

## **MULE CROSSING: *Lucky Three Mae Bea C. T.***

By Meredith Hodges

Bea is the epitome of good manners and propriety, and is therefore allowed in the house! She has been known to help with the dusting, but she also enjoys a good game of cards or a hearty round of eight ball.

She has a little trouble with the pool cues, but her nose will sometimes suffice. She is a little leery, however. Chalk on one's nose can be a little humiliating! Especially to a perfectionist!

Though Bea isn't particularly fond of football, she does love the Broncos like any true Coloradoan. Nothing was more exciting than when the Broncos won the Superbowl!



The owner of the Embassy Suites hotel in Fort Collins made a bet with one of his employees that the Green Bay Packers would win the Superbowl that year. If he was right, the employee would have to sit outside the hotel for a whole day on a toilet seat in his boxers. If the Broncos won, the owner would have to paint his face orange and blue and ride a mule all the way around the hotel. Well, guess who won... and, guess who the mule was?! Yes, it was Bea!

Bea, dressed to the nines in Bronco gear and sporting a Bronco flag, carried the humbled Green Bay Packer fan and hotel owner proudly around the hotel while reporters scrambled asking questions and taking pictures. Later that day, she was on the five o'clock news in all her glory!

Bea is a natural born movie star! She has, to date, help me to produce four books, 10 video tapes, and 27 half-hour programs for television. The cast loves to work with her because she is so willing and cooperative.

A day of shooting can be quite exhausting, but Bea never has to be the one with more than one or two takes. You tell her what to do and she just does it. She puts her heart and soul into everything she does and her expressions are always appropriate.

Though they never finished the movie, DIX Country Pictures chose Bea as Waddy's understudy from hundreds of applicants.

She did a photo shoot in which she appears on the Colombian Relief poster with Juan Valdez! While we were shooting, it was hard to keep a straight face. Here we were in the middle of a grassy pasture, asking Bea to put on her best sad face... without eating the grass! Of course, in true form, she did as we asked, but her facial expressions kept us in stitches!

Two years ago, we did a shoot with the Discovery channel and Bea can be seen as the mule in their production of "The Ultimate Horse." What a gal!

Bishop Mule Days are always fun and exciting, but one of the things Bea likes most is to be in the Bishop Mule Days Drill Team. She has spent more than 10 years on the team and has worked her way into the coveted leader positions. Sarge is tough, but so is Bea!

One year, during drill team practice at the gallop with 30 mules, we were doing the frightening crossfire when her split-ear bridle came off and fell to her chest. I hollered at Sarge, but she wasn't the least bit sympathetic and said, "Just keep going!" Well, Bea finished the entire drill without her bridle and never missed a lick!

Another time, Diane Hunter was riding her in the drill team when she got into some really deep dirt and tripped and fell... right on top of Diane and the flag. I saw what happened and saw Diane pinned underneath Bea's body. Everybody stopped cold and I hollered at Bea to stay still which she did. "Sarge" and I ran over to assess the situation and once we got to Diane and figured out that it was OK for the mule to get up, we told Bea to get up and she did...very carefully. "Sarge" turned to Diane and said, "You know, you owe your life to that mule. Any other mule would have got right up and probably would have kicked your head in!"

Everyone loves a parade and Bea is no exception! She has competed in numerous costume classes and parades, but dressing up for the holidays is her favorite. She has placed first in many a parade and has no problem with any theme you may want to do.

She loves to wear her Santa hat at Christmas time and she makes a pretty scary wicked witch at Halloween!

Bea participated in the American Donkey & Mule Society entry in the 1988 Tournament of Roses Parade along with her two stable mates, Sundowner and Ciji, ridden by Gary Hodges in English attire.



Bea may be a perfectionist, but she is certainly not a prude. She is always willing to try anything you might ask. At home, Bea works hard checking fences, moving cattle, and much more.

Early in the fall one year, two cowboys asked me if I wanted to help them to move some cattle down from the high country... if I thought my mule could do it. I nodded confidently and we were off. We drove those cattle up and down the rocky terrain through thickly wooded trees, shrubs, and bushes. We were headed up one hill behind the cattle and the two cowboys when we came upon a three foot tree fallen across our path. The cattle dove into the underbrush on either side of the tree, the cowboys slid to an abrupt halt, and Bea came right up the middle, jumped the tree and stayed on the heels of those cattle the entire way! No one was more surprised than those two cowboys, except maybe their horses!

The Northern Colorado Horse Trials cross-country phase is held at Lory State Park in Fort Collins, Colorado. Each year, our club is responsible for repairing and setting up new jumps on the course. The only hitch is that there are no motorized vehicles allowed in the park. We had dozens of heavy telephone poles to move in order to do our job. Of course, the event horses weren't up to the job, but Bea certainly was! She pitched in and dragged those poles to their new locations and helped build and repair the jumps. Then, a couple of weeks later, she came back and competed to second place in the competition itself! Talk about versatility!

Bea loves to jump! It took Dressage to get her elevated in front enough to be proficient at jumping, but once we got her there, she cleared fences without batting an eyelash, always right down the center and never expending any more energy than necessary to clear the fence in beautiful form.

She competed in the Bishop Mule Days jumping classes for almost a decade coming in second in later years only to the infamous Empress Josephine. One year, she actually took first against Empress Josephine when she clipped a rail in the last go round. Josephine knew from then on, she could not make even the smallest error against Bea or the competition would be lost.

Her shortened frame allowed her to make sharp turns and still clear the fences in timed classes where she would ordinarily be at a disadvantage to taller mules.

Everything Bea did with the bridle, she would do without the bridle and jumping was no exception. She has done bridleless courses at home and in exhibition. In one exhibition, she did a Dressage and bridleless



jumping exhibition to music as a tribute to the troops during Desert Storm.

Bea is the eternal perfectionist and only clipped two rails in her entire jumping career. She was horrified when it nicked her freshly polished hooves!

In 1986, Bea and I began lessons with an instructor in Dressage. The same year, I went to the United States Dressage Federation Convention and introduced them to the idea of allowing mules such as Bea to compete in dressage schooling shows and competitions. There were some discrepancies in the rules, but they finally decided to allow mules in lower level and schooling shows at the discretion of the individual show committees. This was a major breakthrough for mules in equine society!

A few years later, she was instrumental in helping to get dressage classes added to Bishop Mule Days which has in more recent years become quite popular and a wonderful showcase to demonstrate how very well trained these mules can actually be.

She has shown dressage in all sorts of different disciplines: Dressage Shows, Dressage Schooling Shows, Two-Phase Combined Training Shows, Three-Phase Combined Training Shows, and in Two-Phase Combined Driving Shows. Her scores were always high and she was always in the ribbons right from the start. The most remarkable thing about the training in dressage was how it enhanced her driving skills so drastically that she won the first, second, and the only two Two-Phase Driving Shows she ever entered. People were always skeptical to start and the first to applaud her performances after they saw her! The most prevalent comment during the ribbons ceremonies was, "My God! It's a mule!"

For a decade, Bea was shown in numerous classes by my daughter from the age of six to 16. They showed in Western Pleasure, English Pleasure, Driving, Mule Jumping, and Two-Phase Combined Training shows. They were always in the ribbons and most often first or second in their class.

In later years, she served as a mount for my two stepchildren (six years and 10 years) on mountain trail rides, during lessons, and over jumps at the ranch. It was almost comical to see how carefully she would go over the 18" jumps with a child on her back so as not to unseat them!

When we were in Salt Lake City, Utah, showing, my nieces and nephews who live in Alpine came to see her and were thrilled to be able to take a ride around the fairgrounds with their cousin, my daughter, on Bea. Bea, as usual was infinitely careful and protective of the children.

Bea is everyone's favorite mule to ride. She has carried amateur riders into the ribbons in numerous shows as well as being a schooling mule for students during riding lessons for all ages and abilities.

Her kind and obedient manner makes her a safe mount. She is ever aware of her riders' abilities and helps them any way she can to stay on board and ride effectively. With her help, as an instructor, I am more easily able to assess the ability of the students and teach at appropriate levels.

She is truly a remarkable individual!

Driving has always been one of Bea's strengths. I remember when I broke her to drive; I didn't really know what I was doing. She took to the harness well, ground drove along side of the cart and didn't seem to be bothered by any of it, so within three days, I hitched her to the cart and proceeded to lead her out to the pasture where we would have more room. We were going around a 90-degree turn as I was leading her, hitched to the cart, when one of the wheels caught on the fence. She did a quick little scoot for a step or two which only caused the cart to flip over, putting the shafts, one over her head and the other between her front legs. She stopped cold and allowed me to right the cart and get her untangled. Then we went out to the pasture and had her first drive with me in the cart with no further incidents. No big deal!

She is a driving star! She loves it and has won nearly every driving class she has ever entered. She has competed in numerous driving related events. In breed shows, she competed in Pleasure Driving, Drive & Ride, Gambler's Choice and Obstacle Driving. She went on to win at the only 2 Two-Phase Driving shows she'd ever entered showing in Dressage Driving and the Cones Scurry (accumulated points) against...YES, horses again!

She has schooled numerous students in driving and is so good with her verbal commands that if I let a student drive and they go dangerously to the left and I say "Gee," she will ignore the student and do what I ask to keep things safe. What a mule!

Bea was always so steady, she was the perfect Sidesaddle mount. She competed in Sidesaddle at numerous shows and won many. She competed in Sidesaddle at the National Western Stock Show with several different riders, but always in the top three regardless of who was riding her.

Bea has given many exhibitions in Sidesaddle at various fairs and events, always impressive to the people who were fortunate enough to be there.

In the 1990s, Bea was part of the Bishop Mule Days ladies' Side Saddle Quadrille that showed in the parade and Grand Entry. She was ridden by a total stranger of limited ability and got her safely through the event. Bea had won herself yet another devoted fan!

In 1993, I rode her Sidesaddle in the Inaugural parade in Washington D.C. It was a grueling 24 hours, standing around waiting to go in very cold weather and in the midst of more "mule eaters" than you could count. Bea seemed to take a little exception to the 50-foot Elvis Presley float, but she handled the whole situation with her usual grace and dignity. Bea must have caught Clinton's eye as she went past the viewing area because he

turned away from the man he was speaking to and gave her a hearty thumbs up! We responded in kind and in her usual style, Bea smiled broadly!

Western was fairly easy for Bea because she was so short-strided, but when it came time to try her hand at English, this was a definite disadvantage. She has a rather short neck which made it difficult for collection, and her downhill build made it difficult for her to lengthen her stride. But again, Bea gave her very best and cooperated when we weighted her front legs to encourage some reach. In nine months, she had increased her length of stride by 18 inches!



She was on her way to a career in English events. We began enhancing her English performance with Dressage in 1986. She continued to improve, winning numerous English flat classes and always placing in the top five.



She had competed against horses in a few Western classes and done well, but she really began to beat them consistently in the English classes. Mule shows alone could never offer Bea enough of a challenge, so competing against horses offered her the opportunity to push herself farther. And she did, to the disgust of many a horse person!

Bea was always an impeccable trail mule both in the show and on the trail. She did not always show a lot of Trail classes

because she showed so many other classes, but her technique was careful and deliberate. She would always wait for cues from her rider and respond accordingly.

Trail for her was the enjoyment of many rides in the treacherous Rocky Mountains. I remember a specific time we went up a trail that was particularly narrow and steep. She was leading four people on horseback, when the trail disappeared into a rock slide. She was trapped on the narrowest part of the trail with four horses right behind her. She couldn't turn around, she couldn't back up. After assessing the situation, I asked her to do a 180-degree turn on the haunches and swing her front legs over the 100-foot ledge to get turned around. She did as I asked and got us through that compromising situation with the finesse of a ballet dancer! The people on the horses were nothing short of amazed!

To this day, when we go trail riding, or down the road, everyone wants to ride Bea!

Bea began her show career as a Driving and Western pleasure/trail mule. She's shown heavily in numerous Western classes over a period of about five years from 1984 to 1989 always placing in the top five.

She competed in numerous Western classes: Western Pleasure, Youth Western Pleasure, Trail, Western Riding, Reining, and a combination Trail/Reining class called Ranch Riding. She had several different riders over these years and was always willing to give her best for anyone who rode her.

Her accomplishments are so extensive, it would be impractical to list them all. In addition to showing Western, she did Western exhibitions at various local events and was the subject of many a newspaper or magazine article throughout her career.

Bea began her show career in Colorado in 1982 showing at halter as a two year old. She then showed successfully in Bishop at halter in 1985 and placed second in one of their largest halter classes for adult mules. The same year, she showed her expertise in driving by placing first in the mule driving class. She continued to be competitive with world class competition in driving at Bishop taking firsts and seconds for numerous consecutive years in Mule Driving and Drive & Ride.

She then went on to show in Western pleasure, English pleasure, Hunter hack, Hunter Under Saddle, Jumping, and Side Saddle at Bishop and in other shows across the country, winning firsts and seconds in Mule Jumping and Side Saddle. Her smaller stature seemed to keep her out of the ribbons in English flat classes, but her performance was always impeccable.

She continued to compete for more than a decade in Driving, Drive & Ride, Mule Jumping, always in the top 3 places. Though these were her strongest classes, Bea was always above average in any class she where she competed. Often, she would do 13 classes a day in various shows without complaint. What a trooper!

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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