

MULE CROSSING: *Youth Spotlight Dena Hodges*

By Meredith Hodges

Dena Hodges was born in Santa Rosa, California, where she lived with her mom and dad, Gary and Meredith Hodges, until 1980, when they moved to Colorado. Dena learned to ride at the early age of 18 months, always perched proudly in the saddle in front of her mom. When she was four years old, grandmother Joyce Doty gave her a miniature Appaloosa on which she really learned to ride. Dena spent many pleasurable years with Copper. Once, she even entered him in a mule show costume class dressed as a small pack mule with a Bishop Mule Days cap to supply the "ears" and a sign on the pack that read, "When I grow up, I went to be a mule!" The judge just had to peek underneath the cap to confirm that this was indeed a horse and not a mule, and then placed them fourth with the over-whelming support of the audience.



Dena spent several years practicing her riding skills on horses until 1986, when she asked her mom if she could start showing the mules. At the Douglas County Fair Mule Show she rode Lucky Three Sundowner, a 116.1 HH saddle mule, in the Boot Race. No doubt, her fourth place was somewhat attributed to the time it took to climb back on board! In January of 1987, Dena entered the Youth Western Pleasure (13 years and under) at the National Western Stock Show in Denver on Lucky Three Mae Bea C.T. and took second place her first time showing seriously. In April, they again entered the Youth Pleasure at the Colorado Classic Mule Show, placing first! Then it was on to Bishop Mule Days and a fifth place ribbon in the Youth Pleasure out there. At the Denver Queen City Donkey & Mule Show at the beginning of August, Dena really showed her stuff in her division winning the Youth Showmanship and the Youth Western Pleasure, still with "Bea."

At home, Dena spends a lot of time helping her parents run the Lucky Three Mule Ranch in Loveland. She often pitches in to help clean stalls in addition to her regular chores and is totally responsible for showmanship and halter training of all Lucky Three mules, numbering 13 at this time. She attended the Foxfield Riding School in Westlake Village, California, last summer, which further sparked her desire to ride Dressage and begin jumping. She is currently trying to improve her English flatwork so she can be well prepared before she starts jumping the Lucky Three mules. The choices she has made concerning the mules have all been her own, but it seems she is following in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother before her, as she has expressed a desire to become a mule trainer. Thirteen years old. Dena Hodges is active member of the Colorado Donkey

and Mule Society and promises to be one of longears' shining stars of the future; her dedication and enthusiasm have certainly made her parents very proud and happy to have her help!

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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