

Gregg Lauder is proud to present a Special Guest Article with Kirk Shaw of Equine Unlimited!

Shoeing the Reining Horse

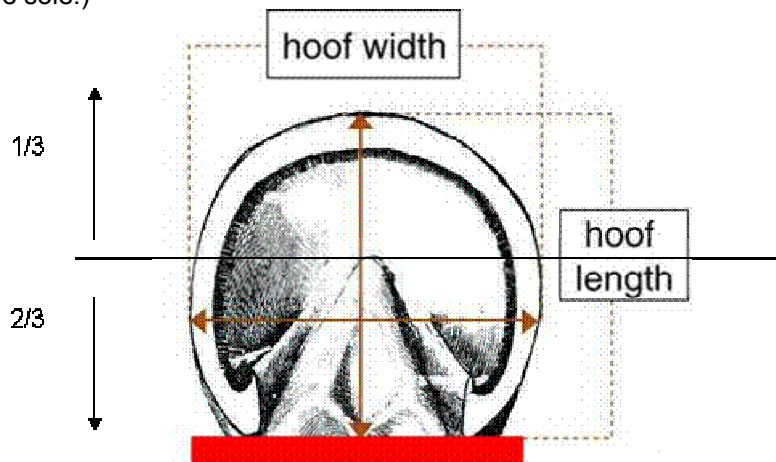
According to the NRHA Rulebook, "Stops are the act of slowing the horse from a lope to a stop position by bringing the hind legs under the horse in a locked position sliding on the hind feet. The horse should enter the stop position by bending the back, bringing the hind legs further under the body while maintaining forward motion and ground contact and cadence with the front legs. Throughout the stop the horse should continue in a straight line while maintaining ground contact with the hind feet."

In the following article I discuss some of my more common techniques for shoeing the hind feet of the reining horse. For simplicity I will focus on the foot trim and shoe fit.

The Trim

I consider the trim of the hoof as one of the most important elements in shoeing a reining horse. The first element of trimming a Reiner involves achieving equal angles on both hooves. The angle of the hoof is important because it greatly influences the horse's stride. I aim to have both hooves with the same break over and the same landing. The angles of both hind feet should be as close to the same as can be managed. This can be achieved a couple of ways.

1. Hoof gauge (mechanical device used to measure hoof angle); or
2. Trimming the feet to the same points. For Example, trimming the heels to the widest part of the frog and trimming to the wax in both toe quarters. ('Wax' is the point at which the dead sole meets and joins the live sole.)



Another tool I use to ensure I get equal angles is to divide the bottom of the foot into two parts. From the top of the frog (or apex of the frog) to the end of the toe should be 1/3 of the length of the foot. From the apex of the frog to the end of the heels should be 2/3rd of the length of the foot. The actual angle of the hoof is not as important as both angles being the same. For a guideline the angle of the hooves will most likely range between 52° - 60°.

Toe Length

The next element of the trim is the length of the toe. The length is measured from the cornet band down the front of the wall to the end of the toe. Both hooves should have equal toe lengths and depending upon the size of the horse toe lengths will be between 3 inches to 3 1/4 inches (smaller horses will have shorter toe lengths).

There is a theory that the longer the toe length the deeper the horses stride. A longer stride should mean that the foot lands further under the horse's belly thus making it easier for the horse to initiate the stop. There are two factors to keep in mind when considering toe length.

1. Longer toe length will extend more stress on other areas of the horse including hocks, stifles, SI joints and tendons.
2. The longer the toe the less balanced the stop will be. Horses with excessively long toes have a tendency to slam their hind feet into the ground instead of going in softly and balanced. Given these factors I try to avoid shoeing with excessively long toes. I believe that a correct toe length will assist in keeping a horse sound and will not affect their stopping performance.

The Last Element to the Trim The last element of the trim is the flatness of the foot. I aim to get the foot as flat as possible from left to right and front to back. One guide I use is to look at the horse's coronet bands on their hind feet. Stand in front of the horse and look straight through to the hind feet. What you are looking for is to have both coronet bands parallel with the ground. If one side or the other is not parallel I will check my trim again. Remember there are bones inside the foot and we do not want to put any more undue stress on them from one side being higher than the other.

I will avoid alternating the flatness of the trim to try to prevent a horse from spreading when stopping. Spreading is the act of the back legs moving further and further apart as the horse slides. I prefer to correct spreading by manipulating the shoe versus the trim.

Shoe Fit

Once I have the feet trimmed I start to fit the shoe to the foot. The fit of the shoe is greatly affected by the shape of the foot. I will place my rasp on its edge at the middle of the frog and examine how much foot is on either side of the rasp. In a perfect world there is an equal amount of foot on both sides of the rasp, however that is not usually the case. It is common for there to be less foot on the inside of the foot compared to the outside. This is usually caused by the horse bearing more of its weight on the inside of the hoof. Horses carry approximately 65% of their weight on the inside of the foot especially on the hind feet because most horses naturally toe out behind. Often you will see a straighter inside wall due to the extra weight the horse places on the inside of the foot.

If the horse is straight on the inside wall I will fit the shoe to the inside to try to give the horse more support. The shoe will extend beyond the hoof wall enabling the horse to have a larger area to push with when the horse goes into the ground to stop. I believe the extra shoe enables the horse to have more balance and allows the hind legs to travel in straight lines through the stop. How much steel will I extend beyond the hoof wall? The straighter the wall the more I extend the shoe usually within 1/16 to 3/16 of an inch. Although it does not sound like a lot I believe it makes a real difference for the horse. With this type of corrective shoeing where your horse lives is a consideration, horses kept in stalls at night with daily turnout and limited hazards (rocks, roots, unlevelled ground) have less chance of losing a shoe extended beyond the hoof wall than those horses that are on full turnout.

The fit of the heels of the shoe should be full enough to allow for heel expansion but tight enough to avoid being stepped on and subsequently pulled off. Heel expansion means when the horse puts weight on the foot the heels expand. I prefer to round the inside branch of the shoe from the toe to the end of the heel with a grinder or a rasp to try to minimize the risk of the shoe being stepped on. The logic is that if the horse does step on the shoe hopefully they will slide off instead of tearing the shoe off. It is important to make sure there are no rough edges of the shoe as rough edges can cut or unnecessarily injure the hind legs.

I prefer to shoe Reiners to the bulbs of the heels with respect to the trailer length (amount of the slide plate that extends beyond the heels). This adds balance to the stop as well as protects the fetlocks from being burned from the ground. I try to get my left and right plates to have the same

shape allowing the horse to have the same feel on both feet. The distance between the two trailers of the shoe should be as wide as possible minimizing the amount of drag on the horse and hopefully enabling them to slide further.

The last element of fitting the shoe is the toe. I prefer to rocker the toe of the shoe. To “rocker” means the end of the shoe is slightly tipped up on the toe of the hoof. The horse will land flat and a rockered toe enables the foot to have a cleaner entry into the ground and helps prevent the toe from grabbing the grounding as it makes contact. This is more important when stopping in deeper ground.

I have outlined some basic guidelines as to how I shoe Reiners. I’ll be quick to mention that if the fit does not work for the horse I will not be afraid to try alternatives. All horses, like people, are individuals and need to be treated as such. If I come across a unique problem I will adjust my typical methods to attempt to find the optimal solution for that particular horse. One last final point, communication with the rider is key to successfully shoeing a Reiner. The rider understands how the horse stops and any changes that the horse may go through.

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We hope you enjoyed this article from Kirk Shaw of Equine Unlimited. For more information on Equine Unlimited and Kirk Shaw Farrier Services Contact Kirk at 403-615-8044 or j.kirk@telus.net.