

## **MULE CROSSING: *Colorado Donkey Mule Society***

By Meredith Hodges

This month, I would like to take the opportunity to introduce a new Colorado mule group, the Colorado Donkey & Mule Society. C.D.M.S. was founded in response to a need for more active performance and research promotion.

As the mule industry grows, so does the number of people and mules involved. There are two basic groups: those who ride for fun and pleasure,



and those who wish to continually perfect their equestrian techniques and abilities. When there are smaller numbers involved, these two groups can manage to work together effectively, but as the number increases, the scales are tipped and one group becomes stronger than the other. Thus, the needs of both are not easily met. Those who wish to ride for fun do not necessarily want to spend time and money on show, lessons and clinics; by the same token, those who are striving for perfection do not necessarily wish to interrupt their rigorous schedules to plan a lot of purely fun activities. In order to function effectively, goals must be clearly defined and compatible with one another. Riding for fun is not necessarily compatible with competitive riding. Competitive riding requires constant discipline and dedication to lessons, clinics, shows, and practice sessions for the purpose of conditioning bodies of mules and riders to perform what is learned. In turn, that which is put before the public is continually more impressive in the quest for perfection. As mules and riders meet new challenges, the appeal of the animal itself is broadened and becomes more positive.

The Colorado Donkey & Mule Society was formed in September of 1986 to meet the needs of competitive mule and donkey enthusiasts. The goals and objectives were defined as follows: 1) To promote Longears in a professional and favorable light to the public; 2) To promote the interest of youth in Longears shows; 3) To promote better and more professional Longears shows; 4) To promote the continuous improvement of Longears and their riders through training, lessons, and clinics; 5) To promote the use of mule and donkey exhibition and achievement with Longears; 6) To promote Longears research; 7) To promote awards for outstanding dedication and achievement with Longears; and 8) To promote fundraisers to support these objectives.

C.D.M.S meeting are held every two weeks at the Lucky Three Ranch in Loveland, Colorado. Members arrive at about noon and spend two to three hours in a video-taped group lesson and practice session after which is a supper meeting. During the meeting,

our video-taped session is evaluated and critiqued and each rider is given his riding and training assignment. Club business is then discussed and the meeting adjourns.

C.D.M.S is not for everyone. C.D.M.S. members are required to perpetuate their riding skills through lessons, clinics, practice, and show participation. In addition to their personal gain, they are required to take active responsibility in the promotion of mules and donkeys. Each member must make measureable contributions regularly; apathy is not tolerated. Our primary purpose is the positive promotion of Longears and we work as a team toward this goal; we must be able to depend upon each other to make this work. We are ready, willing, and able to attend and support whatever function necessary for the betterment of the Longears industry. We believe that the best way to learn is by “doing” and our youth is no exception. We not only encourage our youth to ride mules and donkeys, but also to attend committee meetings and be a part of the decision-making process. Our youth have full voting privilege. In this way, we hope our youth will be willing and able to carry out our objectives, and in time, train new youth to this purpose.

It is our general belief that Dressage is the basis for all performance; the systematic and methodical procedure of Dressage enables rider and animal to assess their progress in a clear and logical manner. The discipline of Dressage enables mules and riders to meet new challenges with a greater degree of patience, thus, bringing about changes with little resistance from their animals. Western and English riders alike can benefit from Dressage. To date, C.D.M.S. has held two Dressage clinics for beginning riders, with Dressage instructors from the U.S. and Sweden; we have our third clinic tentatively scheduled for April 11 with instructor/trainer Melinda Wetherford. We will try to have at least one clinic and two lessons per month for C.D.M.S. members. In addition to scheduled lessons and clinic, C.D.M.S. members are encouraged to use the LTR facility at no cost for practice sessions. Private lessons are also available.

In order to financially support our objectives, C.D.M.S. will be holding fundraisers throughout the year. Also, thanks to the artistic talent of one of our members and the help of her husband, we are able to begin a line of mule and donkey decals and screens to help subsidize our efforts. This project is already in the work and products will be made available to the public in the near future.

C.D.M.S. is not just for mules. We support and appreciate the donkey and his contribution to this industry. We recognize the importance of donkey power! We hope that as we grow as a society, we can establish an equally fun and interesting program for our donkeys. The World Mule Show at Bishop, California, held in May has recognized this need and a “Donkey Driving” class has been added to their schedule. In Colorado, we have had limited donkey halter classes and driving classes. We hope to add to this. At the Queen City Donkey & Mule Show (July 30-Aug. 2), we have added a Wild Burro Halter class; we hope this will help to promote the adoption and care of these beloved animals. The driving classes are split according to size and we hope to see more donkeys in the small sections. If enough donkeys will show, we will be able to break off an exclusive Donkey Driving class and eventually add Donkey Trail, Pack Trail, and Donkey Pleasure. Please help support our donkeys!

Communication is the name of the game, and C.D.M.S. is in constant communication with other individuals and groups throughout the world. We are not a club that works for ourselves; we work for the positive promotion of mules and donkeys. Sharing of ideas, techniques, time, and effort are essential to the life of our organization. This is why our members are carefully scrutinized--we are all active participants! We would like to be used for the benefit of mules and donkeys everywhere. So, if we can, please allow us to help. If you think you might like to join our group, write: C.D.M.S., P.O. Box 111181, Aurora, CO, 80011. Tell us what you would like us to do for you, then what you can do for Longears! Your support will be appreciated. We aren't trying to recruit members, just active participation!

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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