

"Saddle Pad Performance Evaluation" by Kansas State University What the Professional's Choice Advertisement fails to mention...

Horse enthusiasts have likely read the latest saddle pad advertisement from Professional's Choice Sports Medicine Products that has been running in many equine publications. The advertisement is designed to appear like a real article. The ad makes claims about certain Professional's Choice saddle pads as compared to leading competitors. The advertising in reference is titled "Saddle Pad Performance Evaluation" and subtitled "Kansas State University Study Evaluates Leading Saddle Pads for Pressure Distribution, Compression & Wicking." In this ad, Professional's Choice quotes carefully selected statements from a saddle pad study which leads the consumer to believe that their SMx® Air-Ride and Wrangler SMx® Air-Ride pads are clearly superior performers.



The saddle pad study was conducted by Erica D. Wesley, a Kansas State University graduate student. Ms. Wesley is working towards her master's degree from Kansas State's Department of Apparel, Textiles and Interior Design. A field unrelated to equine science. Professional Choice Sports Medicine Products, Inc. invested in the study. This excerpt was pulled from the Acknowledgements section of Erica Wesley's college thesis:

"First and foremost, I would like to share my appreciation with the incredible Professional's Choice Sports Medicine Products, Inc. family, especially Dal and Nina Scott, Barbara Gallagher, and Monty Crist. Their interest and generosity are what made this project possible, and I want to express my gratefulness for their belief and investment in it." Page ix

Because of Professional Choice's affiliation with the study, it is no surprise that they used the study's results to help promote their product. However, it is disappointing that they used the study to mislead the consumer into believing that competitive pads failed.

Simply for the consumer's protection, this press release was written to shed some light on the misleading advertising. After reviewing the thesis in its entirety, the conclusions and the findings of the study are a lot different than the Professional's Choice Advertisement leads you to believe. Although there are too many to note here, these are some examples of what was found:

"All pads recovered by at least 89% of their original thickness. However, the Wrangler® and SMX® Air-Ride™ pads gave significantly lower percent recovery than all other pads after eight hours of relaxation and eight hours of compression." Page 48

Professional's Choice's ad attempts to push consumers to believe that the Classic Equine ESP™ pad did not perform well by stating that because the ESP™ Memory Foam component of the pad completely collapses under compression, the wool or felt top and felt bottom are the only components providing support in these pads. This is true. But, what they failed to tell consumers was that the memory foam was not added for support in the Classic ESP™, but to:

- 1) allow your saddle to seat into the pad for a secure/stable ride, and
- 2) help fill in void spaces between an ill-fitting saddle and the horse's back, and
- 3) the memory foam allows the pad to better conform to your horse's back and rebound to its original shape after each use.

***"However, the fact that the ESP™ Memory Foam displayed such a high percent recovery after compressing significantly under load demonstrates its superior flexibility and resiliency."* Page 58**

In the conclusion section of Ms. Wesley's thesis, she repeatedly stated that Classic Equine, ESP™ pads exhibited the highest recovery values after deformation and compression. She proved that the Memory Foam component of the pad tested to do exactly what it was designed to do. The other components of the pad, the high quality orthopedic grade felt and 100% Navajo wool top offered the superior shock absorption and pressure distribution for protecting and supporting the horse under saddle.



"The ESP™ Memory Foam pad performed significantly well in pressure testing and maintained compression resistance and recovery values (resiliency)." Page 61

"The fact that the ESP™ Memory Foam pad showed such a high percent recovery after compressing significantly under load displays the superior resiliency of this pad..." Page 47

ESP™ Memory Foam

IN CONCLUSION...

What does all the 'scientific testing' in the study mean? No one really knows and as Ms. Welsey states in her own conclusion of the compression study: *"However, we cannot assume that the pads in this study that exhibited the highest peak pressures and highest standard deviation are 'bad' or harmful to the horse, because the level of pressure that will potentially injure a horse is not known."* Page 43 Therefore, the study was not able to give a definite conclusion on which saddle pad is or is not "the best".

Consumers should be aware of deceptive advertising. It is unfortunate when companies use this tactic to purposely confuse consumers into thinking that other products on the market are inferior.

A note from Classic Equine on the topic: "Classic Equine is not interested in negative advertisement or deception. We simply offer you and your horse products that we believe in and use ourselves everyday." Ken Bray, President "We literally spend years in testing and developing each of our products. We work closely with professionals and trainers across the industry to ensure our products do exactly what we intend for them to do - protect and support the horse."

References: Erica D. Welsey, "Performance Evaluation of Saddle Pads" (MA Thesis, Kansas State University, 2006).