

DONKEY TRAINING, PART 2

MEREDITH HODGES - LUCKY THREE RANCH

- Repeat the previous lesson - BUT DO NOT DRILL YOUR DONKEY
- Longears sense of humor
- Identify the differences in training donkeys
- Leading training exercises in the Hourglass Pattern and through obstacles
- Donkeys are hyper-sensitive to a loss of balance
- Donkeys will always balk when they feel vulnerable
- Turns on the Haunches and Turns on the Forehand
- Responding to Verbal Commands and Body Language only
- Progressing from the Hourglass Pattern to the Perimeter of the Arena
- Foundation for learning to stand quietly in Harness and Under Saddle
- Rein Back Under Saddle and in the Drive Lines
- Assess what works better and take the path of least resistance

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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.

Okay, here we are. We're gonna do part two of donkey training. And this donkey school stuff, I, I love it. This is great. So-

Meredith Hodges:

To know donkeys helps you to understand your mule a little bit better because donkeys are so drastically and seemingly slow about responding. And then they're so stoic about it, when you go to get on, you think, oh yeah, we're all ready to go. **They'll lead you down a path, (laughs) and it's not the right one.**

~~Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):~~

~~(laughs) There you go.~~

Meredith Hodges:

Yeah, they're leading you down a path where they can get rid of you anytime they want to.

~~Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):~~

~~(laughs) That's what I love about this whole thing, (laughs) about mules and donkeys. They keep me laughing.~~

Meredith Hodges:

They do. Probably the most endearing thing about mules and donkeys is their sense of humor. I had a lady call me this week, and she was down in the dumps because she thought, "My mule's not doing what I want her to do and I just must be doing something wrong. We talked for a while, and she says, "Do your mules do..." and she described something. I just started laughing. I said, "Oh, she is playing games with you." She says, "Do they do that?" (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

I said, "Of course they do."

"Oh, I'm so glad to talk to you. And now I don't feel so stupid. The people on the trail ride were saying if I didn't do this and I didn't do that, then I was not doing things right and my mule was taking advantage of me."

I said, "Nah, she was just playing with you." (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

If you keep a good sense of humor and you're willing to be patient and take the time to really break these things down into tiny steps, then it's all going to go better. We took all of Part One just to describe the groundwork, which will take three to six months if you conscientiously go through it all. I say three to six months because a lot of mules and horses can get through it in three months, but because the donkey has to do so much thinking, he's more likely to take six months. It's not because he doesn't learn how to do something, he just needs the time to think about whether he really wants to do it or not.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

That's the big thing. It takes that long to convince them that it's more fun to be with you than out in the pasture with their head down in the pasture eating grass. Longears like it when you make training FUN! (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

Eventually, donkeys will come to that conclusion if you give them the opportunity. Otherwise, you might feel yourself being set up with a disobedient donkey and you'll inadvertently blame it on them. But it won't be their fault.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

They have an opportunity to do enjoyable things with you. However, if you don't approach them the right way, and if you aren't patient and respectful about the way you're training, then you might find yourself being set up to be unloaded, if you're riding, or with a run away cart, any of those dangerous things, because they will simply get sick of being forced because it's not fun anymore. So I, I'd rather keep things fun, with good humor, and not really overwhelm them or me.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

This is why a lot of people feel like they can't train, but they're just thinking about training in the wrong way. Anybody can train their equine. They just need to learn to find somebody like me who has researched equine training enough to identify all the little steps involved so that you don't get overwhelmed and confuse your equine. You can move forward together, get in sync with each other and really have a good time doing it.

At the same time, you will both be cultivating Core Strength and Balance in good Posture while you condition your bodies to be top performers. This is the end result of all of this kind of training. Training steps for donkeys are covered in my books: *Training Mules & Donkeys: A Logical Approach to Longears, Donkey Training, Equine Management & Donkey Training* and in the corresponding *Training Mules & Donkeys Videos #9 and #10*.

What all these exercises are for is to identify the differences in training donkeys and to establish a solid foundation from which you will be able to do anything that you choose to do with your mule or donkey, your horse or your pony. With the right kind of solid foundation, they learn to move in Good Posture, to use their bodies the way they were naturally designed to be used. The skeleton will be amply supported by symmetrically aligned ligaments, tendons, muscles, and even connective tissue. The bones in the joints will move correctly so the cartilage will wear evenly and decrease the incidence of arthritis later. Irregular movement can also cause side bones, ring bone and other anomalies that arise from bad posture. Attention to Body Development and Conditioning will give your equine maximum versatility, ideal performance and optimize your choice of any of the equine disciplines that you might want to pursue.

But you need to be patient and willing to spend ample time in the beginning doing the groundwork meticulously in small steps so good posture is established correctly. While moving correctly, they will learn to keep equal weight over all four feet and keep their body erect while bending through their torso when executing arcs and turns. They will no longer lean like a motorcycle does. People generally start them in the Round Pen, but that's exactly the wrong place to start them. Before lunging on a circle, they need to be able to keep their bodies erect and strengthened in good posture at the core. That can only be achieved with the right kind of Leading Exercises done with the Elbow Pull in what I call the Hourglass Pattern, set up in a confined space.

For visual video of **Donkey Training in the Hourglass Pattern**, check on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under **TRAINING/TRAINING TIPS #01-TRAINING DONKEYS and #122-GROUNDWORK FOR DONKEYS, and under TRAINING/CHASITY'S CHALLENGES**.

I think that's why a lot of the trainers say training in the Round Pen is so dangerous. They might not be aware of why dangerous things can happen if you do not do this kind of leading training. If you don't do the kind of groundwork that I'm talking about where you actually teach the equines how to move and build their bodies correctly, it can become dangerous for both of you. Moving out of balance and good posture because can create soreness and pressure points in their body. It can put too much weight on one side or the other. This makes them move erratically which only abuses their bodies and causes resistance and bad behavior.

If you spend adequate time doing this kind of groundwork, your equine will gain longevity so the time with meticulous training is well spent. They can gain as much as 10 years of use life and will live much longer. Longears are much tougher than horses and do tend to live longer with proper diet and management and you can maximize their life expectancy with the right kind of training whether it be Longears or horses. It really is important to go ahead, be patient and spend your time with adequate management and training. The results are truly amazing! Not only do you end up with an animal that's conditioned properly, strong in his body and beautiful in his smooth, fluid movement with regular cadence and rhythm, the process will be fun for both of you.

Resistant behaviors are always caused by a loss of balance. Taking the process in very small steps allows the equine to adjust his balance properly at any given stage of training. It decreases the incidence of a loss of balance and the resulting resistance. Addressing this during the leading stages of training prepares the equine to carry the rider efficiently and happily since he will not be fighting with his own balance while also fighting the unsteadiness of an unskilled rider. This is particularly true with mules and donkeys. They are hyper-sensitive to a loss of balance. It becomes dangerous and is the reason why when you're riding them, they bolt and run off with you. It's even more dangerous when they're in harness and pulling a vehicle.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

Take your time doing adequate groundwork for 3-6 months of leading training with the Elbow Pull in the Hourglass Pattern, 3-6 months in the Hourglass Pattern with circles and ground rails, then with obstacles before they are graduated to the Round Pen. Then if you spend 3-6 months in the Round Pen, first with lunging in Good Posture in the Elbow Pull and later with Ground Driving, you can build a solid foundation that will last a lifetime. This approach will create a foundation of Good Posture that will allow them to practice daily in turnout on their own with only occasional structured tune-ups. They'll be able to do everything calmly, effectively and they won't get anxious about it. Any kind of anxiety or resistance will be kept to a minimum.

I've had my animals get extremely tense from me doing things that other trainers thought would desensitize them. Since I dropped those suggestions and began breaking things down into very small doable steps, I've had no trouble at all. I've learned about going slowly and doing things in a logical, systematic and sequential way. Right now, I have 10 mules that are all over 30 and 3 mules between the ages 25 and 30 that are still useful riding animals. They are very healthy, responsive, totally broke, calm, and relaxed in their bodies would always rather be with me. Even my donkeys act the same way with an eagerness and enthusiasm that is uncommon in donkeys. All I need to do is call them. They all run to the gate and say, "Take me! Take me!" and we have a very good time together. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

It's definitely worth it to put in the time to get these things done right. By walking your donkey through all these different phases of training before going on to the trot, you have given yourself and your donkey an opportunity to learn to negotiate and perfect your movements before you ask for speed. This allows for more perfection of coordination to take place, so things are less likely to fall apart when you do add a little speed.

This is the most obvious difference between mules or horses, and donkeys. Horses and mules are difficult to slow down in training because of their flight instinct and they are better equipped to handle walk, trot, canter all at once when moving from a confined area into more space, and ultimately through obstacles. Donkeys, however, with their freeze instinct, get worried and they won't move if they're overwhelmed and confused. For this reason, their training is approached a little bit differently.

After doing your leading training exercises in the Hourglass Pattern and through obstacles, your donkey should be walking really well in the Round Pen, both when lunging and in the Drive Lines on straight lines and through turns. He should be easily walking the Hourglass Pattern and the perimeter of the arena and crossing diagonals for changes of direction. He should be walking through straightforward obstacles and getting in and out of your trailer easily. He should be moving away from pressure through the Turns on the Forehand and Turns on the Haunches while on the lead line. The reason that donkeys are so hard to load is because the donkey is reluctant to get into the trailer because it puts him in an awkward position. He's usually out of balance and he feels vulnerable.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

Donkeys will always balk when they feel vulnerable. To get a balky donkey to load, use a Lunge Line tied to his halter; do not use the snap. Run the lunge line to the front of the trailer, through the side access feed door and back to you behind the trailer. Keep tension on the Lunge Line and wait for your donkey to offer to step up into the trailer, knowing there are oats in the bin at the front when he gets there.

Always have the crimped oats waiting for him there. As he steps forward and gives you slack in the line, just take up the slack and keep the line taut until he is completely in the trailer. Remember that this could take quite a while...he will need plenty of time to THINK about it! You can tap his heels with a Lunge Whip to encourage him forward, but do not reward him until he is securely in the trailer. He will have access to what you put in the feed bin and is welcome to have more when he is in the trailer. He has to get into the trailer to get his reward.

Then you can tie off his lead rope at the front of the trailer, untie the lunge line, go behind and secure the butt strap and close the rear door. When you do this repetitively and routinely exactly the same way, pretty soon, he will just walk right in.

Trying to force a donkey will only be met with incredible resistance. You will find yourself engaged in a fight you can't possibly win! If you try to get a friend or two to help by lifting him from behind, his front feet will be planted so securely that you will only initiate a somersault and a struggle from the donkey.

With each lesson, always review his Turn on the Haunches and his Turn on the Forehand while he's on the lead rope, while he's in the Drive Lines, while he's in the Round Pen and while he's in the Open Arena. When he performs without any resistance, then you know he is ready to be mounted. Then you can think about perfecting rein, seat and leg cues a little bit more while you're Under Saddle in the in the Hourglass Pattern that should be set up in an enclosed Open Arena. Always use the Elbow Pull to maintain good equine posture.

You can add more variations to the things that he's already learned. Instead of just going right through the pattern, you can go through the pattern on one side, to create one half of the hourglass and then go straight down the Long Side and do a Reverse, or Turn on the Haunches, and double back the other way. Adding variations to the pattern will keep him more attentive and give him more versatility. He will become more responsive to your cues and body language.

It is easy for an animal to get pattern-trained. If he's just doing the Hourglass Pattern the same way all the time, he's going to get bored with it and he's going to start anticipating. This is why we want to introduce and practice the regular tasks in the Hourglass Pattern and then add variety to the tasks to maintain his interest.

When you think he can respond to Verbal Commands and Body Language only, test him by tossing the lead rope over his neck to see if he can truly execute the moves correctly without your interference from the lead rope.

This will keep him attentive and engaged at each stage of training first on the Lead Rope, then on the Drive Lines, then Under Saddle, using the same consistent approach every time. We use the basic Hourglass Pattern, but we vary it with internal tasks that keep the equine alerted to changes in the pattern.

You need to Pattern-Train to a certain extent, so he knows what to expect and will comply easily. You won't be interfering with the symmetrical development of the core elements around the bones. He needs to know the pattern, feel comfortable with the pattern, and then you can easily guide him through the pattern. Each time, he will get better and better and better. You want to keep things light and airy, but you want to keep reinforcing all the things that he's learned thus far. This is why you will actually use the Hourglass Pattern in a lot of different ways so that you can enhance the things that he's learning.

After leading circles at the corner cones in the Hourglass Pattern, he will learn how to move laterally in a "Leg Yield" to the Gate Cones in the middle with the Lead Rope. When he graduates to Ground Driving, he will have already done the circles on the Lead Rope and should move easily on the Drive Lines when circling and then moving laterally to the Gate Cones. Later he can be challenged to cover more distance while moving laterally on the Diagonal from corner cone, through the Gate Cones and to the far corner cone, first on the Lead Rope and then in the Drive Lines. It is often helpful to have an assistant with the lateral moves on the Drive Lines.

When he is finally Under Saddle, you will want to perfect the Leg Yield from his back. In the beginning, the cues will be a little awkward. Minimize your rein cues and help him to move primarily from your seat and legs. Use a push/release movement to get him to move away from the pressure of your seat and legs. You will use your circles, but also use the Centrifugal Force to move him laterally coming off those circles. As you move laterally, try to keep his body as straight as you can and his nose slightly pointed away from or in the direction of travel while he Leg Yields sideways on an angle.

Don't do too many long laterals moves at once. Begin with short distances and add length as he becomes more proficient. Each time you do a circle and try to stay sideways, he might give you three steps, or four steps. As long as he is offering more steps each time, he should be halted and rewarded for his efforts. I have the Hourglass Pattern diagrams shown in my two training manuals: *Training Without Resistance and Equine Management & Donkey Training*. Always keep lessons short and reward often. When you are Under saddle, ask him to "Whoa," lean over and give him some oats then say, "Good Boy, that's what I want."

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

Reins can sometimes get in the way when you use too much or too little unbalanced pressure on them. For this reason, you want to go ahead and introduce him to rein cues by doing these exercises during Ground Driving before going Under Saddle. He will learn to pay more attention to your seat and leg cues.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, okay.

Meredith Hodges:

Having an assistant handy when Under Saddle and during Ground Driving is helpful. Donkeys can get all twisted up when trying to do these kinds of moves. You will be bouncing back and forth Under Saddle and back to the Drive Lines, with the assistant, without the assistant. Remember to use the assistant's Body Language to help the animal to be directed correctly. This is so you don't have to give as much direction through the reins and you can keep your cues really light. Think about moving more from your seat to speed him up and to slow him down. Lighten your seat to speed him up and deepen your seat to slow him down. Alternate your seat pressure to walk forward, side to side to indicate direction of left or right and alternate pressure backwards from your seat to get him to Rein Back. This gives you time to allow him more responsibility for what you're doing together. When you're teaching him to turn right and left, now it's more important than ever to start using the Verbal Commands to "Gee" and "Haw" for right and left so that you can stay off the reins and ride with your seat and legs.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

You will be riding down the rail, coming out of that Hourglass Pattern, and maybe you wanna double back and do a Reverse on the rail. He was going down the rail tracking left (Haw), but now I slow him down and do a Turn on the Haunches to go back the other way (180-degree turn). What I'm doing is turning him with pushing pressure from my leg toward the new direction, but not much, with a little bit of pressure from my little finger to turn his head in the direction of travel and while supporting his body with my "inside leg" in an upright position on the inside arc of the turn. Since we're changing directions. I'm using my Verbal Command to "Gee" through the turn. "Gee," means go right. say. We can "Gee, Gee, Gee," until we get back to the rail again, and we will have done a 360-degree turn with the pivot foot on the haunches just by telling him, "Gee." But keeping all of the aids very, very light.

And as he learns what "Gee" and "Haw" means, you can do it along the rail. You can get out into the open where you halt. You'll start at the walk and go around the two cones on the short end and come down between the corner cone and the gate cones (the cones in the middle). Instead of halting, ask for, "Gee around. "Gee around" and make a circle around the corner cone. In this case, if you're tracking left, then you say, "Haw around, Haw around, Haw around," come back to the place you were (360-degree turn) and then continue on to the gate cones.

You can do that on the Drive Lines and Under Saddle. When you get to the points where he halted before and do these turns, you're creating the beginning of a Reining Spin. You're teaching him how to keep the right balance over that turn throughout a 360-turn. You have not done this before so you teach it in pieces. If he only does a couple steps, then you stop him, give him a reward, then ask him to keep going forward and around a little bit more. If he gives you two more steps, stop him, give him a reward each time until he's completed the circle. This was the whole task, but we had to do it in pieces just like we do everything in pieces.

In Dressage, they have maneuver that is called a Canter Pirouette when they do not plant the pivot foot. What they do is canter around in a 360-degree circle, That is a correct Dressage Pirouette. In a correct Reining Spin, the equine would plant the pivot foot. You want your donkey to know all the steps involved and to know the difference when you're asking for a Canter Pirouette and when you're asking for a Reining Spin. These advanced moves will be initiated through your seat and legs Under Saddle. You won't be able to do it through your seat alone right away.

You will need to take the small steps in sequential order until you integrate all the components together so you know how it feels and can clearly transmit that feeling to you donkey through your rein, seat and leg cues. Doing the same thing with the lines and with the reins when you ride in conjunction with your seat and legs cues will make rein cues apparent. He will learn to focus on you walking in sync with him during Ground Driving and pay more attention to your seat and legs Under Saddle. So just have patience and he'll eventually get it.

When he's doing well at executing his Turns on the Haunches and Turns on the Forehand on the Drive Lines, you can progress to doing them Under Saddle. Just remember to keep things slow and accurate. Speed will only bring confusion and resistance in the beginning. It's best to opt for perfection at a slower and more controlled pace. When you're both more practiced and coordinated, you can add speed later.

Your donkey should be willing to trot in the Round Pen in just his tack. Up to this point, he has learned his turns at the walk, both on the Drive Lines and Under Saddle, in the Round Pen in the Open Arena and through Obstacles. Next, he'll learn to trot on the Drive Lines and Under Saddle beginning with the usual review. After he is lunged at the trot, put him on the Drive Lines and Ground Drive him at the trot. If he gets balky, your assistant can trot ahead of him with the crimped oats in a fanny pack around her waist with no lead rope initially. If he goes too fast, then just slow him down easily by giving the Verbal Command to "Whoa" and create a squeeze/release drag on the lines. Alternate pressure with a squeeze/release action on the lines.

Your assistant can help, if necessary by getting a little ahead of him, the same way she did in Part One. You're using all of these little tips that I've given you to control him, hopefully mostly without the reins and without the legs, only with minimal pressure from there. And when you're riding him, you're going to be directing him from your seat.

You'll use your lines during Ground Driving, but you want to hold the reins or lines with your little fingers and just get a lighter and lighter contact. Use an assistant if he starts to run through the Drive Lines. You need to realize that he is only going to get confused if you abruptly start pulling on the reins.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

He's just gonna look at you and say, "Well, make up your mind. What is it? Are you going to pull or are you gonna let me go?"

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah. (laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

Your assistant can always back up whatever you're trying to do by using her Body Language, by carrying the whip for direction and by positioning herself in the correct positions. He's learning Body Language and Verbal Commands through your hands on the Drive Lines and through your seat when you're riding.

He needs to learn he can't just bully his way forward out of a difficult situation. If there's a problem, most donkeys will attempt to evacuate the scene in slow-mo. It is better to teach him right from the beginning to stop and wait. He should be perfectly willing to do that because of the donkey's stop-and-freeze instinct. So if you don't aggravate him, he won't run off. He'll just stop.

When he trots well in the Round Pen, you can begin to do your lessons in the Open Arena. Always review first and then add the new movement at the end of his lesson. Always add the new challenge at the end of the lesson. After the review, begin by having him trot through the Hourglass Pattern on the Drive Lines with your assistant, then without your assistant. He will be shaky at first. If you are Under Saddle, you might feel like you're riding a drunken sailor, or Driving a drunken sailor if Ground Driving.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

Just make your rein and leg cues are as subtle as possible to prevent an overreaction and keep him encouraged forward with a loose rein as he's going forward. Learn to vibrate, or use a squeeze/release action, on the reins when turning rather than pulling. This helps to minimize overreactions. Soon, your donkey will be doing the pattern smoothly on your Verbal Commands alone.

When he has learned the Hourglass Pattern well, he can progress to the Perimeter of the Arena at the trot. Do this only after he is going well in the Hourglass Pattern or you may find the pattern impossible to do after he learns to trot on the perimeter. After he's learned to trot smoothly and obediently without interruption, you can vary both of these exercises by walking part of the pattern, then trotting some of it, then walking again with random halts and rewards. Do the same thing on the perimeter of the arena. It's best to walk the short sides and trot the long sides. Later on, he'll be learning to Lengthen the Trot on the long sides after executing the Working Trot on the short sides.

Using the trot on the Obstacle Course requires that you be very definite about where and when you do it, so plan ahead. You want to space your obstacles far enough apart so that you can trot in between them. Don't put them all so close together that you have to go from one to the next without any stops in between. You do want stops in between and there's plenty of room to do that. You want to put it together so that he can trot through the spaces between the obstacles, vary your gaits in between or you might want to trot straight over the Ground Rails, or a tarp. He DOES need to be willing to stop immediately on the other side of any obstacle upon command.

Understand that your Ground Rails are going to have to be increased in distance between them for each gait: Working Walk, Lengthened Walk, Working Trot, Lengthened Trot and even Canter and Lengthened Canter. Strategically place your obstacles in your arena so that you don't have to keep changing things around too often. For instance, adjust obstacles to be done at the "Walk" on one day and then for the "Trot" on another day..

ON my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under **TRAINING?MULE CROSSING ARTICLES** there is an article titled **HOURLASS PATTERN - ELBOW PULL 2023-2024** where there is a photo that shows you how to set up the Hourglass Pattern with obstacles included so you have plenty of room to do all tasks without moving things around.

You are not going to be rewarding as often by the time when you're Under Saddle. I generally will just ask him to stand still for mounting, stand still while I mount, get on and give him his oats reward from his back on both sides. When he has quit chewing, I'll ask him to go ahead and move off into the Hourglass Pattern. I take circles at the cones to slow him down if he gets a little fast. It's better than just tugging on the reins or lines.

While you're riding, use your seat to speed him up by lightening your seat or slow him down by deepening your seat in the saddle. To do a Rein Back, halt and just start pedaling backwards with your seat bones and try to minimize rein and leg cues. This will help him to move in sync with you with minimal interference. When you deepen your seat and sit quietly, he'll just settle into the halt and wait for you to give any further cues or commands. This way, he won't get anxious and start prancing around.

This is the foundation for Learning to Stand quietly, both in Harness and Under Saddle. He must Stand Quietly when halted Under Saddle until you present his reward and then ask him to move on. Then he won't get all anxious waiting for abrupt commands. When you ask for a halt in the Drive Lines, you must learn to halt with your feet together, approach him slowly and quietly from behind, loop the lines across his rump and proceed to the front to give him his reward when he stands still!

When Under Saddle, give him his crimped oats from his back on both sides and wait for him to stop chewing before giving him the “Heads up!” to move on.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

A lot of us get used to using abrupt commands When you do this, it just makes them anxious, tense and you will get overreactions.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm-hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

You can help your donkey with his Rein Back through straight backup poles. Make him walk forward first through the poles and then back up through the poles. If they are straight parallel poles, the poles will help him to learn to back straight, even though your cues are alternate pressure on each side. He might overreact if the poles weren't there. This is just a another way to enhance and finesse your cues to receive his responsive movements.

Another way to help the donkey learn a Rein Back Under Saddle or in the Drive Lines is to put him face-first into a corner. Have your assistant help from in front of him on the other side of the fence. She can wave a plastic bag in front of his face while you give the appropriate cues for the Rein Back. As soon as he takes even one step backwards, call for a halt and reward him with crimped oats for his compliance.

You can even add angled parallel poles to add variety to the task. He can walk straight forward and make he turn at the angle and go to the end of the parallel poles. Then he must Rein Back, stop at the angle in the middle, re-adjust his body and finish the angled poles. Lead him through all these kinds of obstacles first with random halts in the middle of the obstacles. Then when you are riding him Under Saddle, he will expect the halts and not get resistant when you ask for them. Practice makes perfect!

During the execution of the Obstacle movements, just lightly give leg pressure and the right cues to direct him and keep his Good Postural Balance throughout. Do not allow him to lean one way or the other, but to bend correctly through his torso when turning. There are a lot of little things that happen in these Obstacles when you are primarily riding from your seat. You can use your assistant from behind or in front with the Driving Whip and then without the assistant. Ground Drive and walk with the assistant and then without the assistant. Ride at the walk with the assistant and then without the assistant. Finally, Ground Drive and Ride at the trot with the assistant and then without the assistant.

The donkey is an animal that was born for no other purpose than to serve. If he understands what you are trying to convey to him, he has the innate desire to please. Remember this and **BE PATIENT** with your donkey. Each individual learns at his own pace and in his own way. Some donkeys will need to learn the Trot and/or Canter in the Open Arena before he is willing to do it in the Round Pen. Just assess which approach will work better with your donkeys and take the path of least resistance. No matter the approach to the small steps of training, rest assured he will never forget what he has learned.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

I've learned a lot about donkeys today. Very cool, Meredith.

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 4:

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

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- 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