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DONKEY TRAINING, PART 5

MEREDITH HODGES - LUCKY THREE RANCH

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- Check Your Harness
- Fitting the Harness – Hitching to the Vehicle
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Mule Talk is an Every Cowgirl's Dream production - www.EveryCowgirlsDream.Com www.MuleTalk.Net or www.LuckyThreeRanch.Com/Podcast-Appearances/

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:

If you understand donkeys, it will help you to understand mules since the mule is half donkey and half horse. Mules seem to take time to learn and that is the donkey half of the mule that we usually encounter and deem as *stubborn*. But donkeys are really just stoic about things because they need to think things through carefully. When you go to get on a donkey, you might think you're all ready to go. They lead you down a path, (laughs) but it's not necessarity the path you think it is nor is it the right one.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) There you go.

When your donkey is completely quiet between the shafts on your Travois, you can consider hitching him to the Training Cart. Begin by showing him the cart, as you would any new object.You should go through one more training step before you hitch the vehicle to your donkey: Ask your assistant to walk the cart around, while you and the animal follow closely behind.

Have your assistant pull the cart beside, then behind the donkey while you do more Ground Driving. This might seem a little strange, with a human between the shafts instead of an animal, but it serves an excellent purpose. Your donkey will hear the cart behind him with all its accompanying rumbles, bumps and rattles. If he doesn't bolt or become afraid, he is finally ready to be hitched.

A good time to check for wear and weak spots on your harness is while you're cleaning it. Before hitching, it's best to make a Final Check of all your harness and equipment, and remember to fit yourself with a helmet. At this stage, there is a big difference between training a horse and training a donkey. A donkey that is accustomed to being tied to a Work Station will usually accept being tied when introduced to the cart.

Fitting Miniature Donkeys for harness can sometimes be difficult, but I was fortunate to find Chimacum Tack, a tack and harness manufacturing company that does a fantastic job with miniature donkey, mule and horse harness. I suggest that you make the fitting a lesson in itself—you can even introduce your mini to the cart he will be pulling without actually hitching him up to it. Just as you have with all other obstacles, first let him inspect the tack. Then, once you have put it on him, have him stand quietly in the spot in front of the cart where he will eventually stand. Don't forget to amply reward him and he should be more than willing to comply. ***For more information about training mini donkeys for Driving, look in the various articles on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under TRAINING/MULE CROSSING/Getting Down with Minis, Parts 1-5 and under TRAINING/ANOTHER AUGIE & SPUDS ADVENTURE.***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Let's talk a little about vehicles. Cart and Carriage Design is very traditional, but whatever vehicle you plan to use, pay attention to two things: *The weight of the vehicle and the length of the shafts.*

When first driving a young equine, it's best to use a light cart and an assistant. A young or unconditioned animal can easily strain its shoulder muscles if the cart is too heavy. The lighter the cart is, the less stress on the equine's body. Also, you should pay special attention to the distance between the shafts. The shafts should be far enough apart that the animal can bend his entire body and not just his neck.

They should also be long enough to reach the point of his shoulder while leaving ample space, roughly 6-8 inches on each side of the animal. Select a vehicle that pulls easily and is proportionate to your donkey's size, strength and conditioning.

The larger two-wheeled carts are very popular for Driving classes, but make sure your equine is well conditioned before asking him to pull a heavier wooden cart. Stick with a lightweight metal cart you would use for training until he is fit enough to pull more weight. You might enjoy a two-person jog cart with motorcycle-style tires or a wooden Meadowbrook Rear-Entry Cart. For family fun, it's hard to beat a four-wheeled Surrey or Buggy. While there are many styles of Carts and Carriages for finished animals, it is recommended that you do your training with what's called an "***Easy-Entry***" metal cart. It is substantially built with safety in mind, and the ***easy-entry*** feature also means an ***easy-exit*** in case of emergency.

It's also better to use a metal cart for training instead of an expensive wooden vehicle because if you have a wreck, the metal cart can be bent back into shape if it's not weakened or broken. With a wooden cart, it might take weeks to be repaired, or it may need to be replaced.

Be advised that many wagons are too heavy for just one animal to pull and will require a Team. Whatever your driving interest might be, pay attention to detailed information about driving to ensure the *safety* of you and your equine during this potentially dangerous activity.

With your donkey haltered and bridled, tie him securely with the lead rope to the stout post in the arena that has become your Work Station. Ask your assistant to stand at the donkey's head to keep him calm.

1. Bring the vehicle to the donkey, lifting the shafts over his back and bringing them down behind the Tug Loops.

2. Your assistant should guide the shaft through the Tug Loop on one side, as you do the other side. If you aren't using an assistant, put one shaft through the Tug Loop, then move to the other side and do the other shaft.

3. Push the cart forward until the points of the shafts are even with the Collar or Point of the Shoulder.

4. Attach the Traces evenly on both sides before attaching the other straps.

5. When the Traces are securely attached to the vehicle, attach all of the other straps on one side.

6. Begin with the Tug Strap and fasten it loosely around th shaft, so that you will be able to make adjustments on the other side.

7. Bring the Breeching Strap forward, under the Trace, through the Keeper on the shaft and wrap it around the shaft as many times as needed to adjust it evenly and comfortably.

8. Run the Breeching Strap over the top of the trace and back to the buckle—*this keeps the trace from hanging too low*.

9. Leave everything adjusted loosely because you will have to make readjustments once the straps on the other side are secured.

10. Pay special attention to the fit of the Breeching, because it is what allows your donkey to slow, stop and back the vehicle—*it is your brake*. It should lie snugly around the rear but be nonrestrictive.

11. If you need one, wrap the Kicking Strap around the shaft and buckle it.

12. Go to the other side and fasten all the straps.

13. Pull the straps until snug, paying special attention to the Breeching Straps. Adjust the Breeching so that your hand slips easily between the Breeching and the donkey's rear end—*snug but not tight*.

14. Run the Drive Lines through the rings on the top of the breeching (if you have them), and then through the Surcingle terrets, through the Collar terrets (if you have them), and then fasten them to the Bit (either buckled or snapped to the Snaffle Bit or to the Snaffle Ring on a Liverpool bit).

15. Check the girth on the Surcingle, making sure it is neither too tight nor too loose. (It can become loose when you tighten the Tug Straps.)

16. Now walk around your animal, shaking and rattling the cart. If he becomes unsettled, stop for a moment, and then praise and reward him when he handles it better.

The first time you Hitch your Donkey to the vehicle, don't go anywhere! It's enough for him to stand quietly while in harness. Reward him with a final pat, praise and crimped oats and then quickly and smoothly unhitch him from the vehicle.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

When he is content to stand quietly while attached to the cart (this may take a few lessons), the next step is for him to begin to pull the cart.

With your assistant holding the Lunge Line attached to the halter, stand behind the cart and give the command to "*Walk on*." You are actually Ground Driving your donkey once more, but he is pulling the cart while your assistant is at his head. With each new lesson, your assistant can let out more of the Lunge Line as if he or she is Lunging your donkey. After quietly circling the arena several times over several lessons, your donkey may be ready to trot, but first make sure he is coping with the cart. Don't make these first hitched lessons too long—*remember that it takes a new set of muscles to pull a cart and your animal must become conditioned as well as calm*. Make sure he masters one move before going on to the next one. ***Take your time!***

When he is quiet and confident, you can add some Changes of Direction across the Diagonal. This is an important test for him because as he turns, the shafts will press against his sides. You can begin to vary the pattern, still with your assistant on the Lunge Line and you Ground Drive your donkey from behind. Always end your session with a "*Rein Back*."

Only after your donkey has been proven he is ***trustworthy***—after a few weeks of Ground Driving with the cart—should you climb into the cart. *For safety, your assistant should remain at his head a little longer than usual.* When yourdonkey while hitched to the cart, can move calmly and easily through the patterns at a walk and at a trot, you are then ready to go *solo*. When you decide it's *safe to go solo*, ask your assistant to walk along with you for a short distance, holding the Lead Line so that your animal will be in motion when he is released. As your assistant detaches the Lead Line, he or she should continue to walk beside your donkey.

For the next lesson, repeat having your assistant walk along beside your donkey after detaching the Lead Line. But this time, your assistant will gradually walk farther away and fade to the center, as your donkey keeps going. When you are confident that your donkey can be trusted to go *solo*, you can practice all your Driving Patterns: *shallow serpentines, circles off the rail, and figure eights.* Once he's good in the patterns, take him to the Obstacle Course and drive him to the *mailbox, through parallel poles, over the tarp, and through the Back Thru "L"* ***(see TRAINING WITHOUT RESISTANCE Appendix B).***

It's a good idea to have your assistant handy for all of these exercises in case of emergency, but now your Assistant can Ride in the Cart, so that your donkey can become accustomed to pulling more weight. If you take ample time for each new task, all of these patterns and obstacles will make your animal more supple and responsive. They will also greatly enhance your Driving Skills, and the two of you will truly become a team.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

To Unhitch your Donkey from the vehicle, drive him back to the work station in the arena. You can tie him to a stout post at the Work Station. Smoothly get out of the vehicle, and then put up the lines. ***When unhitching your equine, everything is done in reverse.*** The Traces are the first to be attended when hitching up and the last to be undone when unhitching.

Training a Team is similar to training an individual animal. Again, it's easiest—*and safest*—to work with an assistant. Harness the Team (as described earlier in the DVD) and Ground Drive them until they are accustomed to Working Side by Side.

Do all of the exercises described in Single Hitch Driving; from Sacking Out, through PVC Pole exercises, to dragging a Tire and Travois, to hitching to a Training Vehicle. Practice patterns and obstacles (***see TRAINING WITHOUT RESISTANCE, Appendix B***) with each donkey hitched by itself, and then hitch the team together. When they are working well, both singly and together, they are ready to be hitched to a regular non-training
vehicle.

Take them to the area of the arena that you are using as a Work Station and using a Lead Rope attached to the halter over the Driving Bridle, tie them both to a stout post. Bring up the vehicle and quickly hook to the Swingletree or Doubletree. ***Remember, donkeys should learn to stand patiently in harness.***

In the beginning, a team may be unsure about what's expected—one may pull harder and one may slack off. Eventually,they will learn that it's easiest if both pull equally. They will even coordinate their strides! This takes patience and lots of practice. Use objects you have on the farm, like hay bales, to simulate a real competitive Mule Pull. You can make your own Sled and use Hay Bales or Cinder \Blocks for weights. Chalk Lines can be drawn in the dirt with any kind of white powder, such as lime or even flour!

There are several important principles to keep in mind: ***First, it's important that you reward your team for their efforts by letting them rest. Second, don't use too much weight at first during training.*** This will only discourage them. ***And third, make sure your team knows your signal to put out extra effort.*** Because a whip is not allowed in pull classes, you must rely on Verbal Commands. Some people say, "*Dig, dig*" and some say "*Get up, Get up*," but there are no standard Verbal Commands in pulling. After all, you might be in an arena where several teams are competing all at once, and you don't want to confuse your animals with a command that another team is using. Your team will quickly learn to pull evenly, with a burst of effort when you shout encouragement. Once they learn to pull, you'll see why George Washington bred mules from quality jacks to work on his farm, and how the donkey earned its reputation for steadiness and reliability.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, cool.

Just as knowledge of good Equitation and Horsemanship helps you become a better rider, your knowledge of the correct handling of the Drive Lines and whip called Reinsmanship will help you become a better driver. When your ability and skill are at their peak, your donkey will benefit!

Just as there are different styles of Equitation, there are several Driving Styles. Basically, while you are Ground Driving and doing the preliminary training, you will be holding a line in each hand, with the Driving Whip held in your right hand. The following is a good method to use when training, because you can very easily shift both lines to one hand to touch your donkey with the whip if needed. When you're in the cart, here's one way to hold the lines:

1. Hold your hands at waist level, about 10 inches (25 cm) in front of your body, and about six inches (15 cm) apart.

2. The Left Line is held securely between the thumb and index finger.

3. The Right Line is brought under the middle finger, up through your hand and over your index finger, with your thumb holding it securely.

4. The Driving Whip rests lightly in your Right Hand, with the excess line looped over your little finger.

Picture an imaginary box about six inches (15 cm) square and try to keep your hand movements small and within the box. Make sure you're sitting erect, with your elbows at a 90-degree angle and your upper arm close to your body, in Good Posture. As always, your goal is to keep your hand movements gentle and delicate. Think of vibrating your little fingers in a *squeeze/release* fashion and keep an even Contact on Both Lines to encourage the straightness of your donkey and to signal for turns. *Long, hard pulls may cause an overreaction from your donkey.*

Practice shortening and lengthening the lines by working them through your fingers, so when you first take up the lines, you maintain a light contact with your animal's mouth. The Drive Lines and Whip act like the Reins and Legs when you are Under Saddle. You will need to practice a lot of give and take of the Drive Lines as your donkey bends and turns. One line turns and the other steadies the body position, while the whip is used to encourage forward motion and to enhance directional cues from the lines.

As you and your donkey become proficient, you might want to try a one-handed driving style called the Achenbach method. This is the style used in Europe and in formal Driving Competitions. With practice, you will fine-tune the movements of your hands on the lines until they feel natural and comfortable. Keep your hands steady and in light contact with your animal's mouth. Use your voice first, then lightly use your whip to urge him on, to help him turn and keep his shoulders elevated.

To practice handling the Drive Lines at home, you can construct a Weight Board with the Drive Lines attached. The lines are run through holes in the board with weights attached on the ends behind the board. Lay the board perpendicular to the floor with a solid stand on the borrom to hold it upright. Use the board in front of a low chair or sofa where you like to sit. Hold the Drive Lines in your hands and practice gauging when the lines are Even and maintaining a steady contact with the bit, when you give the command to Halt, Turn or Rein Back. Practice the *alternate squeeze/release* action and a *squeeze/release* motion with both lines at the same time like you might need to do to get the donkey to back straight. Practice holding the Drive Lines and Whip (optional), adjusting them and Changing them from one hand to another and to one hand (Achenbach Method) as you would do in the vehicle and during Driving and Ground Driving. This will help to make your Rein Cues more clear and add Dexterity of Movement in your hands. Your hands will become much more steady when handling the Drive Lines.

One of the most enjoyable classes in a show is Pleasure Driving. In a Pleasure Driving class, 40 percent of your score is based on Performance, Manners and Way of Going; 30 percent is based on the Condition, Fit and Appropriateness of the Harness and your Vehicle; and 30 percent is based on "Turnout," which means the Appropriateness of your Dress, the Grooming and Conditioning of your donkey and the Appearance of your Vehicle.

You will show both directions at a *Walk, a Trot* and an *Extended or Lengthened Trot*. Remember, an *Extended Trot* is not a faster trot—the same rhythm and cadence should be maintained, but the *Extended Trot* covers more ground due to increased time in suspension. You will be asked to *halt, stand quietly* and "*Rein Back*." ***A word of caution: Don't slap the lines across your animal's rump to urge him on.***

A Rein Back is required more often than you may think. It must, therefore, be practiced many times and executed smoothly…one controlled step at a time. Your donkey should learn to back only as many steps as you ask and then stand squarely and quietly. You may also be asked to execute a Figure Eight. A Pleasure Driving Class is scored and judged more on your donkey's Overall Performance while Reinsmanship is is basically a Pleasure Driving Class judged more on your skill. In ***Training Without Resistance:***

• See Appendix D for Driven Dressage information.

• See Appendix E for Driving rules.

Another excellent driving class is Obstacle Driving. This is great fun, with you and your donkey negotiating a course of six to eight Obstacles. There might be a *Serpentine, Parallel Poles, Backing into a Box, Backing through Poles, a Mailbox or a Water Obstacle*. Practice doing a "*Gee-around*" or "*Haw-around*" in a small circle, with or without the chalk line to guide you. The North American Saddle Mule Association, the American Driving Society and the United States Equestrian Federation rule books all contain details as to what is required for showing in Pleasure Driving, Reinsmanship and Obstacle Classes. And for a real kick, you can get into Combined Driving, Scurries or Antique Carriage Competitions!

While Pleasure and Recreational Driving are fun, the donkey's roots are truly based in Agriculture, so it is natural that your donkey should be trained to work in harness to earn his keep. Once your donkey has learned to pull as a part of a team, your chores around the ranch will be greatly simplified, and you can also have some fun at a County Fair in a Weight Pull. Once your donkey is steady and solid when driven *solo*, it's fairly simple to take him to the next step.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Cool.

Meredith:

With the introduction of the automobile came decreased interest in horse-drawn vehicles. Tractors replaced equine-driven vehicles in the fields. It seemed as if equines had been put out of a job! But, as with any change, this was only temporary. Modern society still has need of equine participation, especially from donkeys and mules. The well-schooled driving donkey or mule is much safer and more reliable than any horse. The reason for this is the donkey and mules' natural sensibility and their positive response to Verbal Communication.

Once they have learned the parameters of their job, if treated fairly they will calmly and diligently go about their business, flicking their ears back and forth toward the driver, always listening for Verbal Reinforcement of their behavior. In a pinch, they can more often be prevented from "*freaking out*" with a few calm and reassuring words. Their strength and durability enables them to work longer and harder hours than can a horse. Their variety of sizes and colors provides them as suitable driving animals for a number of driving-related activities.

Most often we see driving animals in Parades. Although it seems simple enough to drive down a parade route, there are a number of things to consider that can complicate the issue. Parade routes are lined with potential hazards and an overload of outside stimuli. Horses that become spooked have been known to bolt and actually run right through crowds of people. I have yet to hear of a donkey or mule that has done such a thing! Perhaps it is because the donkey or mule will not run into trouble if he can possibly avoid it. He will also be more likely to rely upon his driver for support and direction through the *safest* route. He will stop if in doubt of a situation when properly trained. Mules and donkeys are familiar with Teamwork and will work as a team with their driver. The frightened horse just says, "*Forget you!*" and leaves!

Driving Competitions are becoming more popular than ever these days as a number of different types of Driving Classes are being made available to contestants. For the really serious competitor, there are Pleasure Driving, Obstacle Driving, and Reinsmanship classes in which to measure one's progress in performance.

As the competitor improves, he may move into Marathon Driving, testing his skills Cross Country and through obstacles (called hazards). The driver may use singles, or teams, depending on his personal preference. The American Driving Society has been more than generous, allowing mules and donkeys to compete in most of their events right along with the horses. There are Cones Classes and Dressage Driving Patterns.

For more fun-loving competitors, there are a lot of different Driving Games, gauged for the multiple levels of ability of the competitors. This allows even the most inexperienced driver some source of enjoyment from which he can derive a sense of accomplishment and excitement.

For those who want to enjoy a nice day in the country with their animals, there are Rallies and Organized Picnic Drives. This type of driving is more relaxing, but no less rewarding and satisfying than competitive events. Awards are sometimes given at Rallies for coming in closest to the optimum time, but the pace is usually quite leisurely! Your donkey or mule will love the alternative to showing and will enjoy the activities as much as you do.

Mules and donkeys are used in many Tourist areas, Pulling Cabs and Carriages of all varieties, taking tourists in a more leisurely fashion through the streets of history and tradition. Couples can romantically celebrate special moments in their relationships with a relaxing ride in a special cab or buggy. The sensible mule or donkey assures a safe and romantic memory that will stay with you for the rest of your life! We have used our mules to pull Carriages for Weddings and Receptions, adding a touch of class and a little tradition to an otherwise fast-paced and chaotic world!

Because of their thoughtful and affectionate nature, donkeys and mules are ideal candidates for Handicapped and Disabled Drive and Ride programs. They are not as abruptly spooked as horses, and are therefore less likely to unseat a disabled rider, or run off with a disabled driver. Horses have fared reasonably well in riding programs for the disabled and handicapped, but are not really reliable enough for driving programs of this kind. This is where Longears can excel! Mule and donkey Drive and Ride programs, such as the Slade Centre at the Donkey Sanctuary in Great Britain, afford disabled and handicapped people the opportunity to enjoy the wonders of nature by offering them more mobility with the assistance of a new "*friend*" who is gentle and affectionate. These "*friends*" replace hopelessness with joy and fulfillment, helping to make life worth living!

Driving itself is a wonderful recreation for just about anyone, from the smallest child to the eldest grandmother. Driving donkeys or mules gives you that extra sense of security in an otherwise potentially dangerous situation. Driving a donkey or mule can provide a companion and friend to otherwise lonely and unfulfilled persons, keeping life more positive and enjoyable.

Riding equines for enjoyment still requires a certain amount of training and practice. Learning to drive requires a lot less training and practice time for the driver, provided that the animal is well-schooled and obedient under saddle *FIRST*!

Small farms today still use mules and donkeys for Farm Work. When they know their job, they do it with ease and sometimes work exclusively on Verbal Communication. Old farmers speak of their mules with pride and affection. *It's nice to have a "hand" that doesn't talk back and isn't afraid of a little hard work!* In this fast-paced world, sometimes it's nice to go a little slower and take in all the beautiful and fulfilling things that life has to offer, like a relaxing drive in the country with your very best friend!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) Right.

Meredith:
Once your donkey is calm and experienced in pulling a cart or carriage, there are many enjoyable activities you can look forward to—Picnic Drives, Showing in Harness classes, organized Trail Drives and fun events such as Scurries or Cone Competitions. Of course, this also applies to horses, ponies and mules. There are excellent organizations you can join—such as national groups like the American Driving Society, as well as a great many local groups—which provide contacts, clinics and encouragement. You'll see why driving is one of the fastest growing sports in the equine world!

There is a lot to consider as a Driving Judge, but judges are also human beings, and basically the judge is going to select those donkeys for placement in the class that HE would most like to drive. If you follow the guidelines that I have described, your Longears will be one of the judge's favorites!

Little Jack Horner was to star yet again in the making of my biography, our latest *Those Magnificent Mules* documentary project. I doubt that I had driven *Little Jack Horner* in fifteen years. In fact, since he turned twenty, he had not done much but take part in more sedate roles in our TV shows and videos with an occasional bareback ride around the ranch. At 30 years old, I wasn't really sure how he would react to being hitched to the Meadowbrook Cart again after so many years, so I thought I had better do a dress rehearsal.

During the dress rehearsal, I discovered that *Little Jack Horner* didn't know what to do once I put on the harness. He was tied in the tack barn and when I tried to Ground Drive him forward, he just backed up until he was out of the building, then he went forward to the hitching area. I was rather puzzled. Still, I went ahead and hitched him to the cart and we stood there for some photos before I backed him from the hitch rail. I verbally asked him to go forward…nothing. I did not have my Driving Whip with me, so I used the end of the Drive Lines on his fanny to move him forward which he then did, but kept going straight until he ran into the fence and stopped.

I thought this was very strange, so I asked my Ranch Manager to get my Driving Whip. With the whip in hand, I began to talk to him with the whip. A simple tap to the side and he turned from the fence. Another tap in the middle of his spine sent him smartly forward at an animated walk. Another tap to the other side turned him the other way and we were soon doing Figure Eights, Stopping, Backing and Driving as if there was never a problem at all. During the film shoot, he did all these things and even offered several hundred feet of Trot before he was too tired to continue.

It was during this experience that I realized that *Little Jack Horner* had become deaf and could not hear one word of what I was saying, even when I was yelling. I was sitting in the Meadowbrook Cart, he had Blinders on his Harness Bridle and could not see me, so Verbal Language and Body Language were of no help to him at all. Lucky for us, we still had the "Touch" Language that we had developed between us and we were able to thoroughly enjoy the experience of driving yet again.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, cool.

It is evident to me that every detail that I had taken the time to learn in our 30-plus years together culminated into the results I see now with all of my equines. We have learned so much about each other! Now that we are all a lot older, a lot slower and a lot less coordinated, we are still afforded the luxury to continue to learn and grow together in a safe and enjoyable way. It doesn't get any better than this!

You want your driving experience to be a safe one so it's really important to spend adequate time with details during Driving Training. Be patient and willing to spend adequate time in the Hourglass Pattern on the Lead Rope to build adequate postural core strength which is generally three to six months, depending on the animal's experience. That's just doing the Leading Training in the Hourglass Pattern and then varying the pattern to accommodate Driving Principles on straight lines and then laterally. Then it's another three to six months with Obstacles to build coordination added to the Hourglass Pattern lessons afterwards, There's a specific way to negotiate obstacles after your donkey just gets through them. He learns to stop and listen to you in the middle of the obstacles while maintaining his Good Equine Posture and standing perfectly still until you say otherwise. Then there is another three to six months on Lunging in the Round Pen and another three to six months on Ground Driving in the Round Pen. Then you will repeat the Lunging and Ground Driving exercises in the Open arena.

There is a lot of prep work to do before you even think about riding. I prefer to do all the Under Saddle preparatory exerises and at least a year before training for driving. And if you have a younger animal, sometimes if they are an appropriate candidate for driving, it's more fun to go ahead and further develop their muscles without the stress of a rider, so you engage in driving. In the beginning, you might think that a rider is a lot more complicated for the animal to deal with than learning to pull a cart. We perceive training for driving is easier for them and expect a lot less trouble, so we are tempted to do Driving Training when they are just two years old.

However, their bodies are terribly immature and under developed at this young age. Like I previously described, donkeys have a very steep angles in their pasterns, shoulders and hips that will affect their ability to pull a vehicle efficiently. It will work adversely during every balanced move that they're trying to make. Without the support of strong postural *CORE* strength to help them to control their bodies, they are at risk for all kinds of internal abuses like locked stifles, ring bone, side bones and arthritis. All of these kinds of issues are able to be prevented with appropriate exercises done at the appropriate times in their lives.

When you address their Core Strength in Good Postural Balance in a Logical and Sequential Way using very small steps to achieve your goals, it will result in a happier, healthier companon that has great performance potential and increased longevity of use! So why not take the time to make the most of your Driving Experience!

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