

MULE CROSSING: *USDF Convention*

By Meredith Hodges

Dressage is one of the oldest sports known to man. Its history dates back to times of war when the horse was trained and used to protect its rider from the hazards of war. During World War II, General Patton was responsible for aiding Colonel Alois Podhajsky in the protection of the famed Lippizanner stallions of Vienna. These stallions stand apart in the eyes of horseman everywhere. Their riders are, perhaps, the best in the world. Since the time when this art of horsemanship was nearly lost, it has gained momentum and riders have gained more respect for the art of dressage.

Dressage is a slow, humane, and methodical approach to training equines; it is designed to condition and teach both rider and equine as a team with a logical and appropriate sequence of gymnastic exercises. In dressage, the respect and obedience is attained through no forceful or artificial means and the result is a picture of harmony in motion. The aim of dressage is to cultivate a mount that is a quiet, supple, and obedient. This kind training is the most desirable foundation for all types of performance.



The 14th Annual Meeting of the U.S.D.F. (United States Dressage Federation) was held November 18-23, 1986, in Houston, Texas. Recognizing the need for the mules' acceptance in this realm of horsemanship, Sally McClean and I (Meredith Hodges) attended this convention in support of mules by asking that they be eligible for registration in the U.S.D.F. This registration would entitle mules to the same opportunities in dressage as the horses. There was some discussion as to the physical appearance and capabilities of the mule. With photos and videos, we were able to convince them of the outstanding appearance and abilities of today's well-bred mules. We were fortunate that precedence had already been set by Ann Hathaway and her lovely 17.2 HH dressage mule, Baby Huey, and by Maryster Farms Kit, a 15.3 HH Dressage, Combined Training, and foxhunting mule owned by Edith Conyers of Kentucky. Most of the U.S.D.F. members agreed that there was indeed a certain beauty about the mules that were well-kept and groomed, and none denied that the athletic abilities were present. Conduct and appearance of the exhibitors was also discussed and found to be of minimal concern. Those who had the opportunity to show with Kit remarked on the consideration of her owner and rider. Knowing how frightened some horses could be at the sight of a mule, Edith Conyers and Cathy Weischoff kept Kit a safe distance from those horses who were frightened until it was their turn to show. Edith exhibited not only her mule, but

good judgment and consideration as well. It was duly appreciated. When all was said and done, the main question was asked by the U.S.D.F.: "Is the mule, in fact, an equus?" The answer was, "Yes!" And at that, no change in the by-laws was necessary, only a more educated interpretation. At the general meeting on Saturday, November 22, before the awards banquet took place, it was announced that mules would, hence, be allowed in the U.S.D.F. as of January of 1987!

The A.M.A. (American Mule Association) and A.D.M.S. (American Donkey & Mule Society) will be invited to join the All-Breeds Council, an organization dedicated to the promotion of dressage through the breed associations (i.e. A.Q.H.A., A.H.C., etc.). Breeds are encouraged and entitled to participate in educational and award programs. Through these programs, riders and equines are given ample opportunity to progress to their individual heights of success. Tradition upholds the ultimate goal of those who wish to pursue the dream of becoming a master equestrian, and the All-Breeds Council is a vehicle of opportunity. Our thanks to Cathy Naugle, Chairman of the All Breeds Council for her kindness, support, and guidance.

Mules made many new friends in Houston at the U.S.D.F. meeting. A nicer group of people would be difficult to find; Dressage is truly a circle of friends. The father of the U.S.D.F, Lowell Boomer, guides his child with a firm hand and a soft heart. Thank you, Lowell Boomer, for making us feel so welcome! Our thanks to our Colorado Representative, Veronica Holt, who welcomed us to the R.M.D.S. (Rocky Mountain Dressage Society), and to Lela Street, Region 5 Representative who helped us to get to the right meetings on time. To list all of those we met who were kind, friendly, and supportive would take at least another whole article, but our special thanks to all of you for allowing us to learn with you! Thank you, Marta Worcester for saying, "Why don't you try dressage with your mules?"

These wonderful people have opened the doors for mules into the world of the ultimate in horsemanship. Now it is up to those who wish to take advantage of this outstanding opportunity to show them how well... MULES CAN DO...!

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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