

MULETALK PODCAST: DRIVING WITH MULES & DONKEYS

MEREDITH HODGES - LUCKY THREE RANCH

- How to properly train your Mule or Donkey for driving
- Carts, Carriages and Wagons
- Selecting the Right Harness for your Driving Activity
- Ground Driving and What it Means to your Animal
- Be Patient During the Training Process
- How to Build Confidence in your Animal to Drive Safely
- Not all Animals make Good Driving Companions
- Select a Good-Minded & Even-Tempered Driving Animal
- Driving is Enjoyable from Children to the Eldest Grandmother
- Working on Verbal Commands and Body Language

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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 trainer, Meredith Hodges of the Lucky Three Ranch. Today we are talking about Driving with Mules and Donkeys.

Meredith:

At one time, harness horses 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 and in Show Competitions. If you are not experienced in *Driving*, don't rely on this general knowledge to train your animal to drive. Get some *Driving* lessons from an expert. Make sure your Driving experience is enjoyable and **safe**!

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 are.

Driving is not a cinch, but it looks like it would be a really fun thing to do. There are a lot of animals such as younger mules that will take to it pretty easily from the beginning. However it is really important to do Balanced Postural Core Strength Ground Work to develop the equine body correctly. This will not only develop your equine's body for Optimum Performance, but will illicit Obedience and Good manners because he is comfortable in his work. ***He will learn to how to move and use his body correctly. The core muscles, tendons, ligaments, cartilage and soft tissue need to be developed symmetrically around the bones so you don't have problems later!***

If something happens and the equine becomes uncomfortable while they are being driven, a Longears first reaction will be the inclination to bolt and run. The first thing that could happen is the vehicle could *flip* and you could be ejected from the cart or carriage and possibly be badly injured. When the equine has that thing bouncing erratically behind him, *Heaven* help you if you are in a show when that occurs with multiple other equines and vehicles around you! You put the other people and animals at risk! I also learned that you should ***ALWAYS WEAR A HELMET*** during equine interactions! ***SAFETY FIRST!***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer): Oh, yeah. Right.

Meredith:

I had numerous experiences hitching equines for Driving and realized how important Ground Work is to assess your equine's strengths to identify the best jobs for him. Some animals are just not suitable for *Driving*! I want to fit the equine to the job for which he is most suited. I have a rescue *Mini-Mule* and *Miniature Horse* that both hated their *Ground Work Driving Training*. Rather than trying to *force* the issue, I decided to assess their attributes and their willingness to go in another direction with them.

They were *Best Buddies* and entertaining to our Tour Visitors so I just let them be that way. They didn't *HAVE* to have a specific *JOB*! I had other Driving animals to use. Today, the *Mini Mule* is the Seeing-Eye mule for the 30 year old blind *Miniature Horse*. It is still fun to have them around during the LTR Tours. People really seem to enjoy them a lot! Their Ground Manners are impeccable! They enjoyed performing for their audiences on the Lead Rope through the Trail Course, over the bridge, through poles and tires and jumping over and off various styles of jumps. *Mirage* is the cutest little *Miniature Horse* with his really long mane and thick tail! He is our representation of a *Magical Mini* here at the Lucky Three Ranch! Now that we are no longer breeding for *MULES*, he is the only *HORSE* at the ranch. The kids that come on the Tours just *LOVE* our *Minis*!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer): Right.

It's nice to have them around! They still solidify the importance of *Balanced Postural Core Strength Ground Work*. There are numerous important lessons that occur when you are doing Ground Work properly. When you begin Leading through my Hourglass Pattern in their Elbow Pull Postural Aid, it puts them in a good frame and develops their muscles and other elements correctly around the bones. Then you won't see any *Arthritis* as they age. *Mirage* is blind, but he has no *Arthritis* at 30 years old! It is the same with all of our mules and donkeys and they are all between the ages of 25 and 35 years of age. We only see our Veterinarian once a year for Spring Vaccinations! He says he misses us the rest of the years, but is glad that everyone is *HAPPY* and *HEALTHY*!

A lot of other things occur in this kind of Ground Work Training other than just *Physical Conditioning*. *Equines* learn how to be totally attentive to you and how to truly *BOND* with you. They know undeniably that you really *CARE* about them! They are less likely to *SPOOK* at anything before checking with you first. Bolting and running completely disappears. Depressing their instinct to spook is priceless, especially when you are *Driving*!

That is what you want them to be like as a Driving Animal. You need to make sure that you are both ready to proceed to *Driving Training BEFORE* you hitch your equine to a cart or carriage!

Then you can identify that the animal is a good candidate for Driving. If he pays attention in all his Ground Work exercises, beginning with *Leading Training through the Hourglass Pattern*, he will probably be a *Good Candidate* for *Driving*.

Does he *Halt* promptly at the designated *Halt Points*? Has he learned to set himself up *Four-Square* when you turn toward his shoulder? Is he willingly *Obedient* and does he promptly do what you ask? If so, he is a *Good Learner*. He learns quickly and internalizes everything that you are trying to teach him. That makes him an *IDEAL CANDIDATE* for *Driving*!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer): Wow.

Meredith:

Look at it from the *Equine's Point of View*. It's scary to have something rumbling behind you that you can't get away from. *Driving Bridles* have *Blinkers* on them, so he won't be able to see it either, even if he can hear it. So he really needs to be **sensitive to your voice** and the **feeling from your hands** through the lines. He will pick up on any tension that you have in your body through the lines. It won't take much!

People tend to think way too simply about *Driving*. They think all you need to do is to hitch the equine and get into the vehicle to drive them. They think as long as they go forward, you can steer them and pull on the lines to stop them. You need to learn how to make your intentions clear and how to dispense rewards the right way for every step they successfully complete. **One needs to learn how to reward specific behaviors that you want to be repeated.** That process is what it takes to get them to pay attention to you and to stop whenever there is a question. **Consistency teaches them to Stop, Square-up, look at you and wait for you to decide what you want them to do next.**

Equines are hyper-sensitive to **Body Language**. When you use *Ground Work Aids*, they need to be *conscientiously* repeated by you for long periods of time to make sure he's *internalizing* everything that you are teaching him. **This will make his responses HABITUAL.** Do the *Leading Exercises* through the *Hourglass Pattern* and in the *Round Pen*. Do your *Lunging* and *Lunging with a Lunge Line* attached to the bit. Use your hands to solidify that connection. You will then add a second *Lunge Line* and *Ground Drive* him in the *Round Pen* first and later in the *Open Arena*. Then you can make an assessment as to whether or not he's going to be a suitable candidate for *Driving*.

If you have a horse or mule that you can't ride because he bucks or rears up, and you think he might make a good *Driving Candidate*. The answer is ***ABSOLUTELY NOT!***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer): Right.

Meredith:

When you spend the time and effort to do ***Logical Sequential Training***, addressing all the details, the most important your equine learns is to be *attentive* to you. If he is questioning anything, instead of automatically punishing him and getting the *Flight Reflex* response, stay calm and give your equine a *CHOICE*! If he is a mule, he can opt for the ***FLIGHT REFLEX*** from the horse or he can opt for the ***FREEZE REFLEX*** from the donkey.

I would rather that my mules opt for the ***FREEZE REFLEX*** from the donkey when they get confused or antsy about anything. I prefer that they stay calm with their first impulse to be ***Stop, Turn Around, Look at me and Wait*** for a direction from me. That is what all my equines have learned to do.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer): Right.

Meredith:

You want your *Driving Experience* to be *Safe*! It is truly important to spend adequate time at each stage of training. Adequate time doing multiple tasks in the *Hourglass Pattern* generally takes three to six months. Then it's another three to six months adding *Obstacles* at the end of the *Hourglass Pattern* lessons. Do another three to six months with *Lunging* and then *Ground Driving* in the *Round Pen* and in the *Open Arena*. ***Pay attention to the details of the tasks at each stage of training before moving on to the next stage!***

You have prep work to do that takes roughly two years to accomplish before you will be able to ride or Drive your equine. If you have a younger animal that seems to be calm and takes to new things easily, you might be tempted to move along too fast. Just know that he could become sour later if he is started on some things too early. Equines need ample time to *mature* and *internalize* their training. ***It is advisable to NEVER work two days in a row. Always leave a day of rest between lessons!*** It's more fun, less risky and beneficial to go ahead and further develop their bodies without the stress of a *Rider* or *Driver*.

Be willing to spend plenty of time on the basics and ***DON'T GET IN A HURRY WITH TRAINING! Enjoy the LITTLE VICTORIES along the way before actually Riding or Driving.***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer): Right.

Meredith:

The *Basic Equipment for Pleasure Driving* is a Harness and its function is to attach the equine to a Cart or Carriage. There are many styles and sizes of Harness, each built specifically for a certain breed or to ensure *Optimum Performance* at a certain event. However, there's a third factor...***SAFETY!*** It's really important to get your Harness adjusted properly no matter what kind you are using!

In *Driving*, it is especially important that you have Good Quality Harness. ***The best suggestion is to buy NEW Harness to fit your specific animal.*** There are many reliable Tack Shops that specialize in Harness and they have experts to make sure you get what you need.

Buying Used Harness or something at a Barn Auction can be tricky and leather that looks good might 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 in the addition of *Blinders* (sometimes called "*Blinkers*") and ***Bearing Reins 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 equine's eyes!***

A *Checkrein* is a training and safety device that keeps the 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 equine's head is held unnaturally high!***

If your equine gaps his mouth and flips his tongue over the bit, you can add a *Flash Nose Band* to the existing *Nose Band* of the *Harness Bridle*. By the way, for *Mini-mules*, *Mini-Donkeys* and very small noses, a nylon *Dog Collar* makes a wonderfully versatile *Nose Band*. It can be attaches to an 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 the *Half-Cheek Snaffle Bit* or *Liverpool Bit*. If you're using a *Liverpool Bit*, make sure the *Chin Chain* lies flat below the jawline and the reins are attached on the *Snaffle Ring* (not in the leverage settings on the *Curb Shank*).

The *Drive Lines* are attached to the Bit and are similar to Reins only much longer to reach the *Vehicle Driver*. ***The Harness Collar, the Harness and the Traces are what actually attach the animal to the vehicle.*** And as the animal in his Harness moves forward, he is said to be *in drought* (pronounced “draft”). That is where the term “*Draft Horse*” comes from.

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 as much as a *Breast Collar*. Mules and donkeys are sensitive to pressure on the chest area where they are often narrower than horses. A *Breast Collar Harness* can easily become crooked and not pull evenly which can cause chafing along the shoulders and chest. This is especially critical with donkeys.

Neck Collars are made for individual animals and are not as adjustable and proper fit is crucial. Measurements for *Neck Collars* are taken from the inside of the Collar, top and 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 preferred 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* over the *Withers*. Because it is lightweight and can be easily adjusted to fit a variety of animals, it is the preferred choice for pulling light vehicles in *Show Driving Classes*. We will talk about vehicles later.

The *Traces* are attached to the *Collar* via the *Hames*, one on each side, running back and attaching to the vehicle by *Swingle Trees* and *Double Trees*. The rest of the equipment is an elaborate girth rigging called a *Saddle* or *Surcingle* that straps to the *Girth Area* and supports the weight of a two-wheeled vehicle, absorbs the 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 or back up the vehicle. *Tugs* attached to the *Saddle* to support the *Shafts*. A ***Kicking Strap*** can be attached to the *Shafts* so if your equine kicks, the strap over his rear end prevents him from getting his hind legs high enough to do damage. The ***Kicking Strap*** is attached to the *Breeching* over the top of the equine's rear end. It comes down on both sides and ties directly onto the *Shafts*. It does not angle forward the way the *Breeching Straps* do. If they try to lift their rear end to kick, it is tight enough to stop them. If they cannot raise their *behind* very far, they can't kick you in the face.

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 must be considered. You must be able to reach over the *Withers* with the *Whip* from the *Driver's Seat*. **The *Whip* should be well-balanced, with a *Drop Lash* long enough to reach your equine's shoulder.**

You might also use training aids such as an *Elbow Pull* or *Emergency Draw Reins* to give yourself more leverage and keep your mule in the proper frame. If you have an animal that tends to be very strong in the bridle, you can adjust your *Elbow Pull* in a *Draw Rein* position as an Emergency Stop. I call it the *Emergence Draw Rein Position* and it will give you extra leverage during training.

When showing in *Harness* with a bold animal, it is best to use a *Liverpool Bit* and adjust the lines to the *Curb Shank* where you need the extra leverage. With more *Curb Shank* action, you will also get more animation from your equine.

Emergency Draw Reins

1. Use two *Draw Reins*, one for each side, each with a *snap* on one end and a *loop* on the other
2. Run the snap end of the *Draw Reins* through the turret on the *Surcingle* as if it was a normal *Driving Line*
3. Run the snap end of the *Draw Rein* through the *Bit Ring* and back to the *Surcingle*

4. Attach it to the *Tug Loop D-Ring* on the *Surcingle*
5. Attach your *Drive Lines* to the loop ends of your *Draw Reins*.
6. When you use this rigging, it will give you added leverage to slow the equine when you pull on the *Drive Lines*.

Elbow Pull Draw Postural Aid (Draw Reins)

1. Use a measure piece of 3/8 inch twisted nylon cord with small snaps on both ends
2. Center the cord resting over the Poll
3. Run the cord through the crown piece slit on top of the headstall at the Poll, underneath the Throatlatch Strap, or through the split in the Over Check to make sure it does not slip down his neck to his back
4. Even it up on both sides
5. Run the ends of the Elbow Pull on each side through the Bit Rings and between his front legs
6. Attach the 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. Don't adjust the *Elbow Pull* so tight that the equine holds his head too low which is both uncomfortable and unsafe.
7. When using the Elbow Pull on a Horse, simply crisscross the Elbow Pull ends over the back and tie them to each other in a LOOSE over-lapping knot that can pull loose if it is put under pressure (***See the instructions for using the Elbow Pull in DVD #2 and on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com under TRAINING/TRAINING TIPS #36).***

Lunging and *Ground Driving* your equine in Harness are important steps in his training. Both you and your equine 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 equine is comfortable and remains calm. He will become used to the *Blinkers* on the *Harness Bridle*, to the flapping leathers and things he can't see happening behind him.

Here are the steps for tying-up the Harness Straps before Lunging:

1. Attach the *Over-check* or *Side Check* 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*
3. As an alternative, you can take each *Trace* and tie it snugly to the rings on the *Breeching* on each side with a *Figure-Eight Knot* if your *Collar* tends to slide forward even with the *Over Check* in place
4. Buckle the *Tug Straps* to the *Girth Straps* so they don't flop around
5. Run the *Breeching Strap* through each *Tug Strap* and back to the buckles

6. Make certain the *Quarter Straps* on a *Team Harness* are properly attached to prevent flopping around

You can *Lunge* and *Ground Drive* your equine in *Full Harness*. Just be sure that, as you work him, the *Traces* stay up and out of the way.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Yeah

Meredith:

It's not cruel to have *Blinders* on the *Harness Bridle*. It helps the equine to be more focused and stay calm regardless of any distractions. You've already done the Ground Work to make him pay attention to you. If you've spent that kind of time, you'll have a Good Rapport with your animal. You will be able to stop him from bolting and running or doing something silly by using your **Voice** and your **Body Language**. But sometimes even *WE* get spooked and something happens to make us catch our breath. Equines have the same kinds of reactions.

I do think it's good to have those *Blinders* on the *Harness Bridle* regardless of whether they will cooperate with or without them. I believe in helping your animal by being *proactive* and by leaving the *Blinders* on the *Harness Bridle* so they can *easily focus*.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer): Mm-hmm.

Meredith:

If you are in a *Pleasure Class*, *Obstacle Driving* or *Drive & Ride Class* at a show, people will often use the *Breast Collar Harness* because it can be cleaner looking and it is easier putting it on and taking it off, especially with the three-minute *Tack Change* limit in the *Drive & Ride Class*.

In the *Drive & Ride Class*, you will first be judged at the *Walk*, *Trot*, *Extended Trot*, *Halt and Rein Back in Harness*. Then you will need to disconnect the vehicle, remove the harness, put on your English or Western Saddle, change from your *Driving Attire* into your *Riding Clothes* that match your style of *Driving* and *Riding*, all done in three minutes! Then you will be judged at the *Walk*, *Trot*, *Canter*, *Halt and Rein Back Under Saddle*!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Really? And you made it within three minutes? This three 1minute thing is when you pull your vehicle in the center and you got three minutes to get to your riding outfit, have you done that yourself?

Meredith:

Oh, yes! Of course, ***when you are taking off the harness, the bridle will be the last thing to be taken off. It is also the last thing to be put on.*** You are allowed a groom to hold the animal.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer): Okay. (laughs)

Meredith:

That is also true when you are hitching them up during *Training* or *Showing*. When you are training and putting on the *Harness*, or hitching them up, ***you always tie them up with a halter and NEVER tie them up with the bridle. You can put a halter over or under the bridles, but you NEVER tie them up with the bridle!*** When I am at home, I have *Permanent Chains* at my hitch rails. I don't use ropes because mules like to chew through the *Lead Ropes*. I use *Carabineer Snaps* on the chains because if you don't use those kinds of snaps, Longears can get their teeth into any other kind, undo them and run off!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
(laughs) Oh boy.

The other thing that I will do is school them in the *Elbow Pull* in their *Harness* so they are in *Good Posture* while they are learning *EVERYTHING!* When you are adjusting the *Harness* and *Traces* to the vehicle, you want to make sure that your animal is standing about two feet in front of the *Swingle Tree* or the front of a cart. If your *Shafts* are too long, they will need to be shortened to an appropriate length. Leave plenty of room behind the equine and position the ends of the *Shafts* at the *Point of the Shoulder*. You want the cart to pull forward or back with their first step. If there is too much slack in the *Harness*, they will experience a sharp jerk on the *Traces* and across the chest when they move with a *Breast Collar Harness*.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Okay.

Meredith:

If you do *Combined Training* with *Driven Dressage*, it is very important that the cart moves with the equine and the same on the *Driven Cross Country Course*. Now they make *Marathon carts* that actually attach to the *Tugs* and not up by the shoulders to enhance their *Turning Ability*. **You always want a vehicle that is *Appropriate to the Show or Class in a show*.** You would not use a *Marathon Cart* in a *Pleasure Driving Class*. A more appropriate vehicle would be an oaken *Meadowbrook Cart*. In a show, they might even have a *Pneumatic Wheels Class* where you can show in your metal *Training Cart*.

Most of the time you'll need to look at the *Rulebook* to see what kinds of vehicles are accepted at certain shows and what kinds of *Dress* is allowed with each vehicle. This can change from show to show. You will be judged on *everything* and not just how your animal is going in Harness and how responsive he is. You will also be judged on what YOU look like and is your vehicle is proportionate and suitable to the equine you are driving? ***Harness him about two feet ahead of the vehicle in case he decides to kick.***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah. (laughs)

Meredith:

You can discourage kicking during training with a ***Kicking Strap***. Put your *Harness* on with the *Surcingle (Saddle)* 4" behind the forearm where your *Saddle Girth* should be. The *Surcingle* should be situated where the thicker skin begins to swell into the torso. Don't tighten it around the thinner skin that is right behind the forearm. Your equine could be exposed to a lot of *rubbing, chafing and would become very uncomfortable*. ***It doesn't matter if you cover it with fleece. Fleece can still cause chafing, even on the thicker skin.***

The *Harness* needs to sit steady and move *with* your equine. Remember we talked about your saddle fitting *stable in its position* so it can move *WITH* your equine. It needs to be *snug*, but not so tight that feels like it's cutting them in half! The *Surcingle* needs to be *snug* and *not tight* just like your *Saddle Girth*. ***A lot of people are inclined to keep it TOO loose and when it is too loose, the equine can again become sore from chafing.*** The equine needs to be able to freely move his hind legs. The *Harness* should only be loose enough so he can still move the vehicle on his first step!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Cool.

Meredith:

There were those that never kicked, but there were those that would stamp their feet and get very irritated. I want them to behave. I want each equine to learn to learn to stand still and I reward them for it. I go around their body until they stand still. I go from front to back and then immediately go from back to front and give them their crimped oats reward and wait for them to chew it ALL up! It's harder for them to chew with a bit in their mouth so I am patient about allowing them enough time to chew their oats during training so they don't choke on them from being anxious and trying to hurry.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Right.

Meredith:

Verbal Commands are really important in *Driving*. I never *Canter* them in *Harness* during training. They can do that later in the *Gambler's Choice Timed Events* after they are more advanced in their training. *Cantering* is not required until much later. If the equine is responsive to what he is taught at *Walk, Trot and the Extended Trot*, he can cover more ground by simply adding suspension to his gaits through a *Strengthened and Balanced Core Muscle Frame*. Everything that I do takes place in a *Logical and Sequential Way* so at no time does the animal become overwhelmed at any stage of training. It is a *Natural Progression* and the *Verbal Communication* grows slowly with the connection of actions with words.

The *Sequential Progression* is described in the *Dressage* sections of the *United States Equestrian Federation Training Manual* in the *Dressage Division*. You want to get your equine used to the *Verbal Commands*. You are giving him *Verbal Commands* and putting them in sync with the way he moves. When you repeat those commands repetitively, the same way every time, the equine actually learns the *Language*. Two more important Verbal Commands for Driving: *Gee* go, right and *Haw*, go left. As they learn the *Verbal Language*, you can add more words with more actions like *Gee Around* and *Haw Around* where they learn to pivot on a circle around you on the *Drive Lines*. This will put them in the right position on their Pivot Foot to do that kind of turn. They will learn to put a cart on the *Pivot Wheel* and execute an extremely tight turn in *Harness*. You should always make sure you are executing these movements correctly so you won't *strain, sprain or tweak any muscles* in their body while they are working.

These moves are particularly important during ***Lateral Training***. You need to be concise with your ***Reinsmanship***, how you are steering the animal and allowing the right kind of movement for *Gee Around* and *Haw Around*. *Gee Around* and *Haw Around* teach your equine how to *pivot* on a circle with you in the middle, not moving at all. This is how you put your ***Verbal Commands*** together with the way you want your equine to move. Once he understands the basics of ***Lateral Motion***, you can keep both *Reins* or *Lines* fairly snug with just a slight release on the outside *Rein* to indicate *Direction* and teach him to *Side Pass*. I do everything while ***Ground Driving*** first and then repeat it ***Under Saddle*** and in *Harness*. ***When they are finally hitched, you will be able to direct them without the use of the Drive Lines on Verbal Commands alone.***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Okay.

Meredith:

So it just solidifies the *Language* between you. I will be able to turn my cart around anywhere I want to in a very tight circle where the animal is actually making the inside wheel of the cart the *Pivot Foot*. This is very helpful when you get into *Obstacle Driving Classes* that might, or might not be timed. You just make your animal move sideways while you watch the wheel and not let him go forward on the small circle. You make him turn the cart on the *Pivot Wheel*. Once they learn these moves, you can even manipulate them through a gate with no problem at all! ***When they are hitched, you want their experience***

to be almost completely bulletproof!

If you have trained your animal in a *Single Hitch Cart*, when he gets with his *Teammate* on a wagon, your time will be much better on an *Obstacle Driving Course*. There are a lot of different styles of *Carts and Carriages* for *Finished Driving Equines* (and even other animals such as *Goats and Cattle*). Just make sure they are *Proportionate in Size* and be sure to consider the *Weight Pulled with the Weight of your Driving Animal*. Teaching each individual animal by himself first and *later* with a *Teammate* is preferred to enhance his *Confidence* and *Proficiency*. It will make for a much safer *Driving Animal*.

Once an equine panics and runs in harness, it is very difficult to bring them back if you ever expect to drive them safely again! ***They learn EXACTLY what they are taught so be careful what you teach them and NEVER be in a hurry. Give them all the time they need to internalize your lessons. You want them to be absolutely BULLETPROOF!***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, wow.

Meredith:

Spend at least two years in your Confined Indoor or Outdoor Arena with Minimal Distractions. Practice all the things that you think he might be able to do. Don't think your equine is doing so well that he is ready to drive down the road! ***This isn't about what YOU think about your animal. It's what the animal thinks about any given situation.*** When you take advantage of him by making assumptions and taking shortcuts, you could run into some really bad situations by simply being impatient.

I have been called as a witness at several *Court Cases*. One of the cases involved a paralyzed man that was thrown out of his wagon by his three year old team of mules. He said they were spooked by a *Dump Truck* on the road and he was suing the *Dump Truck Driver*. I felt very badly about it, but in my testimony I had to tell the *Court* that it was really the man's own fault for taking such young, inexperienced mules onto a highway like that. The mules should have had 2 years of *Ground Work in a Confined Area* before even thinking about driving them anywhere else.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Ooh.

Actually, I don't believe it is safe to be driving animals on the road at all anymore. When I was growing up, I used to ride on the roads all the time. I could go for 5 or 10 miles from my house and ride back safely. I could ride between towns on the main highways. ***It used to be that people understood that they needed to significantly slow down when they saw equines on the road. It's rare if anyone slows down these days!*** You are really putting you and your animals at risk if you do ride on the roads. And if you have anyone riding or driving with you, you are putting them at risk as well. ***It's just not safe!***

Our Longears will do just about anything for us if we are polite about the way we ask them. They try so hard to please us because they want so much to be with us. They aren't like horses that would rather be ***GRAZING!***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
Right.

Meredith:

Be prepared to take ample time to build a relationship that enhances the ***Language*** between you so you both understand each other and can respond appropriately in any given situation. You could get into trouble in your own driveway if someone decides to pull in too fast!

There are a lot of ***Safe Driving Activities*** to enjoy once you and your equine have prepared yourselves correctly. They can even include your neighbors! On Halloween, we decorated our Surrey and dressed up Mae Bea C.T. as a witch. We got decked out in costumes and ***Trick or Treated*** the neighborhood. The neighbors LOVED it!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):
(laughs) Oh, cool.

In Wyoming, they have a weeklong *Trail Drive* where they play *Old Time Settlers*. Everybody gets out their *Teams and their Saddle Mules* and spend a week *Camping and Trail Riding and Driving*. It could be a lot of fun, but it could be stressful if you neglected to adequately prepare yourself and your animals.

On any excursion like that, your mule could get sore and grumpy. There is no other way to develop their bodies properly other than Slow, Logical and Sequential Training. Then you won't end up with an animal who is uncomfortable being with you and one that could eventually develop Arthritis, Ring Bone, Side Bones Locked Stifles and other issues as he ages. Better to just get HEALTHY and STAY HEALTHY!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith:

In my ***Training Without Resistance Manual*** that also coincides with ***DVD #3***, we show you How to hold your *Drive Lines* and *Whip* properly. This is particularly important when you are showing, but it's also important to know how to effectively use your *Driving Whip*, how to sustain even pressure on the *Drive Lines*, how to pass them all into one hand (the *Aukenbach Method*) and how to do *Turns and Pivots*. There are numerous pictures and diagrams in the books and demonstrations in the videos. ***We have a wealth of information available about DRIVING YOUR EQUINES!***

You can find a lot more about DRIVING MANAGEMENT & TRAINING on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com

TRAINING: Another Augie & Spuds Adventure

TRAINING: Training Tips (#109 – #120)

TRAINING: Longears Music Videos: *Bishop Mule Days Parade; Bishop Mule Days Driving; As the Wheels Turn; Rolling Along Donkey Carts; Multiple Longears Hitches; Bishop Mule Days Single Hitches & Teams; 20-Mule Team*

TRAINING: MULE CROSSING ARTICLES: *Showing in Harness; Getting Down with Minis (#1 – #5); Bishop Mule Days 1986; Bishop Mule Days 1990; Bishop Mule Days Press Release 2010; Celebrating the Pioneer Spirit of the Mule; Colorado Classic Horse Show 1987; In Celebration of Mule History; Inaugural Parade 1993; National Western Fall Classic 1984; National Western Stock Show 1987; National Western Stock Show 1988; New Year's Rose Parade 1988; Pre-Pasadena Rose Parade 1987; Press Release 20-Mule Team Comes to LTR; Recognizing Mules as Viable Athletes; What Are Mules Good For?; In Appreciation of Mules*

TRAINING: MULETALK PODCASTS: *Driving with Mules & Donkeys; Donkey Training #4; Donkey Training #5*

STORE: EQUUS REVISITED: *Chapter VI: Driving Stretches (TMD # 3) Active Stretching Exercises: Lunging, Ground Driving, Obstacle Ground Driving*

STORE: TRAINING MULES & DONKEYS: A LOGICAL APPROACH TO LONGEARS

STORE: A GUIDE TO RAISING & SHOWING MULES

STORE: TRAINING WITHOUT RESISTANCE

STORE: TRAINING MULES & DONKEYS DVD #3

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Hey, Meredith, thank you for coming on. Have a wonderful afternoon.

Meredith:

It's always my pleasure to help people by sharing all this important information to make their experiences much more pleasurable and to enhance the bond between them and their animals!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

You bet. Gotta go. My mule is looking for me!

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) Building of a Nation
- 16) Give Your Equine the Athletic Edge
- 17) For Children: www.JasperTheMule.com for books & videos