) JB pad, look like this

**The large 1/4" (6.5mm) single layer JB pad**, shown to the right, covers a larger area than the standard JB pads, so will provide more lift than a standard 1/4" (6.5mm) JB pad.



It is a useful pad for horses who have a lack of muscle that extends from behind the shoulder to the middle of the saddle area. It can be used on its own or under one of the smaller JB pads to create a layered effect under the front of the saddle.



***Remember that JB is an abbreviation of 'Junction Box', which is the name that BALANCE uses to describe the area behind the withers and shoulder blades of the horse (shown in blue on picture).***

Keep in mind, that what usually happens when a horse is moved into a BALANCE Saddle System, is that the back starts to recover some, if not all, of the compressed/atrophied muscle mass. For this reason, the combination and thickness of 'Type B' pad will need to be regularly checked and reduced, as the horse changes shape, in order to maintain comfort and stability in the saddle. The degree and the speed at which the recovery takes place will depend on many factors, from the environment the horse lives in to the way it is ridden, so you will need to monitor the progress and remember that we are happy to help you for as long as you have your BALANCE saddle, so do keep in touch.

## ***The 'Type B', Wool Fleece Base Pad***

This pad has some substance to protect and cushion the horse's back and has extra internal layers of fleece in the front section to provide some lift and protection under the front of the saddle. The Wool Fleece Base Pad is a good option to offer to horses who are ridden in foam panel saddles, because it seems to provide a more stable feel for the horse than using a foam panel on top of a Pro-Complete gel-foam Base Pad (particularly the ½" (12.5mm) version).



It has short loops that can be pulled up onto the rings at the front of all BALANCE saddles. The Wool Fleece Base Pad has Hook/Loop strips along its length in order to make it easy for JB and/or Add-on pads to be attached.

Please note that the fleece seen on the underside of this pad is there to provide cushioning and comfort, and should not be used directly on the horse's back. As with all 'Type B' pads, it should be used between the saddle and a 'Type A' Wool fleece-lined saddle pad of appropriate thickness for the horse. The fleece will flatten during use, so make sure it is washed every month or two, then shaken well before drying flat, to fluff up the fleece again



## Common Pad Combinations

The basic 'Type B' Pro-Complete pads (or the Wool Fleece Base Pad) can be combined as follows but always\* on top of one of one of the 'Type A' Wool Fleece Lined Saddle Pads:

\*On rare occasions, an individual horse can appear be irritated by the feel of natural wool, or is allergic to it. In a situation like this we can offer advice on alternative pads.



**Option 1.** This is a popular combination for horses who need/like a reasonable amount of lift and cushioning from the pads, but where the difference between the shape of their body and the width of the saddle is definite, but not large.

Here you can see a ½” (12.5mm) Pro-Complete Base Pad used on top of a regular thickness wool saddle shaped pad.

This arrangement is providing ½” (12.5mm) lift and cushioning all along the back, plus ¼” (6.5mm) extra padding/lift at the front.

***We also have a thinner (¼”) version of this BASE Pad, that can be used on the regular thickness Wool-Fleece pads, but is more often used on top of one of the thicker wool-fleece saddle pads. The ¼ inch version provides a ¼” (6.5mm) lift and cushioning all along the back, plus ¼” (6.5mm) extra padding/lift at the front.***



### **Option 2.**

You would try this arrangement if you found that the saddle was lifting at the back/tipping down at the front with padding Option 1.

Here you can see that a ¼” JB pad has been added to the front of the Base pad to provide an additional ¼” (6.5mm) of lift at the front.

This arrangement provides cushioning all along the back, plus ½” (12.5mm) extra padding/lift at the front.

If the horse is going through a Remedial Saddling process, and needs to recover some compressed or atrophied muscle, you are likely to need to use this, or even **Option 3**, when you first get your saddle, because the saddle will be significantly wider than the horse, to allow for the increase in width that comes with the anticipated recovery.



**Option 3.** \*\* Is the maximum amount/thickness of 'Type B' pads we would ever use under a BALANCE saddle.

You would only normally need this arrangement if your horse had a considerable amount of muscle to recover and needed a lot of, temporary, lift to keep the saddle balanced. This combination would be a ½" Base Pad and one of the ½" JB pads.

This arrangement provides ½" (12.5mm) cushioning all along the back, plus ¾" (19mm) extra padding/lift at the front.

***\*\*This amount of padding is only needed during a 'Remedial Saddling' programme, where the rider must respect that the saddle cannot be as stable when used on top of this amount of padding whilst the horse is recovering from previous saddle damage. Riders need to be able to provide stability in their own body and riding technique and modify the work done, in order to allow the horse to be confident enough to utilise the features of the saddle.***

**If this is not likely to happen, or if the horse is expected to compete, and/or work hard, the saddle width must be reduced so that fewer pads will be needed, whilst still allowing room for some recovery. A wider saddle still may be needed at a later date to finish the horse's recovery.**

The alternative is to give the horse a period of time on the BALANCE Remedial Programme to support his recovery time whilst not being ridden. Then, once he has recovered to a condition and width that is closer to his natural, healthy and well-muscled state, it should be possible to supply a saddle that will only need something like Padding Option 1 or 2 under it.

## Alternative Pad Combinations

In addition to the BASIC Pro-Complete pads, the following 'Type B' Add-On pads are available as Remedial Pads. These are usually only needed temporarily until the horse's posture improves. Occasionally they may be needed permanently to keep the saddle balanced and the horse comfortable. Ideally, these pads should be used on top of one of the Base Pads or the Extra Thick 'Type A' Wool fleece-lined saddle pads.

### The REMEDIAL Pads

#### Remedial A Pad.



For horses with a dropped back posture where the lowest point of the back is under the middle of the saddle area. Position as photo right.



#### Remedial B Pad.

For horses with a dropped back posture where the lowest point of the back is under the back of the saddle area. Position as photo on far right.



**Remedial B pads** are available in either  $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6.5mm) to provide  $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6.5mm) of lift under the back of the saddle to bring it into balance, or  $\frac{1}{2}$ " (12.5mm) to provide  $\frac{1}{2}$ " (12.5mm) of lift under the back of the saddle to bring it into balance.

**NB Remedial B pads** should not be used to balance a saddle that sits too high at the front from because it is too narrow for the horse. This will simply transfer the problems that the horse is experiencing from the area at the back of the saddle to the area at the front! Neither should they be used to compensate for a saddle that is placed too far forward on the horse, where the front of the saddle will be lifted too high.

**It is not every horse that needs the amount of padding shown so far in this Manual.**

If your horse has a well-muscled, well-shaped back, the BALANCE saddle width you will need, will not be much wider than your horse. You won't have to allow for the recovery of damaged, compressed or underdeveloped muscle, you will just need a saddle that is going to allow the back to lift and widen when in correct and engaged movement. We will refer to this as '**Maintenance Saddling**' as opposed to '**Remedial Saddling**'.

Therefore, in these situations, we might suggest that you use a pad combination that does not involve the use of a Base Pad, because your horse won't need that degree of lift and cushioning under the saddle. However, it is unusual, in our experience, to find horses who *only* want something as thin as our regular thickness 'Type A' Wool fleece-lined pad under their saddle. So, if you are not using any of the Base pads, we would normally recommend that you use an Extra Thick version of the 'Type A' pad together, with whichever add-on 'Type B' pad/s you need to achieve correct balance, stability and clearance in the saddle.

**For example: Here are some pad combinations that do not involve the use of a Base Pad:**



Here is a picture of one of the JB pads, used alone, on top of an extra thick 'Type A' wool pad. Notice that the JB pad has been set back from the front edge of the wool pad. This is a useful arrangement on a horse who, like this one, has a back shape that drops away quite steeply behind the withers.

The JB pad could even be moved back by another 1" or 2" (2.5-5cm), if necessary, on a horse of this shape and this arrangement provides lift in the area that is lowest. It also reduces any pressure that the horse can feel along the front edge of the saddle, if the saddle itself extends forward, very slightly, over

the front edge of the JB pad. A flatter backed horse that only needs minimal padding would usually need the JB pad set at the position shown above or even a little further forward.

Here is another arrangement using two standard JB's layered, to create more graduated lift than a single JB pad would provide. If using a 1/2" JB pad and a 1/4" JB you need to put the 1/4" on first in the position of the \*orange pad and the 1/2" on over the top as in the green position. DO NOT USE TWO 1/2" JB's as this will be too bulky and uneven. This arrangement creates a full 3/4" (19mm) of graduated lift.



***Please note that the pads are not actually available in orange and green!!!! The picture has been edited to show them like this to make it as clear as possible.***



Here is one more popular pad combination for horses in Maintenance Saddling who need a little more lift under the front of their saddle.

Here we have used the Large  $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6.5mm) JB pad under a standard  $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6.5mm) JB pad.



One example of when this might be used, is for a well-developed horse, on a Maintenance Saddling programme, who only needs the standard  $\frac{1}{4}$ " JB pad on top of the Xtra thick Wool-Fleece Saddle Pad when doing flat work training/dressage, but needs more padding under the front of the saddle when jumping. See more about this on the following page.



## Using the same saddle for different purposes on the same horse.

If you want to use your one saddle to do flat work and jumping, which is entirely possible with either of the two styles of GP saddles that BALANCE produce, you will probably need to use a slightly different padding arrangement under the saddle to complement the different riding styles you adopt.



For example:

When riding on the flat, your weight will (hopefully) be stable and central, so you will have chosen a pad combination that creates comfort, balance and stability when you ride in this way.

However, when you jump, or ride fast across country/trail, you will need to get your weight off the main seat of the saddle and use a shorter stirrup length. Inevitably, the emphasis of your body weight will tend to be forward of centre for more of the time and therefore, you will probably have to use an extra layer of padding under the front of the saddle for this kind of work.

**An extra layer will protect the horse when your weight is forward in the stirrups and will compensate for the influence of your weight.**

This might mean that when you are jumping, your saddle will look very slightly high at the front before you get on, in order to be level and comfortable for your horse when you are in a forward (two point) position.



**Useful Tip:** Very occasionally, riders might find that when using a saddle over pads in this arrangement the saddle can slide back along the pads and become displaced. If this happens, there is an inexpensive and simple remedy, which is to use a small sheet of the rubberised mesh used to line cupboards and drawers in the kitchen. Place this between the underside of the saddle and the top of the pads and this will keep the saddle and pads together.

## WHAT MODEL OF BALANCE SADDLE DO YOU HAVE?

*Specific instructions that relate to the design/construction of your saddle.*

### The following models of BALANCE saddles:

#### Zenith, Equinox and some Nexus and Xtreme saddles:

are built on full length, laminated beech and steel sprung trees with medium length points. They are flocked in a way that makes them feel softer than some other flocked panel saddles, to maximise the comfort of the horse. However, this feature means that riders have to be aware that the panels *can* become uneven in depth if subjected to unequal pressures caused by the horse and/or rider crookedness; if the saddle is not correctly balanced from front to back during use and/or if the saddle is stored inappropriately. In reality, this happens rarely, but if it does, the panels can be rebalanced by a BALANCE approved saddler.

All flocked panel BALANCE saddles have a gusset inserted in the side/back of the panel to enable the panels to sit flat and even on the horse's back. Can you see the triangular shaped gusset in the photo right?



**Maintenance Tip:** Carefully follow the 'Running-In Your New Saddle' guidelines.

### The following models of BALANCE saddles:

#### Felix, Matrix\*:

are also built on laminated beech and steel, sprung trees. However, their panels are constructed using felt and foam, which creates a shorter and slightly thinner panel. We use a nubuck leather on the panels to provide a non-slip surface to lie against the pads.

These panels are often helpful when working with a short-backed horse and in situations where it is necessary to accommodate the needs of a rider who is tall, riding a short-backed horse/pony. Can you see that there is no gusset on these panels, so that the back edge of the panel lifts slightly where a dropped/weak backed horse is most vulnerable?



\*A note about the **Matrix** saddles: these are built on the same tree as the Zenith and Felix, and they have the same foam panels used on the Felix. However, the points of the tree are fully removed below the rails (bars). This gives maximum freedom behind the shoulder which some horses love. However, some horses cannot cope with this lack of structure at the front of the saddle

**MATRIX Tip:** the lack of points makes the front of the saddle far more flexible. This is what makes it the saddle of choice for some horses. However, this means that this saddle will be far less forgiving of the crooked rider. The Matrix requires the rider to pay attention to their own patterns of movement and weight distribution. If you do experience an unacceptable degree of lateral instability when you are riding in this saddle, do not attempt to rectify the problem by over-tightening the girth, as this will cancel out most of the benefits of the BALANCE Saddling System! The BALANCE English Hunting Breastplate will provide some reassurance. However, the main issue to address is the uneven or conflicting movement patterns that are happening between the horse and rider. Once these are dealt

with, the stability of the saddle/pads will return. The Matrix saddle needs to look a little high at the front before the rider gets on as it will settle down once the rider has weight in the stirrups. Check the balance of the saddle when you get off to make sure you have the padding arrangement correct under the front (see Page 35).

**Nexus and Xtreme saddles are also available with foam panels, so check to see which panel type your saddle has.**

**NEXUS saddles:** are built on a different shape of tree to the Zenith/Felix/Matrix, in order to give horses and riders more choice.



The Nexus Dressage saddle has a hanging 'e' stirrup bar which **will not** always release the stirrup leather in the event of a rider fall. If you have bought the saddle from BALANCE, you will have read and signed an Addendum that deals with this aspect.

***Hanging e Stirrup Bar Safety Tip:*** Always use stirrup irons that are designed to release your feet from them easily in the case of a fall. Do not rely on the stirrup bar to release the stirrup leather.

The Nexus GPD, GPJ and Jump saddles have normal stirrup bars.

***Nexus (flocked panel versions) Maintenance Tip:*** Carefully follow the 'Running-In Your New Saddle' guidelines.

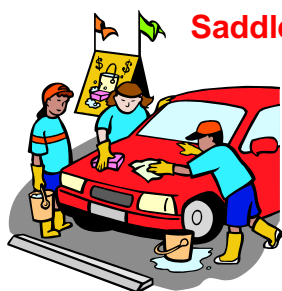


**HORIZON saddles:** are made for extremely wide horses who have little if any muscle atrophy. The panels are made from a combination of high quality English felt and Latex foam which provide a good feel but remain relatively thin to help the saddle to wrap around the horse rather than to perch on top of him. The bearing surfaces are generous and we have used a reversed panel hide on the panels to provide a non-slip surface to lie against the pads.

**BALANCE Pony Saddles:** There is a range of smaller pony/junior BALANCE saddles that have been designed with the good design features found in other BALANCE saddle models. There is a separate manual that goes with these saddles.

## PREPARING YOUR BALANCE SADDLE AND PADS BEFORE THEIR FIRST USE.

Before you ride in the saddle for the first time, there are several things that you need to do, in order to prepare the saddle and pads.



**Saddle Preparation:** Firstly, it is important that you condition your saddle to protect the surface of the new leather from marks, sweat and/or rain. This, in effect, seals it. **If you live in the UK or EU** we will supply you with a sample pot of Sedgwick's Leathercare, please use this to condition your saddle for the first time. Larger pots can be ordered direct from the BALANCE office.

If you live outside of the EU, we probably can't supply you with a sample pot of Leathercare due to import difficulties.

We suggest you search on the internet for suppliers in your own country of Sedgwick's Leathercare or alternative conditioners that are made from Natural fats, oils and waxes with no Petro-Chemical products in them, for example:

R M Williams Saddle and Leather dressing, Fiebings Aussie Leather Conditioner and effax Lederbalsam are all very good.

Please remember, that Petro-Chemical based ingredients in cleaning products break down the structure of the hide, separating the fibres. This allows it to dry out more quickly and also for the dye to escape. Please refer to the section on Care of your Saddle and Pads for more information.



**PAD preparation.** We would recommend that you actually wash any Wool Fleece Lined saddle pads before you actually use them! This may sound strange, but we find they are easier to use and less slippery when they have been washed. See section on washing pads for help.

## Setting up the Saddle/Pad combination for the first time.

You may be sitting surrounded by all the components of the BALANCE Saddling System and wondering if you will ever feel confident about which arrangement of pads to use!

Don't worry, we will take you through it, step by step, in this Manual and if you are still unsure, your BALANCE registered Saddle Consultant or the BALANCE office will help you.

It is best not to ask advice from anyone who does not own a BALANCE saddle as they will not usually understand the principles of the BALANCE Saddling System correctly, and being given incorrect information will make you even more confused! Most things are covered in this manual, and if not, a simple phone call or email to us will sort things out as quickly as possible.



Although you are probably desperate to go off for a ride in your new saddle as soon as you can, please take the time before this happens to familiarise yourself with all the components. Understand how they work together and which combination is best for your horse at the moment.

Allow your horse to see and sniff everything before putting it on his back, and then follow this order:

- Gently feel for the back edge of the shoulder blade with your fingers and sit your saddle far enough behind this to allow the shoulder to rotate back fully when the front leg is extended (usually at least 1½" / 38mm).
- If the saddle is placed too far forward it will restrict the movement of the shoulder blades and therefore, the front legs. It will also tend to be pushed up too high at the front by the wither area which will unbalance the saddle.



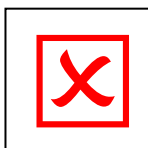
- The underside of the pommel should not touch the withers, but the saddle should tip down slightly in front if you press on the pommel (see picture left). In other words, it will look wider than your horse's current static body shape.

***If you ever notice that your saddle is sitting so low that it touches the withers, DO NOT USE IT. Contact the BALANCE office or your consultant for advice.***

Remove the saddle. Take the wool pad and put it on your horse making sure that it is pulled up over the wither so that it sits level along his back



This is how the pad should look before you put other pads and/or the saddle on top.



If the pad looks like this when you put it on, it is likely to crease under the centre of the saddle and cause a pressure point.



If you have been advised by your consultant to use the Extra Thick Wool Saddle pad combined with one or more of the 'Type B' JB or Add-on pads without the use of either of the Base Pads, go to the section on 'Alternative Pad Combinations'.

Otherwise, place the Pro-Complete or Wool Base Pad on top of the saddle pad, taking care that it does not extend over the back of the saddle pad.



Replace the saddle on top of these pads and pull them up into the gullet at the pommel (front) and the cantle (back).





Put one hand on the pommel and the other on the cantle and alternately press down to see if the saddle rocks forward or if it is steady. If it is steady and the flattest part of the seat is parallel to the ground, the saddle is balanced.

If the saddle easily rocks forward and lifts off at the back, take it off and attach the ¼" (6.5mm) JB Pad to the front of the Base Pad.

Replace the saddle, pull the pads up into the gullet and repeat the rocking test. If it still rocks, remove the ¼" (6.5mm) JB pad and use the ½" (12.5mm) JB Pad.

Remember, if you have a Matrix saddle, it needs to look a little high at the front before you get on as it will settle down once your weight is in the stirrups.



Even when correct, the saddle may not look as solid on the horse's back as you are used to. Remember the more pads you have to use at the beginning, the less stable the saddle will feel. This is why it is essential that a horse going through a Remedial Programme to aid recovery of muscle mass, is ridden in a way that takes account of the number/combination of pads needed e.g. no galloping, jumping, long trail rides, riding on rough or hilly ground.

When you have found the correct combination of pads, attach the straps of the wool pad to the girth straps (billets) of the saddle above the buckle guard, to secure (see picture right).



## The Girthing Arrangement.

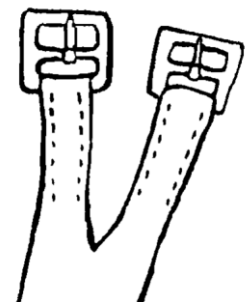
BALANCE saddles usually have three short girth straps (billets), each on separate webs, which means that any combination of girth straps can be used safely.



*The exceptions to this are ATHENE saddles, XTREME saddles and the HORIZON saddles which have the back two webs run into a sliding V arrangement, which means that you will only have the two straps to do up.*



We recommend that you use a girth that splits in two 4" or 10cm below the buckles. This will make it easier to use the V shaped girth arrangement on your saddle and will help ensure even tensions through the girth itself and the straps (billets).



If your saddle has three short girth straps (billets) we usually advise the use of the first and third strap (billet) as this will distribute the downward pull of the girth over more of the panel length, instead of concentrating it around the Junction Box area. Use this arrangement for your first ride unless you have been advised by BALANCE or a BALANCE registered Saddle Consultant to do something different.












If the girth lies too far back on the horses' belly (photo above left), pull the top back corner of the buckle guard down so that it is at an angle (photo above right). This will angle the girth straps (billets) forward and take the girth into the proper place (photo above right).

For horses with a big tummy and/or very narrow shoulders, where the girth tends to move too far forward to the elbow, try using the first and second straps. This arrangement can also be helpful for horses with a very dropped back to avoid pressure under the back of the panel. Usually this arrangement is temporary, as many postural problems can disappear once a horse is ridden regularly in a BALANCE saddle. Then you can use the normal first and third girthing arrangement.

All BALANCE saddles (excluding the ATHENE and XTREME dressage saddles) have short girth straps (billets) as standard. Our ongoing research indicates that there is more potential for:

-  The buckles of a short girth to bruise the horse in the very sensitive area just behind the elbow.
-  The horse to get pinched between long (dressage style) girth straps (billets).
-  High pressures to be exerted under long, thin girth straps (billets) rather than the broader surface area of a long girth.
-  Excessive over-tightening a short dressage girth. The low position of the buckles creates more leverage when the rider bends down and even uses their foot in the stirrup as leverage when tightening the girth. This means that when the rider uses the same amount of effort as he/she would use to fasten a long girth, a short girth will end up being tighter.

**Be aware that your horse may have as much of an opinion about girths as he does about saddles!** Ideally, offer him a few different options in terms of design and materials. As always, he will be the best judge as to what works for him and what does not. We have found that certain characteristics are favoured by most horses. These include:

-  That whatever material the girth is made from is kept scrupulously clean and supple. Stiff, sweaty, dirty girths are an insult to your horse!
-  A quality of smoothness. Avoid wrinkles and creases in either the girth or the girth cover. Check this when the girth is curved as it would be on the horse, not when it is lying flat.
-  Sufficient width (bearing surface) over the sternum area of the horse.

Make sure you have a girth that is long enough, because the girth straps (billets) on new saddles are shorter and stiffer than on well used saddles. If you only have access to a girth that does up at the bottom of the girth strap (billet) of your current saddle, it will probably be too short to use with your BALANCE saddle when you first get it.

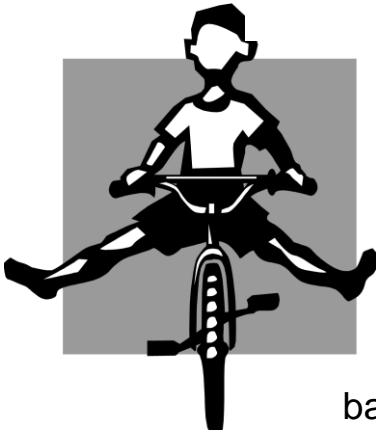
## The BALANCE English Hunting Breastplate

If you are sampling or hiring a BALANCE saddle, you will usually have a BALANCE English Hunting Breastplate included in your Sampling/Hire package. Please use this until you get used to riding in the saddle.

Most conventional saddles do a good job of masking riders' crookedness, because they fit the horse so tightly. Crookedness usually has the effect of riders loading more weight into one side of the saddle or into one stirrup. BALANCE saddles will not hold unbalanced riders in the middle of the horse; they will highlight the riders' lack of balance. The breastplate will assist with some lateral stability and security until the riders are balanced.



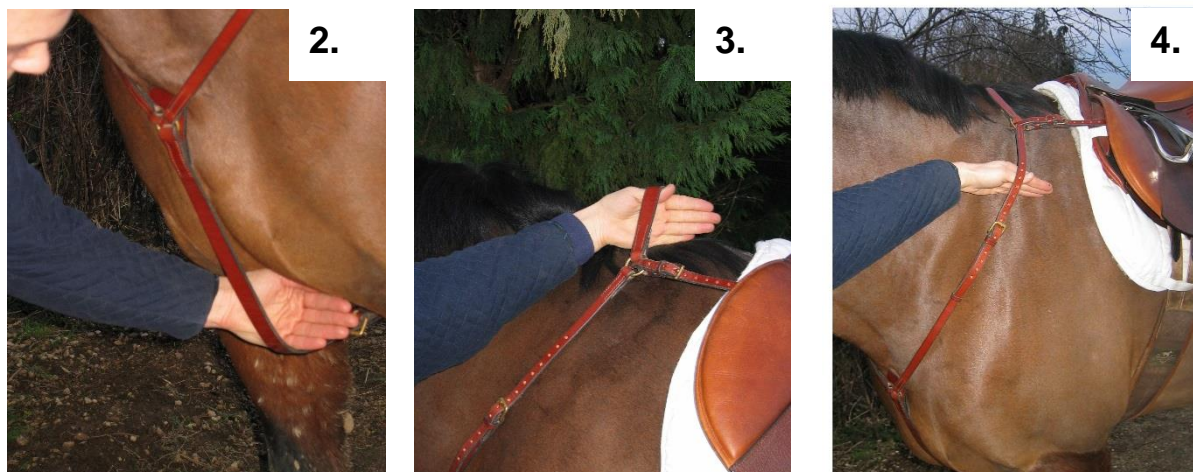
Think of the breastplate as training wheels on a bicycle.



You may find the breastplate unnecessary if your balance and co-ordination are good. However, this is best evaluated in a safe environment! With the breastplate in position and used as intended, it will reduce the likelihood of the saddle getting excessively displaced by the rider.

BALANCE recommends the use of the breastplate to any rider who will be riding over hilly terrain and/or making tight turns at speed e.g. show jumping, cross country events, endurance riding/racing.

## FITTING THE BREASTPLATE



The English Hunting Breastplate was originally designed with long fixing straps to attach to the girth straps (billets), not the D rings as is so common today. This is the best arrangement as it is more secure and more stable. BALANCE has breastplates made in this way, with the additional feature of adjustments in most of the straps, to ensure a comfortable fit for your horse.

The pictures above show how the breastplate should fit. Put the breastplate around the horse's neck like a necklace, with the thicker strap hanging down in front.

Make sure the saddle and pads are placed correctly on the horse. Attach the girth to the off side (right) girth straps (billets). Then take the long double strap between the horse's front legs and pass the girth through the loop at the end of this strap, before fastening the girth in the normal way on the near (left) side.

The straps need to be set at a combination of lengths, which brings the base of the Y shaped join below the base of the windpipe (see picture 1 on previous page). It should not be so short that it puts constant pressure on the horse's chest, and not so long that it hangs down loosely between the legs. If you can get the width of your hand between the strap and the horse, it is a good guide (see picture 2).

Having done the girth up, take the long thin straps back to the top of the girth (billet) straps on either side of the saddle and loop them around them, adjusting their length as necessary (see picture 5 on next page).

These straps should not be pulling tight at this stage, because the breastplate should only come into play should the saddle slide back, in the case of riding in hilly terrain, or if it gets shifted over to one side as a result of the rider's loss of balance.

Obviously, if they are very slack, the breastplate will have little effect. It should be possible to easily slide the width of your hand between any of the straps and the horse when everything is done up and the horse is at rest. See pictures 2, 3, and 4.



When you have finished riding, remember to undo the thin straps which attach to the girth straps (billets) first, then undo the girth and make sure you release the breastplate from the girth under the horse's belly, before attempting to remove the saddle.

Failure to undo all of the relevant straps on the breastplate before undoing the girth can result in a real muddle and a potential accident!

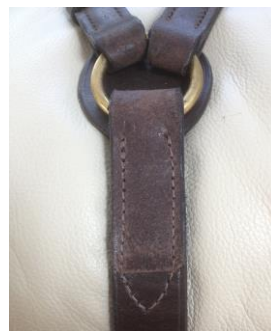
**Please notice how your breastplate has been made**



As with all products that carry the BALANCE logo, we are always looking at ways to improve the degree of comfort that they provide for the horse, as our priority.

When you look at most bridle work, you will see that it has been made with all of the 'lumps and bumps' on the horse's side! Even when well made, you will see that the smooth side is facing outwards, because it looks nicer and the ends of the straps are folded onto the horse's side.

The horse's right to comfort comes higher on our list of priorities than the way the equipment looks and so the BALANCE breastplate is made with the ends turned out so that the horse gets the smooth side against his skin.



## Washing Instructions for the pads

### **Wool Fleece Lined Pads**

As well as conditioning your saddle, you will find it far easier to work with the Wool Fleece Lined Saddle Pads once they have been washed. When new, they tend to be slightly stiff and more slippery. As soon as they are washed, they soften.

Once in use, they should be washed frequently, on average every three rides. If you live in a very hot climate, hose the pads off every day after riding and wash as described once a week.

#### To wash

Brush or vacuum the wool pile to remove horse hair. Close Velcro straps. Hand wash or machine wash on a wool cycle using a mild non-biological (or dermatologically tested) washing powder/liquid.

**DO NOT USE FABRIC SOFTENER.** However, a cup of white vinegar in the final rinse water will soften and

'condition' the wool pile. Allow the pad to air dry naturally by laying it flat, wool side up. Dry away from strong direct sunlight to protect the colour. **DO NOT TUMBLE DRY.**



**Sheepskin pads** *(please note that we have not sold sheepskin pads in recent years, but some people may still own an old BALANCE Sheepskin Pad)*

#### To wash

Avoid washing unnecessarily. The fleece on these pads can be kept comfortable for the horse by gently brushing or vacuuming regularly to remove dried sweat, dust and horse hair. Close Velcro straps. Hand wash or machine wash on a delicate cycle using a sheepskin wash e.g. Leather Therapy's Leather Wash and Conditioning Rinse, Mattes Liquid Melp Sheepskin Cleaner or Christ's 'C7' Wash Liquid. Allow the pad to air dry naturally by laying it flat, wool side up, but the skin will also need to be gently stretched several times during drying to avoid shrinkage. Dry away from strong direct sunlight to protect colour **DO NOT TUMBLE DRY.** There is a YouTube video on the BALANCE Channel *(Functional & Constructive Saddling)* that shows how to care for a Sheepskin Saddle Pad.

### **Pro-Complete pads**

Hand wash only. Use a mild detergent as above. **DO NOT USE FABRIC SOFTENER.** Hang over a shower rail or similar to dry, away from strong direct sunlight to minimise loss of colour. **DO NOT TUMBLE DRY.**

## Your First Ride in your new Saddle.

We suggest that you set aside a reasonable amount of time where you can try the pads and the saddle for the first time, in an unhurried, relaxed and safe (enclosed) environment.

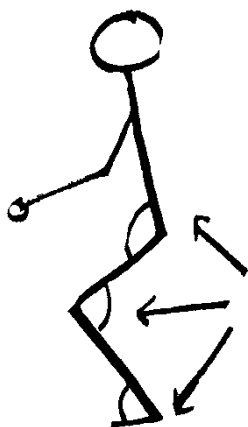
Make sure you have a safe and sturdy mounting block, and/or an assistant to hold the off-side (right) stirrup as you mount because the new equipment will not sit as securely on your horse as it will when 'broken-in'.

Go through the tacking up process again as explained on pages 21-26.

Make sure the girth is snug and remember in a new saddle and new pads, the leather, the panels and the pads soften and settle quite quickly so you will need to re-check the way the girth feels several times during your first ride. However, be careful not to over-tighten the girth. It should never be so tight that you cannot slide your fingers between it and the horse. Remember that it is very easy to over-tighten elastic ended girths!

Once you are satisfied that everything looks as it should, you can mount the horse using a mounting block and, when possible, a helper to stabilise the saddle as you mount, by applying some equalising downwards pressure on the offside stirrup.

Once you are on the saddle, make sure your stirrups are an appropriate length. When you ride in saddles that are wide enough to avoid restricting the horse, it is inevitable that you will be aware of the actual width of the animal you are sitting on! This may sound obvious, but the fact is, that most conventional widths and designs of saddle create an artificially narrow feel for the rider, with angular trees that cost the horse dearly in terms of his own comfort.



Riding in a BALANCE saddle is closer to the way you need to sit on the horse bareback, with a definite amount of angle in the ankle, knee and hip joints. This is particularly important information for the rider who does dressage. You might have an instructor who does not understand the dynamics of ergonomic saddling for the horse and insists that you must ride with a relatively straight leg position. If this is the case, you may have to choose between your current instructor and your horse's comfort!

The way the human hip joint is constructed means that the legs cannot be directed both out (laterally) from the pelvis and also down (vertically).

This is particularly relevant in female riders. If you want to have a long, straight, upper leg to hip alignment, you will always fight with saddles that are designed to accommodate the natural, healthy width of any horse. Do not be misled into believing that a shorter leg position with more angles in the joints is less effective than the straighter leg position so often encouraged in Dressage and Western riding.

To get the best from your BALANCE saddle, you may need to be willing to let go of long held beliefs about what is fashionably considered to be 'right' and 'wrong', and be more interested in what actually gets results!

Certainly, in the first few rides in your BALANCE saddle, no matter what style of saddle and type of riding you do, we would suggest you consider a shorter stirrup length than usual, as you get used to the feel of a wider saddle. You can always drop the stirrups down again as and when you feel you should/can. You may not be able to judge how appropriate your stirrup length is until you start a rising (posting) trot.

Start your riding session at walk on a positive, but not restrictive, rein contact which will give you good feedback about the state of your horse's balance and mobility. Ride in relatively straight lines and large, smooth curved lines (corners, circles). Once you and your horse have walked around the area a couple of times, you should stop and re-check your girth. Remember that things settle down quite quickly in a new saddle, so do not assume that the tension in the girth when you first get on is going to be the same 10-15 minutes later. If it still feels snug, you do not need to tighten, if it feels too loose, tighten it a hole at time until it feels OK again.

Once you have checked your girth, proceed in walk on a good rein contact, but if you feel safe and secure, be willing to allow your horse to stretch his neck if he wants to. Most horses do seem to want to go through a period of stretching their necks forward and down as they experiment with the bigger range of movement that the BALANCE saddle will allow in their backs, before they resume.



If you feel safe to allow this...please do.

If you feel you need to set some boundaries with a shorter rein contact, in order to feel safe...that is OK too.



Pay attention to your own lateral stability and balance as you ride. Notice whether the way your left side feels, is a mirror of the way your right side feels. Most people have some uneven patterns of holding and moving their bodies. It is unlikely that you are an exception, no matter how experienced a rider you are, and it is important to be aware of how you use your body; because it will have an impact on the way your saddle and pads work!

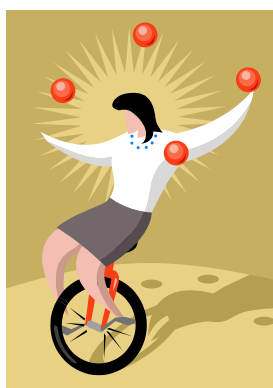


The BALANCE Saddling System does place more responsibility on the rider to be balanced, co-ordinated and stable through their body. These qualities are, of course what the horse is looking for anyway in a good riding partner, so BALANCE saddles can act as a wonderful training tool that supports improvement in riders.



Riders, who have only ever ridden in tight saddles that are clamped onto the horse's body, may be blissfully unaware of how unbalanced or un-co-ordinated they are! Conventionally fitted/designed saddles will often mask poor balance in the rider, but at obvious cost to the horse.

The BALANCE Saddling System tends to expose issues with rider balance and co-ordination, which, depending on the rider's goals, can be seen as a wonderful training tool, or an irritation! The BALANCE Saddling System also shows up conflicts between the movement patterns of the horse and that of the rider.



Symptoms that show up when the horse, the saddle and rider are at odds with each other are:

- 🐾 The saddle gets moved forward.
- 🐾 The saddle gets moved to the left or right of centre.
- 🐾 The saddle gets moved back.
- 🐾 The pads get shifted out of position under the saddle.

Just remember, .....that the saddle and pads do not, and cannot, move on their own! It probably seems like an obvious thing to say, but it's amazing how many times we have heard people say..... "*my saddle's moving forward/back/sideways*", as if it has a life of its own!

It's not just the rider that influences a saddle out of position. A horse that has a postural issue such as being croup high (see picture to right) will tend to also be on its forehand. This combination is likely to influence the saddle towards the withers, so the rider has to be able to help to stabilise the saddle (see more details of this in the 'Trouble Shooting' section of the Manual).



Horses are frequently more contracted down one side of their bodies (as are most humans) which means that the way in which they negotiate turns can shift the saddle to the side. Again, the rider has to be aware of such patterns and use his/her own body to create stability in themselves and in the saddle so that they don't just follow and compound the same pattern.

Simply put, if you can imagine how you would need to use your body as a rider to keep the saddle centred beneath you and centred on top of the horse if you had no girth, you will have an idea of the ultimate in balanced/coordinated and stable riding.

**The girth *helps* the saddle to stay *on* the horse and *under* the rider, despite all manner of imbalance. However, the security it provides should not be abused by allowing riders to abdicate responsibility for their own balance!**

Once you have allowed yourself and your horse some time in walk and steady trot on an unrestrictive rein contact, you can begin to ask a bit more of your horse. All the time, you need to be paying attention to the way the saddle and pads feel. You may need to adjust your stirrup length, either up or down, and also check your girth.

We would suggest that you keep the first session with your BALANCE saddle fairly short and not demanding. For some horses, the change to the way they can move/use their bodies will immediately feel really good and it is tempting to overdo it. Remember that muscles and joints that have spent years working within a restricted range, need time to adjust.

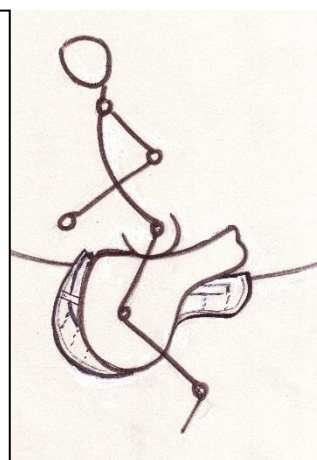
This is why we do not recommend that you use your new BALANCE saddle to compete in or attend clinics until you have allowed at least 4 weeks for your horse and yourself to learn how to get the best results from it. This period will also allow time for the leathers in your saddle to soften and become easier to ride on. Obviously, this also relies on you conditioning the saddle correctly as described on Pages 37-38.

**When you have finished your ride, always check the balance of the saddle, front-to-back, as soon as you dismount.** The red circle shows you where the deepest part of the seat is.

It is a good idea to develop the habit of doing this after every ride, then you will easily see whether you need the same padding arrangement the next time, or more pad thickness, or less.

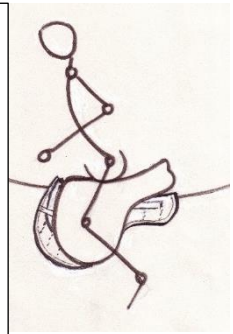


1. This saddle is padded with an Extra Thick Wool Fleece Square and a ¼" JB Pad. The low part of the seat is too far forward, which will tip the rider's pelvis forward too much and create a hollow back with the legs too far back. The saddle needs more lift under the front.

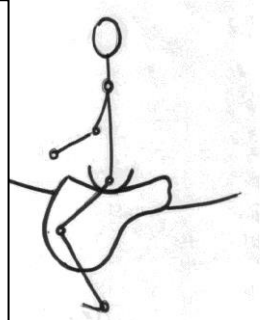




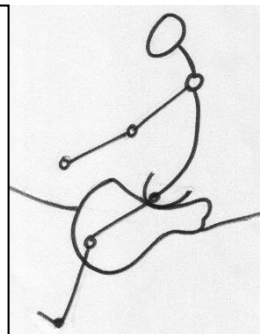
2. This saddle is padded with an Extra Thick Wool Fleece Square and a Large  $\frac{1}{4}$ " JB Pad. The low part of the seat is still too far forward, but the saddle is in better balance than picture 1. However, the saddle still needs more lift at the front.



3. This saddle is padded with an Extra Thick Wool Fleece Square and a  $\frac{1}{2}$ " JB Pad. The low part of the seat is central, the saddle is in the best pad arrangement to help the rider achieve a good balance.



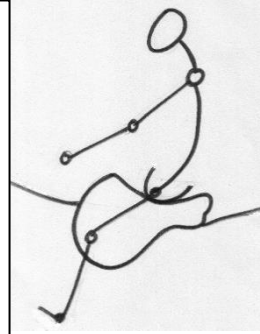
4. This saddle is padded with an Extra Thick Wool Fleece Square and a Large  $\frac{1}{4}$ " JB Pad plus a  $\frac{1}{4}$ " JB Pad. The low part of the seat is too far back, so will tip the rider's pelvis too far back with their legs too far forward. The saddle needs less lift at the front.





5. This saddle is padded with an Extra Thick Wool Fleece Square and a Large  $\frac{1}{4}$ " JB Pad plus a  $\frac{1}{2}$ " JB Pad.

The low part of the seat is even further back, so will unbalance the rider even more. This saddle needs even less lift at the front.



## 'Running in' your new saddle

This is particularly important if your BALANCE saddle has a wool flocked panel. The panels will settle (compress) a little during the first few weeks of use. In many cases the horse is actually increasing in muscle mass at the same time, so you may not notice the saddle sitting differently on the horse. However, it is important that you monitor any changes so that the correct thickness and placement of pads is used to maintain the saddle balance and keep your horse as comfortable as possible.

We recommend that after your initial ride, you spend the first two hours of saddle use (not in one session) in walk where you will have your seat in the saddle all the time. This will help to provide the balanced weight distribution needed to settle the flocking evenly, both front to back and side to side. From time to time, check the underside of your saddle, as you clean it, to make sure that the panels are settling evenly. If you see something that concerns you, please make contact with your saddle consultant.

The foam panels do not change very much in use; however, this does not mean that the issue of unbalancing the saddle through incorrect use of pads or crooked riding can be ignored. It is possible for the foam panel to become distorted through uneven pressures, if these are significant and continue over a period of time. The correction of unevenly compressed foam panels is a more complicated, and therefore, costly procedure than in a flocked panel.

## Cleaning your Saddle.

Cleaning, and conditioning all surfaces of the leather should be done at least once a week and preferably every time you use the saddle. A saddle of this quality is a considerable investment and therefore, it makes sense to take care of it in ways that will protect and extend its 'life'.

You will need:



A small textured cloth (a terry cloth/face flannel is ideal)



A bucket of clean water. The water can be warm but NOT HOT.

First, remove all the pads, breastplate, girth and stirrups from the saddle.

Dampen a cloth with the water, and wring out all excess water. Wipe the saddle over removing dust and dirt paying close attention to the greasy build up that tends to occur on the flaps of the saddle. You may need to gently work at these areas by softening the grease and using your thumb nail to remove them.

You can also wipe the grease and dirt from the stirrup bars. Take some sticky tape and remove all the random hairs from the Velcro to which the knee blocks attach. Make sure that all the dirt and dust is removed from the saddle, and towel off any excess wetness on the leather.

This is also a good time to take the opportunity to check the stitching on your saddle, particularly on the girth straps.

Having removed surface dirt, sweat, grease etc. from the leather with a damp cloth, it is time to go to the next stage.

You will need:



A sponge, not larger than the palm of your hand (you can cut up a larger one)



A bar or pot of firm, glycerine saddle soap.

Take a bar or pot of glycerine saddle soap and a dry sponge. The best way to get the right amount and consistency of saddle soap onto the sponge is to dip the end of the bar of soap in water and then rub the sponge on it. The soap should not froth or foam but should be rubbed into the leather easily and leave a shiny, greasy finish. If you get a lot of foam on your sponge, it is too wet.

There is no need to buff or rub it off again but just leave the saddle to absorb all

the goodness you have treated it to. It should have a very slightly sticky feel once it is finished.

Deeper conditioning of the leather should be done in addition to the regular cleaning, and the frequency will depend on the climate you live in. Think in terms of how the climate affects your own skin. If you live in a dry place, be it hot or cold, your saddle, like your skin, will benefit from more frequent conditioning.

If you live in a more temperate climate, you can do this less often provided that you are disciplined about cleaning your saddle most times you use it.

### There are **two** phases to deep conditioning of leather.

Phase one, should use a natural product that is easily absorbed into the leather and therefore will penetrate towards the centre. 100% pure Neatsfoot oil (such as Fiebings) works very well. This should be wiped on all surfaces of the leather after you have cleaned them off with your damp cloth to remove dust and dirt. Pay attention to areas that are hard to reach by using a small paint brush. The oil will penetrate more easily from the rough side (underside) of the leather flaps.



Phase two. This is really important. When you use an oil based product that soaks into the leather easily, it is essential to follow this up with a second product that is waxier in its consistency and will seal the surface of the leather. Failure to do this can result in drying of the surfaces of the leather because the easily absorbed oils can carry important fats towards the centre of the leather, leaving the surface vulnerable to damage and wear. We suggest you use the same products suggested earlier to condition your saddle before using to do this job.

Do not be tempted to use products that suggest that they can perform cleaning and conditioning in one step. **CHECK THE LABELS FOR UNNATURAL INGREDIENTS IN YOUR CLEANING AND CONDITIONING PRODUCTS.**

**KEEP THEM AS SIMPLE AND NATURAL AS POSSIBLE.**

Experience of using BALANCE products in many different countries for over 20 years has proven that when used and maintained in the ways suggested in this Manual, they will provide good service and comfort for horse and rider for many years. If you have any concerns about the way a BALANCE product is standing up to your use and care of it, please get in touch with the office for guidance immediately.



Even if you keep your saddle and pads in A1 condition and treat them with respect, the stresses and wear they are subjected to through the act of riding are considerable. Therefore, it is inevitable that things can sometimes just wear out. Flocked panel saddles can sometimes need attention after many years of use, or if a horse/rider has strong uneven patterns of movement.

Flocking and minor repairs caused by accidents etc. can often be carried out by a saddler in your own country of residence, but if the saddle is under two years old and therefore still under manufacturer's warranty, you must use a saddler that is approved by the manufacturer to avoid nullifying the warranty.

Major repairs such as the replacement of a tree, can only be carried out by the manufacturer or their approved agent, whether under warranty or not.

## Ongoing progress with your BALANCE saddle.

If you encounter any difficulties when you start working with your BALANCE saddle, please refer to the Trouble Shooting section to see if there is something in there that can help you. Beyond this, we hope that you will make contact with your BALANCE registered Saddle Consultant or the BALANCE office.

We are always happy to offer support to our clients, no matter how long they have had their BALANCE saddle, so get in touch by phone, or email.



Some people seem to 'get' the BALANCE approach to saddling really fast and never seem to need any further input. Other people seem to need quite a lot of help, particularly if they have a less than straight forward horse. There is no point in struggling when there is probably a very simple solution that you have just not thought about!

If you are willing to work with us using digital pictures and video when necessary, we are very likely to be able to help you through any teething problems.

**IMPORTANT...** please remember that the BALANCE Saddling System has been designed to work at its best when used on a horse that is ridden in an educated and supportive way. The principles that shape the System are built around correct (bio-mechanically efficient) equine movement.

When the saddle is used on horses who are moving in an unbalanced and/or disengaged way, one tends to see a variety of problems that can make the saddle look as though it doesn't work!

**In other words, the BALANCE Saddling System exposes inappropriate riding and training techniques. A good feature from the horse's point of view, but a challenging one for some riders.**

## **When to Change the way you use your Saddle and Pads**

It is quite normal for the horse's body shape and/or posture to change when he is taken out of his old saddle and then ridden consistently in a BALANCE saddle.

This means that the padding arrangement you used when you first set up your saddle may need to change.

If the saddle looks high at the front (and you are sure that you are not placing it too far forward), reduce the thickness of the pads at the front of the saddle.

If the saddle looks too low at the front, you will need to increase the thickness of the pads at the front to bring the saddle back into balance.

As you get more practice in using the BALANCE Saddling System you will become more and more confident about checking and adjusting (if necessary), the balance and feel of the saddle, in order to maintain the comfort for your horse, even during changes of season, work etc. It is not complicated!

### **IMPORTANT**

If your horse shows signs of losing significant muscle mass when you are using a BALANCE saddle exclusively and correctly, it is an important sign that something is wrong and needs investigating,

Please do not ignore this warning sign.

Some of the many reasons for this are listed on Page 47.

## Troubleshooting.

Problem	Probable cause	Remedy
<p><b>The Saddle moves over to one side.</b></p>	<p>Rider or horse crookedness. Remember the saddle will not move on its own!</p>	<p>Please check:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That you are not pulling or pushing the saddle over to one side when girthing up and/or mounting.</li> <li>2. That your horse is level in the way it moves its body. Have your horse led away from you in a straight line and notice if he drops one side of his pelvis or ribcage lower than the other.</li> <li>3. That you don't have an uneven way of using your own body and that you are not putting more weight into one stirrup or on one side of the saddle.</li> </ol>
<p><b>The Saddle slips forward 1</b></p>	<p>When due to the rider's position/influence, in combination with the shape/posture of the horse.</p>	<p>Please check:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is the saddle lifted too much at the front so that your weight is tipped back?</li> <li>2. Are you sending the saddle forward by using your seat too strongly, driving with seat in sitting trot and canter?</li> <li>3. Are you trying to sit too upright? This problem is common with dressage riders who often ride well behind the vertical with a 'driving' seat.</li> </ol> <p>This has the effect of moving the saddle forward over the horse's shoulder.</p>
<p><b>The Saddle slips forward 2</b></p>	<p>When due to the shape, posture or conformation of the horse.</p>	<p>Is the saddle positioned a long way back on a horse with a big, round tummy and/or narrow shoulders?</p> <p>If the girth moves forward to the narrowest part of the horse, it will, of course, take the saddle with it. If this is the case, try using a different combination of girth straps/billets. See page 24.</p> <p>Certain ponies and horses are <u>very</u> round in the barrel with no wither and are narrow across the shoulder. With this type of shape, <u>a comfortable non-slip saddle pad</u> is often very effective.</p>

Problem	Probable cause	Remedy
<b>The saddle moves back 1</b>	Are you putting the saddle on too far when you are saddling up?	It is not unusual for someone to say that their saddle moves back when they ride, only to find that the saddle is, in fact, merely moving back to where it should have been placed when saddling up!  Use the back of the shoulder blade as a guide (see Photo on Page 21) and place the saddle approximately 1½" (4 cm) behind the back edge of the shoulder blade to allow it room for a full rotation.
<b>The saddle moves back 2</b>	Is the saddle correctly balanced? If the flattest part of the seat of the saddle is sloping forward, it will throw your weight forward and down into the stirrup area. The movement caused by this can push the saddle back and down. <i>Those of you who jump please note this.</i>	If this is happening, you need to create more lift at the front to re-balance the saddle.  Use a thicker JB pad or move it further back under the saddle.

Obviously, there will be certain types of riding that will make it more likely for the saddle to slip back, e.g. hacking (trail riding) over very hilly terrain, cross country jumping and foxhunting.

Refer to Pages 27-29 about the correct use of breastplates to help avoid the saddle slipping back to an undesirable place.

Problem	Probable cause	Remedy
<b>Finding it hard to get used to the saddle?</b>	You may have spent years riding in conventional widths of saddle, which creates a totally false feel of the true width of the horse.	Refer to Pages 31-37. Shorten your stirrups one or two holes until you get accustomed to the width of the saddle.

Please do not set yourself unrealistic goals during the first few weeks of having your saddle. **HAVE PATIENCE.** Unfortunately, it tends to take human beings a lot longer to let go of their old habits and patterns of behaviour than horses so, for your horse's sake, give yourself a reasonable amount of time to get used to the saddle.

Problem	Probable cause	Remedy
<b>Hair rubbing under the back of the saddle 1</b>	1. Saddle tipping slightly forward and the back of the panels are not sitting down securely on the horse's back. Once this happens, there is more potential for <b>friction</b> at the back of the saddle area. 2. If the saddle is tipping back too much, it will put excessive <b>pressure</b> at the back of the panels	1. Adjust the pads to give a little more lift at the front, so that the saddle sits more level, bringing the back of the panels into better contact with the horse's back.  2. Reduce the thickness of the padding at the front of the saddle, in order to re-balance the pressures under the saddle.

It is useful to have someone on the ground to observe you riding in rising (posting) trot, because they will have a better view of the way that the saddle is contacting the horse's back, than you can on top. If there is not enough pad thickness at the front, the back of the saddle will lift off the horse's back as you rise (post).

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Probable cause</b>	<b>Remedy</b>
<b>Hair rubbing under the back of the saddle 2</b>	<p>1. If the horse has a pattern of dropping the middle of his back when ridden, the saddle may bridge slightly even when the horse is moving. If this happens the back end of the panels will sit heavier on the part of the back that has a lot of movement.</p> <p><b>Please note...if your horse has this pattern of hollowing his back when ridden, make sure that there is not an underlying cause that needs help from a Veterinarian, Chiropractor, Osteopath, Physiotherapist, Dentist, Hoof Care Specialist etc.</b></p> <p>2. Riding the horse at the wrong speed in each pace (gait), usually too fast, but sometimes too slow, will encourage or even force him to raise his head/neck position in order to balance and stabilise himself.</p>	<p>1. If this is the case, you may need the BALANCE Pro-Complete Remedial 'A' Pad in the deepest part of the hollow, in order to even out the pressure and encourage the horse to keep his back lifted and flat. See Page 14.</p> <p>A rider who sits too upright in rising (posting) trot will be behind the horse's movement, and will have the effect of depressing the horse's back.</p> <p>2. Experiment with the speed of each pace to find out what speed your horse needs to be balanced and therefore, relaxed.</p>

**Any influence on the horse that causes him to move with his head and neck raised and contracted, will also cause the area of his back that you are sitting on to be contracted and pulled down (hollow). This is an extremely inefficient posture for him to cope with weight on his back, as well as creating the potential for many other problems that are often blamed on saddles e.g. bridging, hair rubbing.**

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Probable cause</b>	<b>Remedy</b>
<b>Dry spots in the saddle area</b>	<p>With conventionally fitted saddles this is usually an indication of excessive pressure.</p> <p>However, experience would suggest that in a BALANCE saddle sweat is being wicked away more quickly into the pads in this area because of the pumping action of the actively moving muscles and lack of pressure from the saddle.</p>	<p>Keep an eye on the area and get in the habit of gently feeling the area for any sign of sensitivity. However, generally there is no need for concern if you see drier spots on your horse's back when you remove a correctly fitted BALANCE saddle.</p>
<b>Uneven sweat marks on saddle pads</b>	<p>Please check that the saddle is not bridging when the saddle is moving.</p>	<p>Remember that in order to safely carry any weight, the horse must have a degree of engagement (natural collection) which requires him to lift and round his back both back to front and side to side.</p>

**If you are concerned about any severe differences in sweat/dirt patterns when using a BALANCE saddle, please do make contact with the BALANCE office for advice and support.**

**Don't forget to go to the BALANCE website from time to time to check for even more tips and troubleshooting information that you can use, to get the very best out of your saddle.**












## TO CONCLUDE

The BALANCE Saddling System, BALANCE saddles, pads and other products, are the result of many years of studying and respecting horses' opinions about the equipment we put on them. If your horse starts to tell you that he is not happy with something, there are many variables that affect the relationship between the saddle and the horse.

For example, if you change your trainer and subsequently your riding style, the horse may change his muscle development for better or for worse, depending on whether your new riding style helps or hinders his movement.

Any change in the shape of the horse must be taken into account, in the way that you use the saddle and pads. In this way, you can always provide your horse with a saddle that is well cushioned and wide enough for him to lift and widen his back into as he moves. The saddle will then be correctly balanced to avoid excess pressure in any area, whilst offering a stable interface between horse and rider.

Other factors that can change the shape of the horse in the saddle area are:

-  Change in feeding
-  Change in environment
-  Illness in horse
-  Uncomfortable feet
-  Sharp teeth
-  Heavier rider
-  Change of rider
-  Rider with back problems
-  Saddle and/or pads being used inappropriately
-  Non-BALANCE saddle being used on the horse
-  Current BALANCE saddle no longer wide enough for horse

It would be wonderful to think that you could buy a saddle which would *guarantee* that you would never have another saddle-related problem. Unfortunately, the reality is, that *any* piece of equipment that humans put on horses has the potential to create discomfort and injury.

The best that you can hope to achieve is that the saddle allows the horse to be comfortable and provides the minimum of restriction to movement. This is possible to achieve with the BALANCE Saddling System when used appropriately.

To guarantee no saddle-related problems, you might think the best solution is to ride without a saddle! However, whilst short and occasional bareback riding sessions can be useful in helping riders to develop better balance, our experience shows us that horses do best when ridden in a saddle with some structure to it, in the form of a tree.

The best way we can help our horses is to enable them to retain as much of their bio-mechanically efficient movement as possible. To do this, farriers, trainers, manufacturers, fitters of equipment and, most importantly you, the owner and/or rider, need to observe, study and respect what is most appropriate for each individual horse.

Happy Riding



*helping people helping horses...*