

Nail Them Up

TOE CRACKS

By Bruce B. Daniels

More often than not, the reason horse-owners keep us as their horseshoers and don't change over to the new, local "wonder farrier" is some small thing we noticed or did for them. We all know that the last shoer was terrible and that we have done a pretty good job. But it seems as if owners always feel that there is someone out there who can make super movers out of their horses, so that their horses will pin blue every time they enter the ring.

If you want to keep their loyalty, you have to do more than keep shoes on their horses and get to their barns on time. You have to do something for them every once in a while that wasn't asked for or charged for. I am not talking about big things. But horseowners will appreciate a little extra thoughtfulness now and then on your part.

One thing that takes very little time and costs you nothing is nailing up toe cracks. Most of the cracks I have seen were caused by neglect. That is, the unshod foot was allowed to grow too long and physically pried the wall apart. Normally a good trimming will stop most cracks. I used to believe that burning a half moon at the top of the crack would stop the crack from going higher, but I no longer have faith in that treatment. How many times have you seen a ladder of rasp notches or burns up a toe, and the crack just ignored all of these so-called crack stoppers? I've seen and been responsible for quite a few.

No, unless simply keeping the foot short was going to do it in the first place, I don't think the notch or hole on top of a crack is good enough. I feel that you have to hold the crack together mechanically. If the horse is to be



1. Toe cracks that have reached the coronary band will never really go away, but they can be kept closed.

shod, a wide web shoe that won't spread, with some quarter clips, is one nice way to keep the crack from working its way up. But many times it's the turnouts that have the worst toe cracks, and it's hard to clip a barefoot horse.

There are two methods I like to use to stop toe cracks. Sometimes I take an old aluminum shoe and hammer out a piece 2" or 2½" long by ⅝" x ¼" punch or drill a hole on each end, and screw it to the foot across the crack with ½" pan-head screws. This takes a little time but is definitely worth the effort.

A simpler and much quicker way to stop the crack is to nail it shut. I can't say it is as good as a plate, but it is effective. I had my heart in my throat when I nailed up my first crack, but I've always felt, "No guts, no glory," so I went on with it.

The problem in driving nails into the wall from the outside is that the nail wants to turn out as soon as it gets started. The reason for this is that the nail is designed to enter the soft inner wall, go straight, catch on the inner side of the hard outer wall, and then turn out. So nailing up a crack from the outside just reverses that process. To overcome this inclination in the nail it is necessary to burn or cut a small hole of about ⅝" or ¾" in the wall on either side of the crack. The hole should be deep enough to penetrate the hard outer wall, so that the nail will start in the soft inner wall as it was meant to do. Also, by burning a hole in the wall it gives a nice broad surface to fold the nail around when you hammer the clinch down.

In a pinch, you take a hoof knife, hammer the face of the blade into the wall, and make a nice starting point for



2. Two holes being burned into the hoof at the same time, with a hot pony shoe.

3. Don't place the holes too close to the crack or the wall will be pulled loose; if the holes are placed too far from the crack, the nail won't reach.

4. When driving the nail in, make certain you aim for the other hole.

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5. The nail wants to be long enough to be able to get a strong clench.



6. With both ends of the nail clenched over and the foot rasped off, the job is finished. Some plastic wood will dress the foot up.


your nail. In as much as I work with trotters alot and have to put toe-weights on occasionally, I carry a small push drill. This handy little tool will let you bore a nice pilot hole from either side of the hoof wall. If the crack is wide enough, you can see the drill come out and insure that you are lined up properly.

As for the nail, some nail shanks are very bulky near the head and may require thinning. To thin out the shank near the head, hold the nail by the point on the edge of the anvil and let the nail head lie in the hardy hole. Then thin the shank out near the head with your hammer. This lets the nail bend nicely and form a hard clinch without ripping the wall up. As for the size of the nail, what you would usually use for the shoe is about right for the crack.

Take your time driving the nail in. Sometimes it is wise to start from one side and then pull it out and come in from the other side. That way you have a good exit hole prepared. If the horse is standing on a smooth surface, put your foot next to his to keep from sliding him across the floor.

Once the nail is in simply cut off the ends and clench both ends in. If you

really want to see the crack close, take your pull-offs and, catching the ends of both clinches, squeeze them in. Don't overdo this, though, or you will start two more toe cracks. Finish the job off with your rasp and you're done.

A little airplane glue and some plastic wood will cover the job nicely and will leave the horse with no more toe crack and, we hope, an impressed owner. 



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