

## **MULE CROSSING: A.H.S.A. Objects To Mules**

By Meredith Hodges

In November of 1986, mules were accepted by the United States Dressage Federation. This opened many new doors for mules in this country, but the doors to real national participation and recognition remained closed when the American Horse Show Association announced that they would not accept mules competing against horses in A.H.S.A.-approved competitions. At first, this seemed to be a direct insult to mules, but in April of 1988, the A.H.S.A. clarified its position by inviting the American Donkey & Mule Society (our international organization) to join the A.H.S.A. as a division. This meant that although mules would still not be allowed to compete against horses, they would be given an opportunity for recognition of their accomplishments within their own species. It isn't really all that important for mules to defeat horses



in equine sports. Rather, it seems more important to me for mules to have the chance to test their best athletes against each other, thus raising the standard of excellence for the entire breed. Competitions against horses can still take place, but they would take place in a show designed for such a competition, such as the "battle of the breeds." By doing things in this manner, we reward the efforts of all. Equestrians avoid bad feelings among equestrians, and maintain the integrity of the entire equine industry as a whole.

In order to remain an integral part of the A.H.S.A., once we are accepted, we are expected to meet certain criteria. First, our breed organization must have been incorporated in the United States a minimum of five years. Since the American Donkey & Mule Society was founded in 1967, we have already met these criteria.

Second, at least 500 animals must have been registered with the breed registry during the two years immediately preceding an application for recognition. The American Donkey & Mule Register has been continually increasing over the years as people realize the value in registering their animals. The registry gives us the opportunity to identify our own animals, to keep records on stock for the purpose of a traceable ancestry, and to monitor the accomplishments of our athletic champions. Obviously, registering animals improves the chances to help you monitor the health and well being of your animal. A traceable ancestry gives us the opportunity to explore and examine the strengths and weaknesses of our breeding programs and other related research. Monitoring the successful accomplishments of our champions allows us to set new goals and new

challenges for our Longears and keeps them in a favorable light in the public eye. These things are all-important to the stability and growth of our industry. With a well-organized registry drive, we could, no doubt, meet this second criterion with no problem.

The third criterion is, perhaps, the one that is currently giving us the biggest problem: "Competitions restricted to a breed or discipline must have been held in at least 20 events during the year immediately preceding an application for recognition either at A.H.S.A.-approved events or at events approved by the breed or discipline." This alone, is not a problem, since we definitely hold at least 20 events a year that could stand the scrutiny of A.H.S.A. approval. To remain in the A.H.S.A. we must follow up by having "a minimum of 25% of the competitions restricted to a breed or discipline held at A.H.S.A. events annually." We need people and clubs to take responsibility for seeing that these competitions continue to survive and thrive in the coming years.

Currently, there are a lot of new folks coming into the Longears industry. Our industry is growing, without a doubt, but like the horse industry, our solid base is comprised primarily of folks whose main interest lies in the casual, recreational use of Longears rather than in showing and breeding. Still, one cannot exist without the other. The successful showing and breeding of quality stock insures the recreational user that he will be receiving better quality animals at fair prices for his own use. So you see, each integral part of the entire industry is somewhat dependent on the support, recognition, and understanding of the other parts to solidify the success of the whole. There is a lot of anxiety about fees in competitions making the show scene somewhat expensive, but not as much as you would imagine. The A.H.S.A. must have these fees to fund their efforts and when you perceive the results of the numerous things that they do for the industry, you can see that these fees are really quite minimal. Besides, all of our shows do not need to be A.H.S.A approved, just a percentage!

Fourth, and no problem to deal with, the A.H.S.A. requires that we submit a complete outline of conformation standards for the breed and rules for competitions for breeds and disciplines. We have qualified judges and well-informed equestrians within our industry that could easily help compile this information and prepare it for submission. Most of the rules and regulations can be borrowed from the already existing A.H.S.A. Rulebook, so, "why re-invent the wheel!?!"

In order to remain in the A.H.S.A., there are only 2 more requirements:

- 1) "National and/or regional Championships for a breed or discipline must be A.H.S.A.-approved, and...
- 2) "Any division recognized after December 1, 1984, that does not meet the aforementioned criteria in any given year will be warned and if it fails to comply, the following year it will be dropped from the rulebook."

So, you can see that this A.H.S.A affiliation does not have to be a complicated threat and it could definitely increase the integrity of our entire Longears industry. There are many folks across the country that are only waiting for the signal to go ahead and begin work

on this project in their own areas. They don't necessarily need help with the actual work, but they do need the support of Longears lovers in their areas. After talking with folks all over the United States for the past two years, it is clear to me that joining an institution such as the A.H.S.A. can be quite frightening and intimidating to the common man; however, it isn't any more so than any other "new" experience. There are many benefits to be gained by joining, the most important of all being the overall unification of the entire Equine industry including all breeds and disciplines. Our world is composed of billions of people with many diversified interests. To see that each different interest has the best chance for growth and development, all of those with that particular interest should band together in support for its very survival. Dissention and arguments within the industry are counter-productive. Those of you who would like to see mules and donkeys accepted by the A.H.S.A. as a division, please, write letters, cards, or even call me at the Lucky Three Ranch and let me know your feelings. We would like to begin organization for this action. If I do not receive any responses to this request, I can only assume that our industry is too young and immature for such an action at this time and the action to join the A.H.S.A. will again be postponed. But please, for the sake of our growth, consider the options carefully before rejecting this proposal. It could mean the success or failure of our entire Longears industry!

For more information about Meredith Hodges and her comprehensive correspondence training program, *Training Mules and Donkeys*, please visit **[www.LuckyThreeRanch.com](http://www.LuckyThreeRanch.com)** or call **1-800-816-7566**. Also, find Meredith Hodges and Lucky Three Ranch on Facebook and Twitter. And don't forget to check out her children's website at **[JasperTheMule.com](http://JasperTheMule.com)**.

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