

MULE CROSSING:

GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS!

Mules Accepted by USEF in Dressage!

By Meredith Hodges

You've come a long way, baby! The movement to have mules accepted by major equine organizations began with the United States Dressage Federation in 1986, 17 years ago! There was still the hurdle of being accepted by the most prestigious equine organization in the country at the time, the American Horse Show Association, who sanctioned all upper level shows and competitions. Since then, the mules' participation insignificant horse events was a long uphill climb, and membership in the AHSA was only a dream. Even though they were accepted at the schooling level back then, there were still many areas that were unwilling to comply with the USDF acceptance at this level and mules were discriminated against in many shows and competitions.

However, our undaunted mule riders persisted in their quest for perfection and showed the mule as a competent dressage and combined training candidate. Bishop Mule Days rewarded their efforts and added dressage classes at Bishop for these dedicated people and their mules. As more riders began using dressage as a basis for training, and AHSA judges were being used for the classes at Bishop, even more professional equestrians began to see the competence of our beloved mules and our riders' dedication to excellence.

The same kinds of things were happening in the disciplines of Competitive Trail Riding, Endurance, and Driving. The first discipline of the United States Equestrian Federation (formerly AHSA) to accept mules was in Endurance Riding, and was then followed by their acceptance in Driving through the valiant efforts of Dave Ketscher and his mules, Mariah Carey and Jeremiah.

Dressage rider, Carole Sweet, began her quest for acceptance in dressage several years ago and has single-handedly become the proponent of a major rule change in the Dressage Division of the USEF. This was no easy task as it was critical to take this through proper channels just for consideration! The culmination of all her hard work and persistence was rewarded in December of 2003, when she was notified that the mule issue would be on the agenda for a final decision during the USEF convention to be held in January of 2004.



It was at this time that Carole Sweet requested the assistance and support of anyone who could help at this convention. Linda Pitman from the American Mule Association, Leah Patton, administrator/editor of the American Donkey & Mule Society, and Meredith Hodges, longtime longears promoter, judge and animal inspector for the ADMS, descended on the convention, attended appropriate meetings, and lobbied every chance they had in between meetings to make sure that the people involved were informed of the mules' valuable assets to their organization. It was an exhausting three days, but on January 18, 2004, at the General Board Meeting, the rule was approved with consideration.

In the USEF Rulebook, it now reads: "The term 'horse' as used in these rules denotes either a horse or a pony. In all levels of equestrian recognized Driving and Endurance Competitions and in the case of any other Federation rule as it relates to the Driving or Endurance disciplines as the context permits it, the term 'horse' shall also include a mule. See Arts. 2011.4, 2104.2.1 Mules are also eligible to compete in dressage classes with the exception of (1) USET Championships, USET qualifying and selection trials, and other observation classes, (2) any other classes designated as qualifying or selection classes for international or international high performance competition, and (3) championships where such participation is prohibited in the championship procedures. See Art. 1919.1."

There were concerns from the Safety Committee, but they approved with the stipulation that they would be keeping an eye on the competitions to make sure that the mules would not pose serious safety concerns.

"The 'Vision' of the United States Equestrian Federation is to provide leadership for equestrian sport in the United States of America, promoting the pursuit of excellence from the grass roots to the Olympic Games, based on a foundation of fair, safe competition and the welfare of it's horses, and embracing the vision, to be the best national equestrian federation in the world." In keeping with their vision, they have seen the mules as a valuable asset to the Federation and it is both a privilege and an honor to become part of this prestigious organization.

As viable members of this organization, it is now our responsibility to go forward and participate in these events in a considerate and productive manner. Any problems that arise at competitions should be dealt with fairly and through the proper channels. Understand that we will be dealing with people at all levels of horsemanship, with varying levels of comprehension and ability. The principles of good sportsmanship are paramount as we set the example to beginners and young riders of the future. No unsportsmanlike conduct will be tolerated and could result in the revocation of this privilege.

So, fellow Mule Enthusiasts, go forward and bask in the sunshine of opportunity that has been given to us so graciously! Take the opportunities provided to improve your skills and marvel at your own progress! Take advantage of the new comrades you will meet

along the way that share your interests, so we can all take our equines into the future with pride and dignity!

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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