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Rail-First Kiss Shot

Those who play all the major pool games soon learn that each game requires knowledge for certain shots that seldom turn up in other games. The bank-combos that can be business as usual in one pocket for example are rarely, if ever, played in other games. Some shots are so specialized that their frequency within a single game can vary according to the equipment used.

We're going to investigate a very specific, rail-first kiss shot that is played more frequently in 8 ball than in all other games combined. And, because of tighter traffic and typically generous pockets, it's a shot we see far more often in bar-table 8 ball than in 8 ball on a full size table. In fact, it's played so frequently in the bar-table game that the ability to make it when it arises is a required skill for anyone who hopes to move into the top tiers. But because my experience with 8 ball on the bar table is so sparse I had never taken the time, until now, to experiment with this handy kiss shot in search of a reliable method for shooting it.

In the diagram we're shooting solids with one solid left and one of the opponent's stripes blocking that solid's path to the upper corner pocket. Confronted with the same setup in other games, such as straight pool or one pocket, any experienced player would shoot the combination on the stripe. The same setup in 9 ball would demand an attempt at the combo since that game's only stripe is the 9 and a successful conversion would win the game. 8 ball of course is a different story, and, if we envision a table with many stripes and therefore no safety possibility, there's no choice but an offensive shot on the solid.

Set up the balls as shown with the stripe one-and-a-half to two ball widths away from the cushion and the solid ball a foot or so away from the stripe as shown. To pocket the solid we're going to bounce it off of the cushion into the back of the stripe to kiss off of it and roll along the cushion into the pocket. To do so we must find an aiming point on the cushion for the solid ball.

Begin by placing another ball on the stripe as shown with the dashed-outlined ball in the diagram. Note that the line perpendicular to the dashed ball and the stripe's line of centers goes to the pocket as shown with the solid line, so that's precisely how we want the solid ball to meet the stripe. To find the aiming point on the cushion, hold your index finger over the center of the dashed ball and then move your thumb to the cushion point to find the distance shown with the short solid line. Now, while maintaining the gap between your index finger and thumb, move your index finger to the cushion point and your thumb back one more line segment to the X, or your aiming point.

Place a piece of chalk on the rail so a corner of it sits right on the center of X, and then remove the ball that you used to make your measurements. If you aim the solid ball along the dashed line at the corner of your chalk, it will hit the cushion in front of the

stripe at the exact distance needed to pocket the solid off the back of the stripe. To get a faster feel for all of the shot's elements, it works better to eliminate the solid ball and practice shooting the cue ball at the aiming point by itself. When the cue ball is going into the pocket consistently you can reintroduce the solid to play the shot as diagrammed. Note also that success demands gentle speed with a naturally rolling ball. Finally, because you will not be allowed to use another ball for your measurements in competition, you must learn to approximate half a ball width to place your index finger over the table for your first measurement to the cushion point.

Here's a useful kiss shot for 8 ball and a necessary tool for the competitive bar-table player. Our version in the diagram shows only one of many possible setups for the rail-first kiss, so it's a good idea to experiment with various arrangements after gaining consistency with the relatively easy setup seen here. As the stripe moves farther from the cushion the shot quickly becomes more difficult. In fact, based on the balls' relationships to each other and to the cushion, some setups will require an alignment during the collision that's different from the one in the diagram. Committed experimentation with this rail-first kiss and any variations you can imagine will be time well spent to add a dazzling game winner to your arsenal.



