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DONKEY TRAINING, PART 4 – DRIVING

MEREDITH HODGES - LUCKY THREE RANCH

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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.

Meredith Hodges:

Donkeys will do things a little differently than horses and mules. It is most beneficial to begin driving training with your donkey after his Postural Core Strength is sufficiently developed and he has adequate bulk muscle built on top. Donkeys are often deficient in muscle tone and development in their hind quarters because of the steep angles in their shoulders,hips and pasterns.Spending time in Hourglass Leading Training, Obstacles, Lunging and Ground Driving in the *Elbow Pull* along with Under Saddle exercises will better prepare him for driving.

It’s important to consistently use the lessons on Showmanship in ***Training Mules and Donkeys (TMD) Videos #1, #8 and #9***, going to and from the work areas and during any ground interaction with your animal, in order to improve communication and truly bond with him. As you work it’s also important to consider your animal's Posture, Frame, Balance, Coordination and Muscle Development. If he is comfortable in his body, comfortable with his handler and happy in his environment, he will perform better.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith:
Understanding the equine's natural evolution can help us give him what he needs to thrive in captivity. It would be nice if we could provide a habitat akin to what the wild equines used to enjoy: room to run, with an abundance of soft dirt and occasional hard ground under his feet.

Unfortunately today's equine must deal with a multitude of unfamiliar challenges including extreme activities, exposure to crowds of people and more prolonged exposure to hard surfaces such as asphalt and cement. It's our job to provide not only adequate nutrition, exercise and training for their physical health, but also routine and comfort during recreational hours to minimize stress and improve their psychological well being as well. Because equines are under more stress, we need to watch their bodies more carefully and provide the right kinds of exercise and feed. Their well-being is our responsibility now. It's our duty to give them what they need to adapt in a healthy way to a world that can never be how it once was.

Environment is also important. When you ride use good sense and pay attention to the ground condition. If the ground is hard, ride carefully at slower speeds and if the ground is soft, proceed with the same caution. Concussion on hard ground can cause bone problems and soft surfaces can do damage to tendons and ligaments.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Oh, yeah.

Meredith:
Excessive exertion isn't typically an issue for equines in the wild. But as trained athletes, their bodies are stressed beyond normal and proper conditioning is essential. As equal partners in athletic equine activities, we must also take the same precautions with our own bodies, paying attention to our own posture and athletic conditioning to improve rather than hinder our donkey's performance.

Mules and donkeys have taught me to look at each equine as an individual and think of my relationship with them as one of friendship and mutual enhancement. Knowing what to expect from your donkey and setting him up for success will help foster a Healthy Relationship. When you look at it as a partnership, when you have your donkey's best interest at heart, he'll know this and comply, but only if you're realistic, accurate and honest in your leadership skills.

Also, be careful of overusing Desensitization techniques. Mules have taught me that too much desensitization can result in boredom and lack of interest. It's better to turn fear into curiosity, exploration and confidence—to teach your donkey to think about his response rather than react instinctually or be totally unresponsive to a situation.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Right.

Meredith:
Owning an equine is a tremendous responsibility. No one person could be expected to know everything about donkey health and well-being, so it's important to have a good team of professionals to support you. Your ***Veterinarian, Farrier, Chiropractor, Masseuse and Trainer/Coach*** can all help you do the best by your animal.These professionals provide preventive medicine that keeps your equine mentally, physically and emotionally healthy, increases longevity and makes your time with him more enjoyable.

One element of Athletic Conditioning is balance. Your equine's hooves play a critical role in balancing his body structure for good posture and performance. Remember what they say, "***No foot, no donkey***," and this is quite literally true. "***Trim the toe of the foot to where it's in a straight line with the pastern and that straight line should complement the angle of the shoulder. Whatever the angle, you would be correct for that animal. There have been times that I raised the top line on some animals as much as 10 - 12 degrees just by trimming, without even putting shoes on them***," says Rusty May. Your donkey's hooves set the foundation for everything you do with him. So find a good Farrier and don't settle for anything less.

As a rule, your donkey should be trimmed or shod every six to eight weeks by a reputable Farrier depending on how he wears his hooves. When you select a Farrier, make sure he has been to a Farrier's College and has the right temperament to work with your donkey patiently. For good posture and performance, it's important to trim and balance the donkeys's hooves to suit his body structure. One way to tell if your donkey is in good balance is to listen to the footfall pattern as he walks on a hard, resounding surface. If your donkey is shod, it's easy to hear although donkey's don't usually need to be shod.

According to Rusty May, "***The reason for shoeing a horse is to make him usable to man. There are things that you can do with shoes that you cannot do by leaving an animal barefoot. If you're just riding your donkey in the ditch banks on the weekends, he really doesn't need shoes. If you want to go to the mountains and the places I go, he'd better be well shod!***"

"***A horse in nature has no pressures***," continues Rusty. "***He is out there grazing around having a good time getting fat. Ideally, the wear of the feet is equal to the growth of the feet. So, the wild equine maintains a status quo all the time. Nobody is going to tell him to jump over this fence, or go rope a calf! I find that donkeys are a very reactionary animal. They react to how you treat them. If you come up to them with a chip on your shoulder, they'll be glad to knock it off***. Making sure your Farrier has the right temperament to work with your animal is critical. He can also guide you in understanding when and why your donkey needs to be shod.

Be sure your Farrier understands the difference between Mule and Donkey hooves and Horse hooves. The mules and donkeys should be trimmed more upright, leaving more heel than you would on a horse. And all equines should be trimmed according to the angles in their *pasterns, shoulders and hips*. Be wary of Farriers who haven't had the benefit of a good Farrier school. In spite of what you might think, it's not quite as simple as trimming your fingernails! You want your donkey to have the best Farrier possible.

"***Shoeing is absolutely important to the overall balance of your donkey. They might need to be shod or trimmed so they're physically comfortable. You should try to complement the whole body not just the feet. You should look at the foot to see if they are toeing in, or toeing out, with a based-wide, or based-narrow stance***."

"***What you have to do is trim off just enough sole to expose the amount of hoof wall you want to take off and the amount of sole you need to take off. This here line is when you can clearly see the White Line. It can become infected with a fungus called White Line Disease and will need to be treated responsibly. This is the separation between the sole, which is live tissue and your outer wall. Anything on the inside of this line and you'll have blood***," coninues Rusty. Learn more about ***White Line Disease*** on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under ***Training/Whats New With Roll?/Scroll Down to 2016. See much more in our DVD and manual titled EQUUS REVISITED.***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Oh, sure.

Meredith:
As the handler, you have a critical role to play in shoeing. When the farrier is underneath the equine, place yourself on the same side. Then, if the animal spooks, he'll spook away from both of you. Keep your body between the farrier and your equine's eyes to block his view. Pet him and offer small handfuls of oats when he's still and complies. Don't bribe him with food or shovel oats to distract him. Just reward his good behavior when he stands still. Do your best to keep him calm and keep your farrier safe. Different shoes exist for different activities. Though mules and donkeys have very tough feet, if you're asking them to do repetitive activities over hard ground, they should be shod.

For example, you should use Slider Plates if you are doing repetitive Reining patterns, Egg Bar shoes are good on the front feet for dispersing concussion while Jumping, and ordinary shoes are fine for most Pleasure events, Pleasure Trail Riding and during extensive Showing and rough Trail Riding. If you will be riding or driving on blacktop, you should use either Rubber shoes or shoes with Borium Beads on them to prevent your equine from slipping. If you are doing only moderate riding or driving on softer surfaces, shoes probably aren't even necessary.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Okay.

Meredith:
Clear Communication between you and your equine will help you perform any task with ease, particularly when riding without the company of other riders. Proper Groundwork before riding will strengthen the muscles correctly for the stress you are putting on them. When you train for a task or sport, your equine uses certain muscles and not others. That's why it's so important to give him the same Full-Body Conditioning that any athlete needs in order to perform safely and effectively. Don't rely on the task to do the job. Just as a football player strengthens his entire body in preparation to play his sport, you must prepare your donkey with Comprehensive Conditioning. If you do exercises to strengthen the entire body, in the proper posture, he'll be better able to perform at his best no matter what you ask.

Some people worry that treats will cause a biting problem, but the Correction for Aggressive Behavior such as biting is really quite simple. ***Limiting behaviors, or negative reinforcement, is covered in TMD Video #2 (biting and kicking).***

If your donkey gets too close or pushy, use the "Biting" approach for correction. Slap him on the side of the mouth with an open hand, say, "***No***" very loudly and put your hand up like a stop sign in front of his face. He will step back, or fling his head back, at which point you should tell him, "***Good, Boy (or Girl)***," immediately take a step towards him and give him a reward for *giving you your space*.

The next time you should only have to put your hand up like a stop sign and say, "***No!***" The donkey should then be willing to back up for the reward when you put your hand up. Be very consistent about when rewards are given and when correction is truly needed. "***No!***" is the only Negative Verbal Command you should need to indicate your displeasure. To avoid confusion don't use any other words or noises.

Paying attention to this kind of detail will greatly improve your animal's Conditioning, his Balance and his Attention to your Commands over time. Donkeys will learn EXACTLY what you teach and will be only as meticulous as you are. Lead your donkey the same way, in sync with his front legs every time you have him on the lead rope. You'll build good habits, facilitate good posture and give him the few seconds before each move to prepare for what comes next. Use Passive Stretching Exercises after he is warmed up during lessons to help to keep him comfortable, calm and relaxed. The result is a relaxed, compliant and confident companion! Check out ***EQUUS REVISITED: Chapter VI: Driving Stretches (TMD Video #3) Active Stretching Exercises: Lunging, Ground Driving, Obstacle Ground driving***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) There you go.

Meredith:

Driving vs. Riding: At one time, harness horses, donkeys and mules were a necessity to civilization. Today, for the most part, these animals fill a recreational need, and driving is one of the fastest-growing sports in the equine industry.While there are some practical applications connected with pulling contests, most people want nothing more than to drive for pleasure or competition.

You must understand something very important: ***Driving*** **a horse, mule or donkey is very different from riding. It is more important to pay attention to detail and it's much more difficult to learn the basics, let alone the finer points.**

Here's an analogy: Just because you can drive a pickup truck doesn't mean you can fly an airplane. And if you want to fly a plane, you need more than just one lesson to become a pilot. The point is this—driving is fun and it certainly looks easy, but of all the equine activities, it is the most potentially dangerous for you, for others and for your equine. If you get into trouble while riding, you might get thrown off. If you get into trouble while driving, you could end up with a runaway animal and a careening vehicle that's crashing into everything in its path. So please recognize that ***driving can be dangerous***, no matter how experienced you may be. Make sure your driving experience is enjoyable and safe!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Wow.

Meredith:
The time to determine whether your equine is a good Candidate for Driving is before you hitch him to a cart. Basically, horses and mules have two distinct reactions to danger—***flight or freeze***. An animal with a strong ***flight*** instinct is not a good choice for driving. Instead, pick an animal that will wait to see what's happening, rather than running off and then takes a peek. Donkeys tend to have a stronger ***freeze*** instinct.

Look at it from the donkey's point of view. It's scary to have something noisy rumbling behind you. And, to compound the problem, your donkey will be wearing blinders on his bridle so he can't see what it is dragging along behind! He can only hear the noise, so it is important that you use supportive Verbal Communication during this process in order to keep him calm. Can you see how important it is to make sure you have an animal that will stay fairly calm and under control when facing new situations? He needs to be able to ***trust*** you and rely on your judgment. Choose an animal that will not only be a pleasure to drive but will also be ***safe***!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Oh, sure.

Meredith:

The basic equipment for Pleasure Driving is a harness, and its function is to attach the animal to a cart. There are many styles and sizes of harness, each built specifically for a certain breed or to ensure optimum performance at a certain event. But there's a third factor—***Safety***!

In driving, it is especially important that you have Good-Quality Harness. The best suggestion is to buy a ***new*** harness to fit your specific animal. There are many reliable tack shops that specialize in harnesses and they have experts to make sure you get just what you need. Buying ***used*** harness or something at a barn auction can be tricky and leather that looks good may actually be ready to fall apart because of dry rot. Look at buying new harness as an investment and buy the best quality available. Along with good maintenance practices, this will ensure the longevity and safety of your equipment and provide you with peace of mind.

A ***Harness Bridle*** is similar to an English riding bridle. Major differences are the addition of blinders (sometimes called "*blinkers*") and "*bearing*" or "*checkreins.*" *Blinders* are pieces of leather attached to the cheek pieces to eliminate side and rear vision. ***NOTE: The blinders must be adjusted so that they don't rub against your animal's eyes***.

A "***Checkrein***" is a training and safety device that keeps your equine from dropping his head too low. There are two types of checkreins: ***Over-checks*** and ***Side-checks***. They both keep the equine's head raised to an optimum position so the collar does not slide down the neck if the equine lowers his head, but be careful about their adjustment. ***NOTE: The Checkreins should not be adjusted so tightly that your mule's head is held unnaturally high.*** If your equine gaps his mouth (as most mules will do, but not so much with donkeys), you can add a flash noseband to the existing noseband of the harness bridle. By the way, for mini-mules or donkeys with very small noses, a nylon dog collar makes a wonderfully versatile nose band. It can be attached to the existing nose band with a small belt-like strap.

There are several styles of ***Driving Bits***. You will want one that is mild and similar to those used for riding, such as a ***Half-Cheek Snaffle*** or ***Liverpool*** bit. If you're using a Liverpool-type bit, make sure that the Chin Chain lies flat and begin training with your lines attached to the Snaffle Rings on the bit. The slits for the lines on the Curb Shanks are used for leverage with more difficult animals whose training has been less than complete. The Drive Lines are attached to the bit, and are similar to reins, but are long enough to reach the vehicle you'll be driving.

The ***Harness Collar***, the harness and the traces are what actually attach the animal to the vehicle. As the animal, in his harness, moves forward, he is said to be "in drought (in "draft")." There are two types of collars: a Neck Collar and a Breast Collar. I prefer to use a Neck Collar because it doesn't shift across the chest as much as a Breast Collar. Mules and donkeys are sensitive to pressure on the chest area, where they are often narrower than a horse. A Breast Collar harness can easily become crooked and not pull evenly which can cause chafing. This is especially critical for donkeys.

Neck Collars are made for an individual animal and are not adjustable, so proper fit is crucial. Measurements for Neck Collars are taken from the inside, top to bottom. Measure your mule from the point of his chest to just in front of the withers, and then add an extra two inches to the collar measurement for comfort. Neck Collars are used when pulling a heavy load and are common for agricultural use and for weight pulls. A ***Breast Collar*** is a heavy strip of leather across the chest, suspended from a Neck Strap. Because it is lightweight and can be easily adjusted to fit a variety of animals, it is the choice for light vehicles. We'll talk about vehicles in a bit. The traces are attached to the collar via the Hames, one on each side, running back to the vehicle. The rest of the equipment is an elaborate girth rigging called a "Saddle" or "Surcingle" that supports the weight of a two-wheeled vehicle, absorbs road bumps and carries the shafts. These are often padded underneath with a separate Harness Pad.

The ***Crupper*** keeps the Saddle from slipping forward. Breeching is used so that your animal can stop the vehicle and back it up, and tugs attached to the saddle support the shafts. A ***Kicking Strap*** can be attached to the shafts over his rump so that, if your donkey kicks, the strap over his rear end prevents him from getting his hind legs up high enough to do damage.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

And if they're harnessed and pulling an ice cream wagon, they are real popular in their neighborhood.

Meredith:
There are a lot of different ***Driving Accessories*** that can be used in driving. There are many variables to consider when picking the right ***Driving Whip***; for example, the size of the animal and the size and style of the vehicle. The whip should be well balanced, with a drop-lash long enough to reach your animal's shoulder. You may also use training aids such as an ***Elbow Pull*** or ***Emergency Drawreins*** to give yourself more leverage and to keep your donkey in the proper frame.

Emergency Drawreins

1. Use two *Drawreins*, one for each side, each with a snap on one end and a loop on the other.

2. Run the snap end of the *Drawreins* through the terret on the *Surcingle*, as if it were the normal Driving Line.

3. Run the snap end of the *Drawreins* through the Bit Rings and back to the Surcingle.

4. Attach it to the Tug Loop D-ring on the Surcingle.

5. Attach your Drivelines to the loop end of the *Drawreins*. When you use this rigging, it will give you added leverage to slow the donkey when you pull on the lines.

Elbow Pull

1. When using the ***Elbow Pull*** self-correcting aid for good posture, use 3/8″ twisted nylon rope with snaps on both ends that has been measured for your specific animal. The ***Elbow Pull*** length will vary with the size of your equine.

2. Run it through the Crown of the headstall, underneath the Throatlatch Strap, or through the split in the Overcheck, to make sure it will not slip down his back.

3. Even it up on both sides.

4. Run the ends of the ***Elbow Pull*** on each side through the bit and between his front legs.

5. Attach snaps to the Surcingle Rings on each side so that he can't carry his head so high that he hollows his neck and back.

6. See instructions for the ***Elbow Pull*** on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under ***Training/ Training Tips #36 – Using the Elbow Pull During Leading Training, Equus Revisited Page 91 and under Training/Mule Crossing/Elbow Pull Use...***

Lunging and Ground Driving your donkey in harness are important steps in his training. Both you and your donkey must become accustomed to the proper rigging—after all, there are a lot of straps attached. Take the time to make sure you understand how each piece should fit and that your animal is comfortable and remains calm. He will become used to the Blinders on the bridle and to the flapping leathers, and to things that he can't see happening behind him.

You can Lunge and Ground-Drive your donkey in full harness. Just be sure that, as you work him, the Traces stay up and out of the way. Here are the steps for tying up the harness straps before lunging:

1. Attach the Overcheck or Sidecheck to the Surcingle (saddle).

2. Tie up the Traces by folding them in half; then loop the double thickness into a tight Figure-Eight knot at the Collar. As an alternative, you can take each Trace and tie it snugly to the ring on the Breeching on each side with a Figure-Eight knot if your collar tends to slide forward even with the Overcheck in place.

3. Buckle the Tug Straps to the Girth Straps so they don't flop around.

4. Run the Breeching Straps through the Tug Strap and back to the buckles.

5. Make certain that the Quarter Straps on a Team Harness are properly attached.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Okay.

Meredith:
Verbal Commands are vital to driving. After all, you have only three aids available to communicate with your equine—*your voice, the driving whip and the lines to the bit*. Before he can advance to the next phase of training, your donkey should have learned to move forward with energy at a walk and trot. He should know how to halt and stand quietly, to turn to the right ("*Gee*") and to the left ("*Haw*"). He should have also learned to "*Rein Back*." In other words, he must be obedient and maneuverable while Ground Driving before he can advance to the next phase of driving training.

It is also assumed that you've been able to do a little fine-tuning on these responses by teaching him to "*Gee-over*" (move to the right) and "*Haw-over*" (move to the left). That is, he's learned to keep his shoulders and hips more or less parallel to the side of the arena as he moves off on an angle to the right or left. It's his legs that will cross over as he moves in the direction you want.

Ground Driving can be a little tricky so don't be alarmed if this exercise is very awkward in the beginning. It will take you and your donkey a little time to get into sync with each other and this is what learning is all about. It is a matter of Fine-Tuning his Obedience to your *voice, rein and whip commands*. Be patient and willing to spend the time necessary to fine-tune each individual movement before moving on to the next at this stage. It will be critical when it comes time to Hitch Him to a Vehicle. Once he is moving easily from one corner of the arena to the opposite corner, try going from corner to middle and then you can vary the patterns to increase his flexibility. Teach "*Gee-around*" and "*Haw-around*" near a fence and eventually move to the open.

Have your donkey move Laterally in a Circle around you. Basically, you want him to do a long Side Pass on an Arc with you in the center like the hub of the wheel. Move him 360 degrees around you. If you have difficulty in the open, you can always go to the rail of the fence and try it again. Once he understands the basics of Lateral Motion, you can teach him to Side Pass on the Long Lines with no forward motion. Train him to become accustomed to *whip cues* and remember to use the lightest touch possible, and to increase the severity of the whip only as needed.

Make sure your hands and the whip are consistent and not used for punishment. Always use your Verbal Commands first and then pause and wait for a response. If there is no reaction, repeat the Verbal Command again and follow it with a tap of the whip—*in the middle of his rear for forward, on his left side for a right turn and on his right side for a left turn*.

Teach your donkey to Side Pass in the open, using the same cues as you did for the lateral moves, but ask him to move over instead of forward, and to move over until he reaches the wall. Use the Verbal Commands, "*Haw-over*" and "*Gee-over*," and keep a snug and even contact on the lines to aid him. If you do these exercises correctly, you will soon be able to drive your donkey around and through any kind of Trail Obstacle, while he remains calm and compliant. Practice Side Passing over a Ground Pole placed in front of a fence and over a Ground Pole in the Open Arena. You might also try a Side Pass "T" pattern and even a Tractor Tire.***The diagrams in Training Without Resistance, Appendix B illustrate these moves in detail***. When your donkey finally gets the hang of it, they are a lot of fun!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith:
Just like with horses and mules, it's important that your donkey masters these Lateral Movements so he will not just bend in the middle when he's between the shafts to make the turns. In other words, this will help to avoid a wreck. In order to safely turn a cart in a small area, he must learn to move his entire body correctly, laterally when asked. So be diligent about teaching these skills. They are important for *your safety* and for *your donkey's safety*.

Haw-around
Your donkey will circle in a *counter-clockwise motion*, crossing over with his front and hind feet. He should take very small steps behind and longer steps in front, while staying on the circle as you drive him.

Gee-around
Your donkey will circle in a *clockwise motion*, crossing over with his front and hind feet. He should take very small steps behind and longer steps in front, while staying on the circle as you drive him.

You will need assistance for this next phase of training, so ask a friend to act as your assistant. You'll be working in a Small Arena or Round Pen, and your donkey must become accustomed to seeing and feeling "*scary*" things, so we'll be taking the Sacking-Out phase of training a step further. A harness consists of many flapping leather straps, and you must *desensitize* your animal to them before it is safe to hitch him to a cart. Shafts bumping against his body can also be frightening, and who knows what scary things he'll encounter on the Trail or in a Parade. Your goal with this lesson is to make him as "*bullet-proof*" as possible. Your donkey should be wearing his halter each time you take him to the Round Pen. Tie him to a stout post or ask your assistant to hold him. This will be your donkey's harness training "Work Station."

Begin with something he's already used to—the Saddle Blanket. Then gradually add:
1. Bells
2. Plastic bags of empty cans
3. A Tarp
4. Anything scary, noisy and floppy (as long as it will not cause injury or danger)

As with all training, begin slowly and build your donkey's confidence with prompt rewards and a soothing voice, so he realizes that these things will not hurt him. Reward him as he learns to be calm and accepting of things he can see, as well as things that touch his body. When he can handle these objects, put the Driving Bridle with blinders on him, and allow him to get used to objects that he can't see but can hear and feel.

PVC Pole
When he accepts being *sacked out* with these things, add a PVC pole in order to *desensitize* him to the feel of a shaft on his body. You will need a piece of PVC pipe, 15 to 18 feet (4.5 to 5.5 meters) in length.

1. At the work station, begin gently touching his body with the pole. Reassure him that all is okay.

2. As he accepts the pole, touch him all over his body with it.

3. If he remains calm, your next lesson should be while he's in harness

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\4. With your assistant at his head, bump the pole over his sides and head, and even between his legs.

5. Next, loosely fit one end of the pole into the Harness Tug Loop.

6. Ask your assistant to walk at his head, as you drive him from behind holding the pole.

7. Gently drop the pole and let it drag.

8. Finally, bend the pole around his rump and suddenly let it go. Your job is to show him he has nothing to fear.

When he accepts being touched with the PVC pole, you can take him to a larger arena for the next step of training. I like to take my donkeys and mules into the Indoor Arena for this because the walls are solid, but an Outdoor Arena with *rail fencing* is fine. ***Don't work in an arena with wire fencing or stock panels***. It's too easy to get a shaft stuck. I use a slightly longer PVC pole for these exercises. If you have problems, it's easier to grab a longer pole and pull it out of the Tug Loop.

Ask your assistant to hold your donkey with a lead rope while you attach the PVC pole along the left side of your animal's body through the tug. When he's handling the pole well, tighten the Tug Strap around the PVC pole and begin to Ground Drive him around, with your assistant, still holding the lead rope, walking along beside him. You have control with your *lines* and your assistant is there as a *safety* backup. Your goal is to get your donkey used to dragging the pole—feeling it bump beside him and along the ground on straight lines and through turns.

Make sure the pole is connected loosely enough that you can pull it out in case of an emergency! Your assistant should try to stay to the inside of the arena and not between the animal and the wall, so that, if you run into problems, he or she doesn't get trapped between the donkey and the wall. Remember that donkeys LOVE to crowd you so—***SAFETY FIRST!***

1. Ground Drive in both directions,with the pole on the left side.

2. Switch the pole to the right side and go in both directions.

3. Pick up the pole and carry it as you drive.

4. Let the pole bump into the arena wall or against a fence post. Go a few steps, and then suddenly let it go.

5. Bend it around your donkey's rump and let go. Eventually, you can even lunge your donkey with the PVC pole firmly in place. When he goes around counterclockwise—with the pole on his left—he will feel the pole against his shoulder.

When he Reverses, he'll feel it bump against the wall of the arena. Do these exercises at a walk and then a trot, in both directions, until he is completely calm. A donkey that is steady and responsive with a PVC pole in the Tug Loop simulating the shafts is ready to pull an object.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Okay

Meredith:
Pulling a Drag
Prepare your donkey to pull a drag by asking your assistant to put weight on the ends of the Traces. Run the Traces through the Tug Loops and use a length of Baling Twine to attach a six-foot (two-meter) lead rope to the end of each Trace. Standing well out of kicking range, your assistant should hold the end of a lead rope in each hand, and follow behind you as you move the donkey forward.

Your assistant should gradually pull on the two lead ropes, *increasing the drag* on the Traces. It won't be long before your assistant is practically skidding along. You can even run the Traces between your donkey's legs to prepare him for any situation where the Traces could get out of their proper position. When your donkey tolerates this, he is ready to pull a *drag*.

Every trainer has a favorite device, but I prefer an old tire with a length of nylon strapping attached. Begin as you would with any new obstacle. Show your donkey the tire, and then ask your assistant to drag it a bit while your donkey watches, so he knows what it sounds like.

Next, move your donkey in front of the tire, and then have your assistant drag the tire so that your donkey can hear what it sounds like, but can't see it with his blinkers on. To safely attach the tire to the Traces, use Trace Extenders made from loops of Baling Twine. (In case your donkey panics, the Traces can be easily released by just letting go of the the nylon strap that is atteched to the tire.) Once your donkey is securely hooked up, pick up the lines and move into position near the tire.

With your assistant in control of the tire, ask your donkey to "*Walk on*." It's hard to predict how he will react this first time. The tire is noisy, the Traces will rub and flop against his sides, hocks, and legs and he'll feel the weight of the tire, so it's best to keep the first drag session short, only a few steps forward, stop, then immediately reward him for good behavior—*this will set him up for success*. Each succeeding lesson can be longer, and, as he gets more comfortable, you can add some of the familiar patterns. Eventually you can even have him drag the tire with the Traces between his legs, in addition to the correct position, so nothing surprises him. It won't be long before he's used to feeling the flap of the traces and the weight against his collar.

Pulling a travois

The next step is to create a simple Travois with two poles and an inflexible crosspiece, such as a 1″ x 6″ piece of wood. The poles are inserted into the Tug Loops and held in place with the Wrap Straps. You can use a short length of Baling Twine to attach a snap to your Traces, and then attach them to Eye Bolts on the Wooden Crosspiece. The ends of the poles will drag on the ground behind your donkey. This accustoms him to the feeling of two shafts, weight, noise and drag.

You can begin by Ground Driving him with the Travois, and then, eventually, Lunging him with it. If he tries to run off, just drive him into the fence with the lines and stop him. Be sure to reward him when he stops! It will take only a few sessions for your donkey to learn to tolerate the shafts. Remember that each animal is different. You may be able to take only two or three steps with the shafts the first time—or they may not bother your donkey at all. At any rate, take all the time you and your donkey need, and exercise patience to help him overcome his fears. By taking your time now, you will reap rewards in the future.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, cool.

Team Driving

At some point in your Longear's training, you might want to teach him to drive as a part of a team. A Pair Harness is similar to a Single Harness, with two major differences—*the lines are coupled together, and the donkeys are hitched to either side of a pole or to a combination of swingletrees*.

For a team, the Continuous Line (no seam) goes to the outside of each animal to the Bit Ring, the left line to the left side of the animal on the left and the right line to the right bit ring on the animal to the right.

The other two lines are stitched to the Continuous Lines and go to the inside Bit Rings on each donkey. Take the Stitched Line to the right-hand donkey, run it through the terrets on his left side and attach to the Bit Ring on the right side of the left-hand donkey. Then take the Stitched Line to the left-hand donkey,run it through the terrets on his right side and attach it to the Bit Ring on the left side of the right-hand donkey.

The driver will have one right line and one left line in his hands so that, when he pulls, it will pull both animals on the same side for Direct Rein Action. In other words, when he pulls the right line, it will pull both animals' bits on the right side and when he pulls the left line, it will pull both animals' bits on the left side. The Sitched Lines will be crossed between the animals. Make sure you do all the same Groundwork with the team that you did with the single equine.

Begin by laying the Center Pole over the rear coupling between your animals and ask your assistant control it. Have your assistant push it forward, and then pull it back. Push it forward to the wall and let it scrape the wall in front of the animals. Pull it back and let it scrape the wall behind them. Gently bump their legs, shoulders and sides with it. Next, let the team Drag the Tire. Finally, take them to the Obstacle Course for a final lesson before hitching them to a vehicle. This is one instance when it may help to put an Experienced Equine with a Green one of the same size, but make sure your Experienced Equine is a very solid, dependable animal, or he'll be teaching your Green Animal bad habits. Also be aware that your Green Equine must successfully go through all the stages of training that you've practiced up to this point before he's ready to learn to be a part of a team.

To decide which side is appropriate for each donkey to be on, just put the one that leans to the inside toward his teammate and not away from him. It will be easier for them to learn to work together if they stay close together. This is the same as people being right or left handed when sitting in a group for dinner. It also helps if the donkeys LIKE each other!

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
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