

Georgia Professional Farrier's Association



Driving the White Line by Eric Gilleland, CJF

As my wife and I were driving home from my son's soccer game, I cut the corners off of our winding road a bit too much and scared the heck out of her by getting too close to the neighbor's mailbox. I didn't think it was ever too close until you hit one. She informed me that I was mistaken and hopefully will start talking to me again tomorrow. During my time of silence I have begun to think about the importance of driving on the white line. When I was learning to drive my brother told me that from behind the wheel, if I keep the hood ornament on the white line I will keep the truck in my lane. Unfortunately, trucks don't have hood ornaments anymore and therefore I skim a mailbox or two. I have taken his advice and used it not only on the road but on the horse's hoof also. For me, driving nails can be a tedious process. One that I take for granted and one that I depend on. There are several alternatives such as glue on shoes, barefoot, slip on shoes, etc. The glue ons are great except that they are expensive, time consuming, restrict expansion, and not healthy for long term use. The slip ons are good for the occasional trail horse. As for the barefoot, great alternative. My horse is barefoot. After all, he doesn't need traction or protection on his feet to eat grass. But when I took him to the Junior Rodeo he wanted his shoes on. His tiptoeing across the parking lot barefooted was embarrassing since he belonged to a farrier. The next rodeo we went to he was shod and he was grateful.

Therefore, nailing on shoes has become the best way to give the horse traction and protection for his hooves. So, properly nailing on shoes must be left to a competent farrier with vast experience. Unfortunately, to gain experience you have to start somewhere. I started by being extremely cautious and nailing very low and very fine. Fine is described as toward the outer edge of the horseshoe. Coarse is described as toward the inner edge of the horseshoe.

A very talented farrier, Dan Hutchison, once said "It took me ten years to learn how to drive nails". Most people would think there is nothing to driving a nail. Just hit it. Dan knew the importance of where the nail goes. Dan was a much faster learner than I. I wish it only took me ten years. When he said that, it was an instant relief to know that I was not alone. Farriers take pride in driving nails. I want them to be in a straight line and not too low. It is more appealing to the eye and healthier for the hoof. If the nails are too low there is not as much nail material in the hoof and therefore it has less holding strength.



The ideal place for the nail to enter the hoof is in the white line. The white line is softer than the wall and therefore won't split or splinter as the nail enters. A comparison would be driving a nail into a rubber mat or a concrete block. The white line is like the rubber mat in that it will displace much easier without damage. Nails are tapered and get thinner away from the head. So the farther from the head (or higher) that it exits the hoof wall the smaller the exit hole. Therefore, smaller the exit hole, the less splintering of the hoof wall. While the nail is in the hoof wall it simply displaces material. Pull it out immediately after driving it and the hole will close back up. The only place that splinters is the exit hole.

If the white line is about an $1/8^{\text{th}}$ of an inch wide, from the outside edge to center may only be a $1/16^{\text{th}}$ of an inch. That doesn't leave much room for error. One of the problems with driving nails through a shoe is that you cover up the white line and can't always see it through the nail holes. That is why it is important to properly shape the shoe and to use the appropriate width shoe with the nail holes punched correctly. A preshaped keg shoe is a wonderful thing if the hoof looks exactly like it. Otherwise, you still have to shape it. I prefer a shoe that is generically shaped because I am going to beat on it anyway. It doesn't matter if it is a front pattern, hind pattern, or whatever because I will change it to correspond to the hoof wall perimeter. By following the perimeter of the hoof that I have trimmed to mimic the white line the nail holes should line up properly.

Without burning side or quarter clips in it makes it very difficult to properly start the nail in the white line. The clip will hold the shoe away from the edge of the wall and therefore move the nail holes more to the outside. This may be preferable on a horse with a thin wall if you are using a wide web shoe and the holes are punched down the middle.

The beauty of handmaking shoes is that you can place the nail holes anywhere you want. If the walls are thin, you can punch the nail holes fine. If the wall is thick, you can punch it coarse. If the wall is broken or chipped away, you can move the hole toward the toe or heel more or just skip that hole altogether. The handmade shoe is a custom fit for the horse. Although, we do custom fit store bought shoes also. We buy them with a generic shape and then reshape them to fit the exact foot. Or at least that is the idea. Below is a picture of shoes pulled off of two different horses. They are different sizes but notice the shapes are the same for all eight shoes.



Remember that four are fronts and four are hinds.

Shoes are from two different horses. Notice there is no difference between fronts and hinds

These shoes were not custom fit to the feet and therefore the nail alignment did not match the white line. The feet were broken up around the edges even with the shoes on.

Square Peg in a Round Hole! Notice where the toe nails were.



The white line (or white zone) is seen from the ground surface as the area that joins the hoof wall and the sole. It is usually seen as a yellowish color and has a different consistency of the anterior hoof wall. The white line that I refer to in this article only extends upward as far as the sole wall junction. It is not to be confused with the very thin white line that is the non-pigmented section of the stratum medium which extends all the way up to the coronary corium.

In a lecture given at the AFA Convention in 2013, Robbie Hunziker, CJF and Steve Sermersheim, CJF, AWCF explained how the white line is a mirror image of the coffin bone. Therefore, when you shape the shoe to the white line you are fitting the coffin bone also. It is plain and simple, just connect the dots. Don't make mountains out of molehills and let's allow the foot to tell how it needs to be shod.

Now, all of this being said, I have made a few mistakes in the past. I have missed the white line and quicked a horse or two. Unfortunately, the height of the nail got blamed instead of the depth of the nail. That has given "High Nails" a bad name. I try to be careful on placement but I still want to use most of the nail that I paid for. I don't like to drive a nail and cut off half or two-third of it only to throw it away.

This is all based on my experience and is what works best for me. Each of you may see it differently and I respect that. I have tried it many different ways. If you haven't tried it mine, please consider it.

Treasurers Report as of 7/29/13: General Fund = \$7,485.06 Bill Crowder Memorial Fund = \$1,103

Annual Contest November 15th & 16th

The Exhibition class or "First Timers" class will be back again this year. It allows someone who is unsure how the whole contest thing works to get a taste of it without the pressure. Anyone who has never competed may enter. Their shoes will be judged but no points will be awarded. The judge will go over the shoes and offer tips to improve. This year we are proud to announce the judge will be **Jason Gilliland, CJF** from Albertville, AL. Jason won the GPFA contest last year and the Southeastern Triple Crown series in the Open Division. The shoe list and directions are on www.georgiifarriers.org or can be found at www.southeasterntriplecrown.com. Although, preregistration is not required we do ask that you let us know if you plan to compete. We have changed our format a bit from last year and everyone will shoe a horse, not just the top five. Please call or text me at 770-312-4841.

I look forward to seeing you there,

Eric Gilleland

Also..

We want to thank everyone who supports the GPFA! If it was not for all of you, the clinics, contests, and family events would not be possible. Please contact Lucas Gilleland at, lucasgilleland@gmail.com or 678-873-2555, with any suggestions or questions.

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