

MULE CROSSING: *Bishop Mule Days*

By Meredith Hodges

Most of the world's calendars begin with New Year's, but a mule lover's calendar begins and ends with Bishop Mule Days held in Bishop, California, over Memorial Day weekend each year. This year marked the 17th Annual Mule Days Celebration with over 600 mules participating in everything from the parade to packing to steer roping and jumping. But Mule Days is more than just a mule show--it is an annual meeting of mule lovers from all over the world. It is an opportunity for these people to come together, exchange ideas, demonstrate their talents, and pay their respects to the one animal most responsible for the building of this great country of ours--the mule!



Just as the mule has suffered great injustice to his character throughout the ages, so have his admirers and advocates. Stories and rumors have repeatedly portrayed the mule as an unattractive, stubborn creature, but modern day mule lovers have found that these rumors are simply not true. Fast breaking and gross impatience are probably the underlying reasons for such ignorant remarks and mule lovers today are doing their level best to educate the general public about the true nature of the mule. The simple fact is: he's generally better than the horse out of which he came, and much more personable!

It is said that hardship builds character and this is quite evident as you experience those around you at Mule Days; despite chiding and jokes, mule lovers hold their heads high, yet they are humble; they are insulted, yet ready to give assistance; and above all, they give their hearts for the love of mules. You will never meet a nicer group of people. Several times champion mule Leading Lady, tied for World Champion Performance mule with Jord Ass Jean. "Leading Lady" is owned by Cliff Rich of Amarillo, Texas. Word got out that Cliff's birthday was over Memorial Day weekend, so in the spirit of mule days, Cliff Rich was given a Happy Birthday party. We hope you enjoyed it, Cliff! Our congratulations to both you and your "Leading Lady."

The hard work and dedication of the owners, Dr. Robert and Debbie Miller and trainer of "Jord Ass Jean" was also quite apparent; she exhibits the grace and agility of a truly fine

animal. Congratulations on tying for World Champion Performance Mule! It was well earned. Not to be outdone by horseracing, mule-racing fans cheered the victory of Cajun Queen, owned by J.P. Rogers, as the World Champion Running Mule; she is indeed a queen! Demonstrating speed and skill, the World Champion Packer was awarded to Tony Holdridge of the Red's Meadows Pack Outfit; he does it so smoothly! The best for the best--good mules need a good shoe and Lee Green is where it's at! Congratulations to our World Champion Shoer! Is it that wonderfully loud shirt, or was it the mule? Congratulations to Johnny Enos and Poco Streak, the '86 World Champion Working Mule!

As more people are educated about mules, we see more participants in Mule Days. Ordinarily a town of 4000 people, Bishop's streets were lined with 50,000 spectators for the Mule Days Parade, the largest non-motorized parade in the world. This year the parade consisted of 240 entries. Among those entries were real diehards such as the Vision Quest and Tindell Wagon Trains; both wagon trains travelled over 300 miles to take part in the Mule Days Celebration. The impressions they left along the way will probably go down in history. Once arrived, the young adults from Vision Quest gave us an extra-special treat with their multi-talented marching drill team. Our deepest thanks for their special contribution!

"Mule Fever" has finally reached Hollywood! Producers and directors from Dix Country Pictures joined thousands to celebrate Mule Days; they were searching for a mule to star in their new film, "Hey, Mule!" The choice could not have been an easy one, with over 600 mules from which to choose. Sunday afternoon, Woddy, an Appaloosa mule, was chosen for the part. Congratulations, Woddy! In addition, Dix Country Pictures will also be putting together a documentary about the Bishop Rule Days Celebration; with their enthusiastic help, we will be able to reach more people than ever in praise of mules! In addition to the actual mule show, special events and people are an important part of Mule Days. Governor of California George Deukmejian participated in the parade and later held a press conference. Ted Dawson, award-winning sportscaster for KABC-PV Los Angeles, was honored as Grand Marshall for the Mule Days Parade. Struck with "mule fever," enthusiastic Ted also participated in many mule events, with his memorable performance being in the musical tires class. Surely, it is a time he will never forget...and neither will we! Semi-truck pulls, steer packing, large hitch demonstrations, and races with eight to 10 mules per wagon are just a few of many special events enjoyed by spectators this year. All the way from Colorado, the Coors Belgian Pitch gave several impressive performances during the weekend shows. Under the steady hand of Jim Hilgendorf, the Belgians exhibited an awesome display of power and grace. Monty Montana, 1978 Grand Marshall of the Mule Days Parade, returned to tantalize the crowd with his intricate rope tricks and trick riding, a wonderful contribution to Mule Days. Even the United States Armed Forces were represented at Mule Days--two were from the Mountain Warfare Training Center. Rumor has it that mules will be replacing some modes of transportation in the more mountainous regions; the overall feeling is that mules would be more practical and economical.

Each year, before the Saturday and Sunday evening performances, a very special lady, Witi Vick, makes her contribution to Mule Days. Affectionately known as "Sarg," she takes rookie volunteers and shapes them into the Bishop Mule Days Drill Team. No one would know from the actual performances that this team had the absolute minimum practice time; their performance "Under the Flags" is a sight to see!

Tori Thompson, famed artist of animal portraits and editor of the "Mules" newsletter, is correct in saying that Bishop Mule Days is the most important American Association Show--it appeals to everyone in some way. Western cuisine, western art shows, and western dances add to the overall picture of Bishop Mule Days. Fiddlers across America rosin up their bows for the Mule Days Fiddling Contest. As they wandered the grounds serenading the crowds, they were joined in harmony by singing donkeys and mules and dancing exhibitions and spectators. A fun time was had by all! Bishop Mule days is more than just a mule show; the area around Bishop is filled with mountain lakes and streams and offers backpacking, hiking, fishing, swimming, and even skiing. Couple this with unique and spectacular entertainment and you have the opportunity for the time of your life! Memorial Day weekend is the beginning of the year for unique animals and the unique people who love them!

For more information about Meredith Hodges and her comprehensive correspondence training Program, *Training Mules and Donkeys*, please visit **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**

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