

## **MULE CROSSING: *Meredith At British Mule Day***

By Meredith Hodges

It used to be that owners had to look long and hard to find things to do with their mules, but this is not the case anymore. There has been a tremendous surge of interest in longears, and events and shows have been cropping up all over the world. It is now difficult to choose which events to attend on any given weekend!



This has proven to be one of the Lucky Three's most active summers yet. In May, we attended Bishop Mule Days in Bishop, California, held over Memorial Day weekend, and returned home with four World Championships won by Lucky Three Sundowner and Jack Horner, and two reserve Championships won by Lucky Three Mae Bea C.T.! My apprentice, Ruth Elkins, rode her first classes at Bishop and gained a fourth place ribbon from the Ladies' Side Saddle class. Congratulations! On my return, I caught a plane to Massachusetts where my daughter, Dena, graduated from high school. A week later my friend Jack and I flew to Britain for the British Mule Society's annual general meeting and first annual Mule Day!

We were met graciously by BMS members who were just as enthusiastic about their mules as anyone. I was amazed to discover the truth in the fact that all British mules were, predominantly, produced by accident and not by deliberate breeding as we have in the States. These 'accidental' mules, however, were cute, endearing, and also very capable performers--despite their small stature of 14 3hh or less. Held in the cobblestone courtyard of the Bass Museum of Brewing in Burton-on-Trent, the classes at the Mule Day were limited to walk/trot activities. Nevertheless a full day of events took place.

Judged by the eloquent and experienced Captain Dick Ashby were showing classes for halter ('in hand'), ridden, and driven mules. Each division then took part in a "Handy Mule" obstacle course with combined points to give a championship. The course, which I thought was rather clever, consisted of five sections: a barrel to be rolled from point A to B, two large plastic hoops to climb through, a set of five cones with red and white flags to change over, an archway to pass under--suitably decked out in bunting and also a rope gate to negotiate. Sound simple?

Not always, as those of us who know mules could guess!

During breaks between classes, once in the morning and once in the afternoon, I gave a long lining exhibition with a sweet little black molly mule named Cally, loaned by Jon Green, a Welsh events officer, who is consistently successful in driving competitions. Cally was an

outstanding pupil, who quickly learned to side pass when asked. People were most congenial and complimentary of the exhibition, and I took the mike to deliver a talk and answered many mule-related questions.

Lots of t-shirts, books, and other longears items were sold in various booths around the courtyard during the course of the day, and I do believe that the spectators were pleasantly surprised by the mules shown. At the close of the show there was an awards ceremony, with presentations made to exhibitors and a lovely bouquet given to Lorraine Travis, founder & honorary secretary, for all her hard work and devotion. After this, Lt. Col. Charles MacFetridge, the new chairman, led the crowd in three hearty cheers! We had lovely weather for the show and it was a day of fun and laughter for all.

It seems that wherever you go, mules and donkeys bring people together in a most positive and enjoyable way. Here's to Longears... hip, hip, hooray!

Within 10 days of our return to the States, Ruth and I competed at the Abbe Ranch Horse Trials & Schooling Trials held in Larkspur. Ruth and Lucky Three Ciji completed their division to ninth place--jumping clear but with time penalties. Fourth and eighth place in this pre-school division were also taken by mules--from the Bitterroot Mule Company in Bennett, Colorado, Fran Howe's mules Pale Rider and Spider Dee, respectively. At the regular horse trials I rode Mae Bea C.T. to first place in the novice division against 17 horses. All I can say is... "What a mule!" Though I couldn't be more proud of Bea's performance, I was equally as proud to see three more mules entered in this event. The United States Combined Training Association has been more than accommodating, and the people we have been competing with are just wonderful!

Mid-July, Jack and I took Lucky Three Sundowner and Mae Bea C.T. to Bozeman, Montana, for an exhibition at the Galleo County Fair, where "Sunny" danced to the Emperor Waltz by Strauss and "Bea" did a jump course--bridleless. The people there were amazed at the obedience and ability of these mules!

It's funny how people believe the worst of these incredible animals until they are confronted with the proof that mules are extremely capable, and indeed exceptional! Again we met a lot of really wonderful people, sold t-shirts and books, and left knowing there were more folks about to come down with a serious infection of "Mule Fever!"

We have a short break now, but September 10-12, Mae Bea C.T. is entered in the Region 9 Combined Training Championship Show. First we will see if our entry is accepted.... then if so, we'll see again what mules can do! Three cheers for Longears!!

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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