

The Thin Line

BY JACQUES MARAIS

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY



The band is approximately 5cm wide, less than the width of the white line painted on a tennis court. It stretches from a craggy spire topping the plunging cliffs forming the eastern face of the Table Mountain massif, and spans a 40m chasm back-dropped by the city of Cape Town hundreds of metres below.

Your first step will be excruciatingly difficult. When your back foot leaves Mother Earth, all that remains is absolute and utter focus. You must not even for one moment think of the wind

buffeting your body, or the thin air plunge yawning below your feet. Obviously there's a safety rope and harness, but that does little to take the edge off the endorphins fizzling within.

This is slack-lining, a brand new adrenaline craze taking the world by storm. I was fortunate enough to shoot Adidas International athlete, Lukas Irmmler, on a recent visit to South Africa to promote this new edge sport. The following images document a few of the startling instants captured during this time. *More photos can be seen at www.jacquesmarais.co.za.*

SKY LINING AT DAWN

Lukas Irmmler is walking the line, suspended nearly a kilometre above the city of Cape Town. This photograph is a composite, consisting of a dozen exposures I captured on my Nikon D700 and then combined in Photoshop.



▲
ON THE LINE

The craggy Cape coastline creates the perfect backdrop for dramatic images of slack-lining. Here Lukas performs tricks on a low-line setup near the Cape of Storms. Off-camera flash from a Nikon SB-900 adds interest to this image.

▶
TO THE WIRE

Capetonian Warren Gans tentatively steps into the void on Table Mountain. In order to capture the full extent of the athlete within the landscape, I scrambled onto a high outcrop overlooking the slack-line and shot this image with a longer 28-300mm Nikon zoom lens.



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WHEEL IN THE SKY

A public exhibition of Lukas's skills at Cape Town's V&A Waterfront gave me the opportunity to shoot images within an urban context. Here, the wide setting on a Nikon 16-53mm wide-angle zoom allowed me to compose a vivid and striking photograph of both the athlete and the 'Wheel of Excellence'.

walking the line



BO-KAAP COLOUR

Adding a cultural angle to imagery often adds to the story-telling potential of any photograph. Here Lukas balances above a Bo-Kaap street to the amazement of one of the residents of this historic Cape Muslim quarter.

INTO THE BARREL OF A GUN

The old cannons with their massive barrels above Red Hill, in Simon's Town, made for an interesting shooting location. Lukas tightens up his laces while Warren walks the line. One of my Nikon SB-900 flashes, triggered by a Pocket Wizard transceiver, adds appeal to the image.



BIG CHILL

Lukas enjoys a few minutes of time out on his slack-line during our shoot in the Bo-Kaap. I have yet to meet an athlete as unfazed and focused as this young German adrenaline junky, in his early twenties. *More info on Lukas is available at www.adidas.com/outdoor and www.slackline-tools.com.*

unfazed and focused