

BREEDING FOR QUALITY MULES – PART 1

MEREDITH HODGES - LUCKY THREE RANCH

- What are your Breeding Goals?
- Focus on the Temperament & Dispositions of the Jack and Mare
- Essentials you will need when Delivery is near
- What to Expect
- Being Organized and Prepared
- Documenting your Breeding Program
- What to do in Emergencies and more!
- Training Jacks to Breed mares

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Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

The mules are in the corral. Welcome to Mule Talk! And I'm Cindy K. Roberts, your host. And our author, TV personality and world-renowned mule trainer, Meredith Hodges of the Lucky Three Ranch. We have never run out of content to every week, so of course now we're talking about breeding mules and how to prepare your jacks, so nobody knows it better than you.

Meredith Hodges:

Well, thank you for saying so. I've had plenty of experience. I learned about breeding for mules at my mother's mule ranch in California from 1973-1979. The name was Windy Valley Ranch located in Healdsburg and we produced 30 mules a year and sold them as yearlings and 2 year olds.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

It was a 1000-acre ranch with lots of stalls, pens and turnout areas. We had 60 head of brood mares, five jacks and seven jennets to produce mules and more jacks. On this ranch, we not only did *live* cover, but we also did Artificial Insemination, We covered not only the ranch mares, but outside mares as well. When we weren't breeding mares, we were collecting semen from the jacks. It was a full-service operation. We got quite an education in Jacks and Mares Selection, because we had a lot of clients that wanted a lot of different kinds of mules. So when my mother was putting the ranch together, she went out and bought a lot of different breeds of mares.

About the only ones that she really didn't have were Warm Bloods. And I finally bred Trakehner mules when I moved to Colorado six years later. In California we had Tennessee Walkers, Fox Trotters, Quarter Horses, Appaloosas, Paints, Morgans, Arabians, Thoroughbreds and Belgian Draft Horses. The Morgans, oddly enough, were really difficult to get pregnant. I learned a lot about these different breeds of horses and the effect their characteristics had on their mule offspring. Athletically, these horses had very different talents and skills! Their personalities and dispositions were also very different. Within the types of horses, personalities were as diverse as human personalities. All the horses except the Draft mares were quite reactive instead of calm and intelligent about things. Of course, that could have a lot to do with the way they were approached back then.

People complained about Thoroughbreds and Arabians being exceptionally hard to handle, but in my experience, they seemed to be generally smarter than the other breeds. Of course, there is always the ONE that is not quite as intelligent than most of the others! My mother used light-weight pipe fencing with loose connections to the posts. I remember one Thoroughbred mare that got her tail righteously stuck in the fence. She thrashed around so much that she broke off the end of her tail! Horses always seem to need to show you how stupid they can be. Horses will often go into a frenzy and end up hurting themselves worse. The mare's mule offspring were all very sensible and intelligent! A mule would never do what she did. He would figure out pretty quickly that he was stuck and just wait for someone to come and rescue him. Longears are so much smarter than horses!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay. Case in point.

That was back in the day when we had to Tube Worm everybody. There was no such thing as Paste Wormer. We had 100 head of equines to do every six months! When it was worming week, I had to help the vet with the hundred head of animals that were there. They weren't always cooperative and it took the better part of a week to get through them all. That was my first introduction to *TRAINING EQUINES*: horses, donkeys and mules! I did not want to battle them the way that the cowboys did, but in many cases, there was no choice but to restrain them and bully them into submission!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh.

Meredith Hodges:

We got it done as often as we needed, every six months. But it was quite a chore. It was a *real* learning experience. I got to know a lot about Donkey Behavior and particularly Jack Behavior. Most of the jacks were born there and they were pretty docile. *Little Jack Horner's* sire, *Windy Valley Adam* was a mature Mammoth jack when my mother bought him. He was really kind of vicious. I swore to God that *Little Jack Horner*, even with those genes, was never going to act like *Adam*.

But *Adam* was used *only* for breeding. He never got any training to do anything else. *Little Jack Horner* was a friendly Large Standard jack that wanted nothing more than to do everything that I was training the mules to do. So, I trained him, too! He was a MUCH happier jack than his sire. That's why I talk a lot about having different things for your jack to do besides just breeding mares. They need a *purpose* in life beyond breeding. They really enjoy riding and driving with humans. When the hormones are high and they're forced into Artificial Insemination (AI) and Live Breeding, you can tell that these jacks really do feel like they're just being used. They don't *like* feeling like they are being *used* just for breeding and especially when they are being *collected* for semen on an artificial female. Read about more details on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under *TRAINING/MULE CROSSING/BREEDING QUALITY MULES & DONKEY JACKS*. And for purchase in the STORE: *A GUIDE TO RAISING & SHOWING MULES* Pages #41, #119 & #137

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

I learned a lot about what the jacks would let you do and what they wouldn't. And I learned how to negotiate with them. First, if you want to breed your mare, understand that you need to take your mare to the jack and don't expect the jack to be brought to you! And certainly don't even think about purchasing a jack if you have no experience with them! Jacks need masterful handling and maintenance. I know a lot of people think, "*I got a really nice mare I don't want to pay a high dollar for a horse or mule. Since jack stud fees are really low, I think I'll just go and find a jack to breed to my mare and we'll just get another mule that way. It'll be a lot cheaper to do it that way.*"

There's so much more to breeding. Genetics is an important consideration. If you breed who you think looks like a good mare, she might *NOT* be all that. You have to consider the Conformation, Temperament, Personality and the Disposition of both the mare and the jack. If you get a mule that has crooked legs, a bad disposition, bad temperament and not much athletic ability, there are all kinds of things that can go wrong. You need to do your homework about how to evaluate jacks and mares. In *Part Two*, we're going to talk about the mares, but right now I want to talk about the jacks. The jacks need to have a basically balanced Conformation, very similar to a horse, but they will have steeper angles in the shoulders, hips and pasterns.

Donkeys do generally have steeper shoulders and steeper hips. Many of them have crooked legs and a lot of them have feet that are too small. Their heads can be too large, their neck can be too short. And the one thing that you really want to look for in a jack is really big ears. The ears are the *Crowning Glory* of a Donkey Jack. That is why tufts of hair are left at the tips of the ears when they have been body-clipped. We had some really amazing jacks at my mom's ranch, *Windy Valley*, *Gray Cloud*, was a big gray Mammoth jack. He was about probably more than 56 inches at the withers. His ears were *enormous* and so nicely shaped. (Laughs). *Black Jack* and *Dexter* had lovely heads and ears. *Dexter* was a spotted jack with shorter ears and he was bit more stout, but he still had nicely contoured ears. Read more on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under *TRAINING/MULE CROSSING/CHOSING THE RIGHT JACK*

All those, all those jacks had beautiful bodies. A lot of things that you will see on jacks are long bodies and short necks. Jacks bodies should look more balanced overall. I wrote a Mule Crossing article about *Assessing Balance and Shape in the Equine*. See more on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under *TRAINING/MULE CROSSING/ASSESSING YOUR EQUINE*

The Conformation Rules that were developed by Richard Shrake generally work for *ALL* equines: horses, mules, donkeys and ponies. You need an animal whose Center of Gravity is right down the middle of his barrel. There should be equal distance from the forearm to the center of gravity and from the Center of Gravity to the flanks. The jack should have enough length of neck so that he can arc his body upward and stretch his spine from head to tail. He should be able to reach well underneath his body with his hindquarters and have his hind feet step into the footprints of the front feet. This creates balanced movement. When you school your equines with Leading Training in the Hourglass Pattern tacked up with a Snaffle Bridle, lightweight Saddle or Surcingle and the *Elbow Pull*, you are building Good Postural Core Strength and won't have animals with rough gaits. The rough gaits come with animals that have Poor Posture, Irregular Conformation and are not trained correctly.

The hair on an equine can create an Optical Illusion and make you think things are straighter than they really are. An Optical Illusion that takes place is when you have a Paint jack or a Paint horse. It's sometimes very difficult to see if everything is straight with the legs if they are not body clipped. As a judge, I learned how to look through the hair to see the body and the true skeletal structure of the animal. As in horses, jacks also need to have a really nice refined head. Most of them will have a Roman nose and in a mule, that is a redeeming quality. They can be very handsome with an attractive Roman nose. It's not a defect.

We like to see the heads on Thoroughbreds, Quarter Horses and Arabians more like the Arabian heads but without a really dished face. Of course, the Quarter Horses came from the original foundation stock of three Arabian stallions: *The Godolphin Arabian*, *The Darley Arabian* and *The Byerley Turk*. You can trace their roots back to imported Arabian, Barb and Turk horses from the late 17th and early 18th centuries. It gives the mule offspring very pretty heads.

The Horse Genetics actually keep the head more refined in the mule. Even though they may have a Roman nose, it might be quite attractive because on a balanced body, the head wouldn't be oversized.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm-hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

Donkeys are a species that originated in Northeast Africa, descending from the *Nubian* and *Somali* subspecies of the African Wild Ass (*Equus Africanus*). They were domesticated approximately 5,000 to 7,000 years ago in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula for use as pack animals and for milk & meat. From there, they spread quickly into Asia and Europe. Key European Donkey Breeds and Types are:

The Andalusian, Spanish: *Asno Andaluz*, is a Spanish breed of domestic donkey. It is native to the province of *Córdoba in Andalusia*.

The Catalan (*Catalan: Ase Català or Ruc Català*, Spanish: *Asno Catalán*) is a breed of large domestic donkeys from the historic region of *Catalonia*, now in North-Eastern Spain and South-Western France. Approximately 80% of the breed population is in the modern autonomous community of *Catalonia*, and approximately 20% is in the historic *Roussillon* region of France.

Poitou Donkey (France): Known as "*Dreadlock Donkeys*" for their long, shaggy coats, they are large, sturdy animals, historically used for breeding large mules.

Mirandes Donkey (Portugal): A large breed from Northeast Portugal with a long, dark coat often used in rural, mountainous and tourist activities.

Mediterranean Miniature Donkey (*Sicily/Sardinia*): Small (under 36 inches), these are popular as pets and despite near-extinction in their native lands and are common in the United Kingdom and North America.

Balkan Donkey (*Serbia/Balkans*): Known for producing milk used to make highly exclusive, expensive cheese.

Pyrenean Donkey (France/Spain): A versatile, strong breed that evolved in the steep terrain of the Pyrenees, historically used for work in harness.

You want to be careful with the Mammoth Donkeys because they're so big they can be clumsy if they're not balanced in training. They need a good length of neck and a head that's not oversized or possesses too much bone. You see a lot of thick bone over the eyebrows of the Mammoth donkeys and thickness of bone in the joints in the legs. It makes them rather clumsy when they have a narrow chest and narrow hips.

Without our Balanced Postural Core Strength exercises with the *Elbow Pull* in the Hourglass Pattern, they exhibit an oddly balanced body. This is why it's particularly important to do Core Strength Training with your Mammoth donkeys and your larger mules that have been bred from Mammoths. They have thickness of bone, but they don't have the thickness of a fatty covering to balance the weight across the whole body. They are not necessarily flexible and athletic, and can easily come up with stifle issues.

The jack should not be too narrow through the chest, the rib cage or in the rear quarters. He can also be too wide in these areas if he's overfed. A lot of donkeys are overfed and become obese if they are left out on pasture. They really shouldn't be left unsupervised on pasture. It's better if you can keep them in a dirt lot and feed them accordingly so you can monitor their weight gain. I use Grass Hay to balance their weight, but keep their oats mix at a fixed amount fed once a day in the evenings. They are rewarded with more oats during lessons when they are in training. See more details about conformation on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under *TRAINING/MULE CROSSING/MULE CONFORMATION*

People will tell you not to feed grain to donkeys and I do agree in light of the numerous highly marketed pre-mixed grains, but they do require a balance of nutrients and minerals to be healthy. They can get their required nutrition from our recommended 1 ½ - 2 cups of crimped oats mixed with 1 ounce of Sho Glo Vitamins, 1 ounce of Mazola Corn Oil and Free Choice Trace Mineral Salt blocks.

Farmed Ground has not necessarily had crops rotated properly and often is lacking the necessary nutrients when the hay is harvested. We know this from having our fields soil-tested while harvesting hay on our property. We do what we can, but you can't put all those nutrients back into the ground the way you think you can. Mother Nature unobstructed is the only one that can do that!

We developed a Feeding Program that is in balance for what our Longears and horses need to stay healthy. I found that their Natural Instincts basically dictate what they need and when they need it. People often over-feed gallons of oats and grains to fatten their animals. They tell you *Equine Senior* will put weight on them, but it doesn't. It may have the nutrients in there to put on the weight, but it's sucking the fluid out of their system and the nutrients cannot be efficiently absorbed. You can't add enough water to Dehydrated Feeds to supplement the natural fluids that an animal excretes through their Digestive Tract to normally digest the dry food. They're built for that, but not for Artificially Dehydrated feeds. With the increased marketing of Dehydrated Feeds has come the increase of *Choke, Colic and Founder*. They do better when the nutrition is truly naturally balanced for their individual needs.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, I know they do.

Meredith Hodges:

I don't think researchers or veterinarians in a laboratory can accurately predict nutritional needs, nor how often the equines need their trace minerals. A Field Study of numerous animals over several years would yield better results. In my Field Studies, I discovered a lot of things that needed to be left up to the animals. I leave out trying to measure those sorts of things and make them available to the equines as Free Choice. Equines will even eat all kinds of weeds or dirt that might contain something in that they are lacking. When my mares have foaled, I leave out Free Choice Grass Hay, but never any rich or leafy hays like *Bermuda Grass*, some *Timothy Hays*, artificially processed hays like *Teff Grass Hay* or *Alfalfa*. Granted, they do eat their own manure once in a great while, but that manure goes through them and is digested in the Large Intestine. It's called *Coprophagy* and it does have some nutritional value.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

I don't turnout my donkeys on grass pasture at all. I have large dirt pens for turnout where they can run and play. They can still snatch grass from under the fence along the fence line. I will also take them for walks in the pastures and allow them to stop and *briefly* graze the grass. It's really important to keep your pens cleaned so they don't accidentally ingest any spores or viruses that blew in on the wind. We clean the stalls and runs every morning, but if it's a larger pen, we clean our larger pens once a week. See more details on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under *TRAINING/TRAINING TIPS #5 - #10, TRAINING/MULE CROSSING/INSECT CONTROL*.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

When selecting a jack for your mare, you need to take into account the Conformation of both the jack and the mare and compare which traits in one will complement the traits in the other. Donkeys can be a Conformational Disaster as can some horses. If you have a horse with a long back, for instance, you might be tempted to pick a jack with a short back. Too long a back on a donkey or any equine is not really all that desirable. They will tend to be rather weak through their backs and start getting *Lordosis*, or *Sway Back* as they age. You don't want a back that's too long, but you don't want a back that's too short either. If an equine has either of these faults in their topline don't use them for your breeding program. Breeding with faults can result in problems that come with exorbitant vet bills later.

The Topline, the Head, Neck and Back of the jack will greatly influence the overall shape of the offspring's body. So, both the jack and the mare should be proportionate in their Head, Neck and Back to produce a balanced Topline and overall correct Body Shape. Sometimes you can get away with breeding a *long-backed* mare to a *short-backed*, jack, or the reverse, to get a proportionate body in the offspring, but **Genetics** being what it is with a 1 in 4 shot of those kinds of recurring combinations, it's probably not a good idea to even take the chance. It's better to breed two well-shaped and balanced individuals together to produce an *Ideal Body Shape* in the offspring. Even doing that is not a *guarantee* as Genetic makeup can skip generations.

Since donkeys typically have steeper angles in the shoulders, hips and pasterns, you want a jack that has as much angle to the hip and shoulders as possible. They will never possess the ideal 45-degree angle that many horses have, but you want to get as close as possible because that will provide more *athletic ability* in the offspring. They need to be able to *move*. If the angles in the hips and shoulders are too steep, they could wind up *post-legged* in their legs and *inflexible* in their joints.

Jacks contribute the thickness of the bone. Many people, they think because Mammoth jacks are so large, they will produce a bigger mule, but that's not necessarily true. They will give you a heavier-boned, stout mule, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. When you cross them with Thoroughbred horses and Warm Bloods it gives them a thicker bone in their legs which makes them more desirable for Dressage and Combined Training. They can possess a lot of action.

You need that thickness of bone if they are going to be Jumping and to absorb the stress that comes with Endurance. Your mule will obtain spring to his steps from the more-refined Large Standard and Standard jacks. Breeding for *flexibility* and *suspension* minimizes the concussion on the hooves and bones. Still, if you're galloping three miles over 20 or 30 jumps, that's a lot of stress to put on the animal coming off the jumps and they will need thicker bones for that.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

When you assess a jack, think about what you're going to be doing with the mule. If you want your animal for packing or carrying heavy loads, he will need more thickness of bone, but you may want to breed to a shorter mare. You don't want to pack a mule that's 16 to 16.2 hands high. It would be difficult to lift loads to that level. A shorter pack mule would be easier to load. If you want a really nice Show Mule or a good Dressage Mule, pick a mare with a lot of *animation* to her gait and breed her to a Large Standard or a Standard jack. Use mares that are between 14.3 and 16.2 hands. You will get a gorgeous Show Animal because in the absence of the thickness of bone, their head, neck and bodies will look much more trim and refined. They won't have that heavy bone over the eyebrows or in the joints. You will get a lot prettier face, head and neck and a really streamlined body on your mule.

Like I have said before, “*No foot, No Donkey, No Foot, No Mule, No Foot, No Horse*” is quite literally true. You want to make sure that that animal has a balanced foot! Make sure he doesn't have any faults like: *buck-kneed, calf-kneed, tied up in the knee, round-bones, short and straight pasterns, coon-footed, too long a cannon-bone, sickle-hocked, splay-footed, knock-kneed, bow-legged, pigeon-toed, broken forward or clubbed feet or too straight through the stifle and the hock*. These are all serious faults and should be avoided when breeding.

Read more on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under *TRAINING/MULE CROSSING/CONFORMATION*

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

Being a little bit *cow-hocked* is probably okay because it does afford them a better Lateral Action. But when they're a little too *post-legged* or *straight-legged*, they can get stuck during Lateral Movements. A lot of donkeys will have those faults. The coat should be smooth and inclined to look sleek and shiny. Their hooves should look *slightly oily* without *stress lines*. They should not be contracted, but *well-sprung* and more *upright* than those of a horse. They need to have a *well-extended, healthy frog*. In a donkey, you have a lot more heel left by the Farrier than on a mule. The mule will still be more upright than a horse and he should also have more *heel* left, but not as much as the donkey.

A lot of horses' heels sit right down on the ground because the *frog* needs to come in contact with the ground so it can pump blood through the foot. Things that you see happening to the hoof should definitely be inspected carefully. You don't want any weakness in the hoof to develop and go untreated. *White Line Disease* has become a common problem. In my opinion, it's coming from feeding donkeys and mules feed that is a little bit too rich for them, or allowing the environment to become infested with fungus and disease like in pastures where it would be difficult to control.

It does *not* appear to be strictly a housing problem. For instance, years ago we allowed a person to board five horses in one of my pastures. Unknown to me, they had *Sarcoïdosis*. *Sarcoïdosis* is a spore that does show up on the equine's body and you can treat it, but the *spore* itself in the pasture never really goes away. *Roll's* stall, run and turnout pens were always keep impeccably clean everyday so any fungus would have difficulty originating from there, but he *was* turned out in that same infected pasture a few times as were several of my mules that developed *Sarcoïdosis*.

That was the only viable explanation that I could come up with when *Roll* got *White Line Disease*. Read about more details on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under *TRAINING/MULE CROSSING/BREEDING QUALITY MULES & DONKEYS, DONKEY JACKS and TRAINING/WHAT'S NEW WITH ROLL? And for purchase in the STORE: A GUIDE TO RAISING & SHOWING MULES Pages #41, #119 & #137, #157 & the DVD – ROCK & ROLL: DIARY OF A RESCUE*.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

White Line Disease or a poor diet causes the hooves to start to collapse, get misshapen and show stress. The hooves need to be hard. A donkey with an adequate heel on the hoof can still bring the *frog* to the ground depending on the way it grows underneath across the sole. A skilled Farrier will know how to trim your donkey accordingly. It is always advisable to discuss things with your Farrier so you understand everything he is doing and can increase your own knowledge each time he comes to visit!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

It's better to just be smart and do your research from the beginning. People who are only breeding a single mare should just take her to a Reputable Breeder who *stands* really nice jacks. The breeder should all also have the capacity to collect their jacks and Freeze Semen so they can ship it to you long distance. Your veterinarian should have the capacity and skill to Artificially Inseminate your mare. Only a facility that's set up to do this would be a Reputable Breeding Facility.

People that just get into *breeding for profit* are not doing the world a favor by breeding substandard animals. They wind up with all kinds of Veterinary Issues and those issues also affect the animal's *disposition* and make training difficult in the long run. Too many of them end up going to the slaughterhouse. It's just heartbreaking. People think of it in terms of money, but you don't ever make money like you think. It just doesn't happen that way.

When you're looking at the Equine Neck, make sure the animal does not have a U-Neck. They will be unable to stretch and elevate the spine into an upward arc to efficiently carry a rider. It will exacerbate *Lordosis* as they age. Their hind legs need to step well underneath their *barrel* to reach the Center of Gravity to move properly in a Good Postural Balance

Educate yourself and do plenty of research concerning what is a good combination in breeding. Regardless of how lovely and balanced the equine might look, he or she might possess *genes* that produce offspring with many Conformational Defects. Usually the defects will skip a generation. When you have a really pretty jack, he might not have had a really handsome sire or a really pretty dam. Since donkeys have been so inbred, it's hard to predict what you will get in breeding them.

Record-Taking has been sparse at best, but there have been a few registries that cropped up when Longears became viable show animals in more recent times. *The American Mule Association* and *NASMA, North American Saddle Mule Association* has good registries for show mules. Take the time to look into these registries. There is also *the Miniature Donkey Registry* and you can also check with various breeders on Social Media Platforms.

Take the time to explore and research the offspring of the jacks. What have they been producing? What have their sires been producing? If you take the time to find out who has the offspring and look at them, the faults will often show through. You want to do the same thing when researching the Ancestry of the Mares. Who's her sire? Who's her dam? What is their breeding record? Get as much information as you can. We're lucky today to have access to Mule Breeding Registries that are fairly good.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

People are finding new uses for Longears and they're doing extraordinary things with them like Trick Training, Therapeutic Riding using mules and donkeys and even visiting Assisted Living Facilities with the miniatures. Longears are truly quite impressive. People respond to them in *wonder* at all the different things they can do! People are doing all kinds of different things with their mules and donkeys because they *are* so *extraordinary*. ***Now mules and donkeys are more popular than ever.***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

Probably the most important thing is the *Disposition* of the jack. There's a difference among the jack's *Natural Instincts*, his *Personality*, his acquired *Personal Attitudes* and his *Disposition*. Learn to distinguish among these traits and alert yourself to what is a Behavior due to improper handling. I've found that most donkeys are cooperative and very affectionate when being treated patiently and fairly. However, some can also be more obstinate about things than others. So remember, in addition to the *Inherited Traits* of the jack, it is the Mare or the Jennet from which the offspring learns most of his Behaviors while he is growing up. So learn to make educated choices concerning your Breeding Stock. In order to maintain the integrity of the breed, use only jacks with the Best Conformation for breeding.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah, that makes sense. Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

I found a solution to produce mare-breeding jacks. I kept *Little Jack Horner* and later his offspring jacks away from the jennets. If the jennets are not seen, only smelled and heard once in a while, it's not a big deal. If jacks don't get used to really integrating with the jennets, then they don't learn that's what they're *supposed* to breed.

People also told me, "*Oh, don't put your jack and your stallions together because the jack will kill the stallion.*" *Little Jack Horner* had been breeding mares forever and my stallion, *Kip Dee Beau*, a registered Quarter Horse stallion, had been teasing the mares before L.J. was breeding them. They both had interactions with the mares. So after a while I put them in turnout next to each other with a fence between them. One day, I went out to see them and *Little Jack Horner* had jumped the fence and was in with *Kip*. They both had been schooled with my Grandmother's training advice about Good Equine Posture and Good Manners, so they were just quietly grazing side by side *PEACEFULLY. It did not appear that the jack was going to kill my stallion!*

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Two bachelors.

Meredith:

The jack likes to do more in his life than just breed mares. He can get sour if that is all he does. Don't think that you can just throw the jack out in a pen with mares and have him breed them. The thing about jacks is that they can take up to three to four hours and even more time to breed a mare, sometimes days or even weeks while you just stand there and wait. After he had bred mares for years, I decided to try *Little Jack Horner* at pasture breeding his four jennets. The jennets all cornered him, backed up to him, began peeing all at once and *Little Jack Horner* was *trapped and terrified!* The girls *will* intimidate him when they are in *heat* and even one young healthy mare can be quite intimidating to a jack. At that point I decided I was just going to have to teach *Little Jack Horner* how to breed the mares *In Hand* and how to do it quickly. It is *safer and more practical* to train the jacks *how* to breed mares and jennets *In Hand*.

I figured out that you need to really plan for it, negotiate with your jack and teach him that he can be confident in breeding the mares. He doesn't need to sit there and peruse it all day like donkeys like to peruse *everything*. You could find yourself allowing him to peruse things when the sun comes up and not finding a solution until the sun goes down.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(Laughs).

Meredith Hodges:

Breeding jacks to mares is unnatural for them, so *Little Jack Horner* made me rethink my breeding program if I was going to have jacks that would breed mares easily. I decided when my jacks were very young, right after they were weaned I should put them in a pen with one 25 year old mare, so that her chances of settling pregnant after being with him would be slim to none. I just left them together for two years so the jacks got used to being around mares.

We have an area in the Tack Barn where we constructed a Breeding Chute with a platform behind it. It's one that my mother's husband designed and is not like a simple stanchion. You can open the side of it, stick the mare in there and close the partition. It's open all the way across the top and there's a removable bar at the rear to measure how wide the mare is behind. There is also a bar that goes in front of the mare's chest to keep her back against the rear bar. There is a platform behind to accommodate the Large Standard and Standard jacks if the mare is too tall.

I learned to clean the mare with a hand towel and just dip it in water to clean her off. Of course she's peeing and I would catch some pee in the hand towel and hang it on the hitch rail about 10 feet away. Then I would get *Little Jack Horner*, bring him in, tie him to the hitch rail and let him sniff the towel. I put a drop Nose Band on him so that he would only grab the mare enough with his teeth to hang on. With this approach, he would usually drop down within 20 minutes.

Then I would wash him with warm water and no soap. Of course he sucked it back up again. Then he resumed sniffing the towel and dropped down again in another 20 minutes. Then we could go ahead and cover the mare.

It was a *great plan* and I was no longer waiting to get the mares covered for more than an hour. This works wonders and the mares didn't get scared because he was wearing the drop nose band and couldn't hurt them. That's really important.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

I just let him sit on the mare's rear end for a bit after he was done. I let him jump off when he was ready...*no pressure*. When he finally got down, he hit the platform again behind the mare and would stick up his nose in the Flehmen position all happy with himself, "*Did I do my job? Isn't this cool?*"

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Cool. (Laughs).

Meredith Hodges:

I say, "*Oh yes, LJ, this is, this is **super cool**. Now would you like some oats?*" And I give him the oats for a job well done.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(Laughs).

Meredith Hodges:

He would take his oats, I would wait for him to finish chewing and we would walk off the platform and back to the barn. He was a very Willing Breeder that way. And that's the way you want your jack to be. It's simply using the same approach to *everything* so he can learn Good Manners and be *successful* at all his jobs. He will be happy that he is not just being used for breeding. He has a well-rounded life! If you just use this approach, your jack will be a Willing Breeder, a good Performance animal Under Saddle and in Harness and will produce Outstanding Offspring. See more details in the *STORE* about teaching jacks to breed mares and much more in my manual ***EQUINE MANAGEMENT & DONKEY TRAINING Part 9 – Volume 3*** and in ***DVD #9: TRAINING THE DONKEY: INTRODUCTION & BASIC TRAINING*** and in my hardbound book ***A GUIDE TO RAISING & SHOWING MULES***.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow. (Laughs). That, you know, this is almost going to be rated R on this episode. (Laughs).

Meredith

It's all in your mind. With breeding thing, it's important to think about the way that these animals are bred. Know how it's done cleanly and in good taste. The animals don't like being used and they *know* when you're doing your best.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right. Oh, yeah.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay. Uh, Meredith, wow. You've been wonderful. Thank you, again.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Meredith's website is luckythreeranch.com and you can call her at 1-800-816-7566. And I can be reached through my website, everycowgirlsdream.com. Gotta go, my mule is looking for me.

Speaker 3:

Mule Talk! is an Every Cowgirl's Dream production.

RESOURCES:

WEBSITE at www.LuckyThreeRanch.com /TRAINING:

- 1) Another Augie & Spuds Adventure
- 2) Chasity's Challenges
- 3) Longears Music Videos
- 4) Mule Crossing Articles
- 5) Mule Facts
- 6) Podcast Appearances
- 7) Training Tips
- 8) Rock & Roll: Diary of a Rescue
- 9) What's New With Roll?
- 10) Video On Demand
- 11) Wrangler's Donkey Diary

BOOKS/VIDEOS IN THE STORE:

- 1) Training Mules & Donkeys: A Logical Approach to Training
- 2) A Guide to Raising & Training Mules
- 3) Donkey Training
- 4) Training Without Resistance

- 5) Equine Management & Donkey Training
- 6) Equus Revisited Manual
- 7) Equus Revisited Video
- 8) Rock & Roll Documentary
- 9) Building the Jasper Carousel
- 10) LTR Hay Production
- 11) The Road to Bishop
- 12) The Bishop Experience
- 13) The Bishop All Stars
- 14) Walk On: Exploring Therapeutic Riding
- 15) Build of a Nation
- 16) Give Your Equine the Athletic Edge
- 17) For Children: www.JasperTheMule.com for books & videos