

MULE CROSSING: *What Are Mules Good For*

By Meredith Hodges

Welcome to Mule Xing; this is a column designed to take care of some of those unanswered questions about mules. Mules have made contributions to the building of this country since its beginning: they brought the pioneers across rough and rugged country to their new homes in the West, carried arms and equipment for the army, and worked long days in the fields. With industrialization came a gross decline in the mule population; there no longer seemed to be any use for the mule.



This brings us to our first Mule Xing question: What are mules good for outside of packing and farming?

The modern contemporary mule of the late 1970s has emerged as a fine saddle, driving, and pack animal. No longer does he come from exclusively low grade mares; with the upgrading of mule breeding, the mule is a new, gentle, and versatile animal capable of performing well in all forms of equine athletics. He can do cow work, work and pleasure driving, packing, jumping, and is better suited for long trails, yet he still possesses all the traits that have made mules popular throughout the centuries: willingness to work, easy keeping, better resistance to disease, surefootedness, and his undying intelligence which is often confused with stubbornness.

Mules are capable of being used for as many different things, as are all breeds of horses put together. Since a mule gets most of his ability from the mare, one need only scout a mule out of a particular kind of horse to match the desired ability. For example, the cattle person might want to seek a mule bred out of a stockier breed of horse, such as the Quarterhorse, to get a mule bred for this type of work, while the Saddleseat Equitation rider might want to look to a mule bred from a gaited horse, such as Saddlebred or Tennessee Walker. A mule out of any breed of horse will be stronger and more durable than the horse out of which he came.

What of the person who is curious about mules, but shies away because of the stigma attached to them? I can only say that there was a time when people would laugh, but in this new age a new breed of mule is causing mockers to choke on their laughter. He is better bred than his ancestors and his ability turns laughter to awe. The modern contemporary mule has been banned from competing with horses in such events as

cutting and jumping because he has proven to be consistently and considerably better than the horses in the events. On keeping with the evolution of the mule, more and more all-mule shows are springing up all over the country sponsored by concerned mule enthusiasts. The shows cover a wide spectrum of mule activities, from judged events to just plain fun and games. The growth of such shows has more than tripled since the late 1970s and is ever growing. The modern contemporary mule is now taking the credit he so richly deserves; he sees what the horse can do and thinks, “Anything he can do, I can do better!”

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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