

## **RIDING SIDE SADDLE (ASIDE)**

MEREDITH HODGES - LUCKY THREE RANCH

- *Belle Star* rode side saddle!
- How to achieve position and security when riding in a side saddle
- Learn the three types of side saddles and what they offer
- Learn the proper attire when riding aside
- Men do ride Side Saddle!
- Shows/classes that offer side saddle
- Proper bits to use when showing in side saddle
- Care and reconditioning of side saddles
- There are Side Saddle organizations (I.S.S.O.)!

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Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

The mules are in the corral. Welcome to Mule Talk, and I'm Cindy K. Roberts, your host. And our author, TV personality, and world-renowned mule trainer, Meredith Hodges of the Lucky Three Ranch. We're gonna be talking about side saddle.

Meredith Hodges:

It's good to be back, and what a better subject to go around, uh, than side saddle. Most people don't even think about it, but when I was thinking about doing this interview, it was pretty amazing all the different things that came up because I did side saddle from 1991 to 2000. I learned a lot. I learned tons doing that.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow. That is so neat. There's a photo that comes to my mind and that is, I remember seeing Belle Starr riding side saddle, and I didn't know that you could rob a bank or steal horses while riding side saddle.

Meredith Hodges:

Oh, yeah. Well, back in the old days, that's the way women rode.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

And they weren't really supposed to ride any other way, but I suppose there are ones like Calamity Jane and Annie Oakley that rode astride and they could cover it up with their skirt.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

But it's really more of a solid position on the horse than you might even think because the only thing that's gonna throw you off is if you get twisted on that side saddle. And I learned in a clinic that if you grab mane with the left hand and you grab a crupper or the back of the saddle with your right hand, it will keep your shoulders in alignment, and then your hips will be in alignment with the spine and it'll keep you balanced on that saddle.

When you put that right leg over the, the horn of a side saddle, you can't grip it, just grip it without having your body in the right position because it will twist your hips. But if you just put that leg over, that right leg over, and instead of just gripping that horn right in the crux behind the knee, that will twist you. If you put that leg over and keep your femur on your right leg parallel to the spine, it is a very secure position, probably more so than riding astride.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

The only thing is, is you don't wanna come off the side saddle because there's only a couple ways to come off. One is off the right side if you do get twisted.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

And the other way is off the back, and it just lands you right on your back.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Whoa.

Meredith Hodges:

And it's impossible to do that roll thing that you can do when you're riding astride. If you go off and you're riding astride, you usually go off forward from one side to the other and you can tuck and roll, but there's no way to tuck and roll off a side saddle. (laughs)

My side saddle mule CG taught me that. We were practicing in the dressage arena where I've got, like, three, four inches of sand there, and she bolted, then hopped when she bolted. And I wasn't ready for it at all so I didn't have myself in position. And I went right off the back.

Audio:

Uh-oh.

Meredith Hodges:

And I just, after I landed, I thought, "I don't wanna do this again."

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

(laughs) And I never did. And she never bolted either because she didn't like it that I came off 'cause I usually don't-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

... not off of her.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

She's kinda, kind of a, a... She was kind of a hyped-up mule really, you know? And she would do what she wanted, but when she didn't wanna do it, she had some pretty good moves. And when we were getting ready for the class, the side saddle

class, when we were riding against Saddlebreds and Tennessee Walkers and everything like that, they abandoned us in that class and made us go out by ourselves the second time, uh, which was our second time out after about three years. And they saw that the mules were gonna do really well.

So they found out I was riding and I ended up having to ride the class by myself, but while all the horses were leaving, CG thought that she should leave too.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

And so she reared up with me in that side saddle. And I was, I was really surprised at how secure I was. So, yeah, Belle Starr's gonna chase horses-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

... she's gonna be more secure probably-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

... than the riders who are not riding on a side saddle (laughs) and don't have that option of really gripping out there in front.

When you're dumping, you do have to bend at the waist and lean forward and not stay in your, your balanced seat because it will throw you off the back 'cause you, you've gotta stay over that spine and your legs are held out in front of you instead of equally down on both sides, and you have to take that into consideration when you're jumping.

I'd like to tell you a little bit about my history.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

I was always horse-crazy. I would try all kinds of gymnastics and things when I was younger. And I was born in Minneapolis in 1950 and I, when I was six years old, I got a bouncing horse. I don't know if you remember those that were on coil springs.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

And, uh, my parents got me a set of chaps and a vest, which I wore all the time. My grandmother was horrified because she was little miss I'm gonna sit in front of the TV in my tweed suit and all my jewelry and my stockings and everything.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

So, she was always trying to get me to dress up like a girl, but I said, "You can't ride in a skirt." You know, (laughs) even on a bouncing horse.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
(laughs) Oh, that's good.

Meredith Hodges:

(laughs) So I would fight with her, and one, (laughs) one time she tried to take me to the mall and she says, "Now, you better get in your nice pretty little frilly dress and we're gonna go to the mall and you'll see all the little girls are gonna be dressed like that." And I, I said, "No, I don't think so."

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

"I wanna be ready to ride."

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
All right.

Meredith Hodges:

So my grandmother conceded-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

... (laughs) because she didn't wanna argue with me.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

And we went to the mall and we came back and she looked at me and she said, "See, I told you all those pretty little girls would be wearing dresses. Now don't you wish you had worn yours?" I said, "Nope." I still only wore my, my dresses for church. That was it.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

I was in pants and it wasn't... I was a tomboy, I-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

That's who I was. And I didn't want... That didn't mean I wanted to be a boy, I just wanted to be in the proper clothing to do all the work.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

And when, when I went riding with my aunt along the Mississippi River, I got dirty.

Audio:

That is really cool.

Meredith Hodges:

And you don't wanna be dirty in a pretty little dress, you know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

I just figured it was better to be dirty in pant.

We moved to California in 1958 and I got my first horse, Duchess. She was about a 16 two-hand Palomino Morgan-Tennessee Walker cross. She was awesome. But see, even there, I was very much a tomboy, cleaning stalls, doing chores on the ranch, and riding my horse. In '61 I even joined a 4-H Club and got for her for cattle, and now I was a real cowgirl 'cause I had cows.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

All right.

Meredith Hodges:

You know? (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

And in '62, I finally got some jeans to wear underneath my chaps, a belt, cowboy boots, proper Western shirts, and a hat. And still, I learned feminine skills like cooking and sewing from my grandmother, and I still wore my dresses on Sunday. And I was working on becoming a lady, but most of the time I was being a real Western girl.

I went ahead in '73 to '79 and worked on my mother's mule ranch on the weekends while I was going to psych tech school and getting a psychiatric technician's license. And I spent the next 20 years trying to prove that mules and donkeys could really do anything that horses can do and much more. So I rode them in every event that I was allowed in against horses, and most of the clubs were really good and let me ride in the open classes.

At the same time, I was teaching my mother's 30 mules a year to wean... I got the weanlings to teach to lead, so I didn't do much riding. Although she did give me a mule to ride to get used to mules. When I was riding my mules against horses, as we improved, I had several different mules to school. So I wouldn't just go out and practice one thing over and over again; I practiced different disciplines on different days during the week. I never drilled on anything, but spent limited time teaching the things I had to learn slowly, sequentially, and logically.

This meant that the mules were doing different things on different days and they really appreciated the diversity. You know, one day we would work on Western, one day we'd work on English, one day we'd work on jumping. And our schedule is something like this, Monday through Thursday were training days from 5:00 AM to 5:00 PM and sometimes later in the evening. Then on Friday, while I packed up my truck and trailer for the weekend shows, the mules were turned out for a day of rest. And then Friday night or Saturday morning, we'd load up and leave for the show and return on Sunday night when the cycle would begin all over again. And I did that for 20 years.

We competed in gymkhana, English, Western pleasure, driving, and Gambler's Choice, drive and ride, Western riding, reining, trail, dressage, and combined training. And it made for exceptional skills as I learned, and the equines just kept learning and got better and better too. So by the time that I decided I was gonna try a side saddle, we had learned quite a bit. And the crowning glory was not just our success in dressage and combined training, but the success - real success was that we had learned together, which made learning side saddle a whole lot easier than you might think. We even jumped 2-9 side saddle in the first year.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

And it was by, it was by (laughs) no mean a cinch. When Lucky Three CG and I won the ISSO Championship in '92 and then Reserve Champion in 1993, I bought a life membership to the International Side Saddle Organization and continued to compete. I was wearing dresses and aprons when I rode.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

I was not prepared for the high that I got from finally becoming a real lady.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

A lady-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

... mule skinner.

Audio:

Woo!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay!

Meredith Hodges:

(laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Well, now that's impressive.

Meredith Hodges:

Yeah. Well, it was and I became a lady and I'm very proud that I did. That was no real easy thing to do-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

... in my, in my estimation, you know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

So, but no, it, it was kind of a thrill, really, doing all that. And then thought about it and I wrote this article about side saddle and, uh, today the concept of elegance has been greatly compromised by the fast pace of our progressive society. Few of us neither have the time nor the inclination to do what's necessary to cultivate this concept as a major part of our lives. Most of us have gotten very casual in our dress, and the only people that dress up are people that do fundraisers and go to work in a suit and things like that.

Women today have far too many jobs and responsibilities with which to cope without worrying about being elegant. Unless she lives in a densely populated urban area, there are just not a lotta places where a woman can practice being elegant.

One of the places she can, however, is in the growing number of side saddle classes that are offered at many of the different breed shows across the country. And this is where the mule started was in these side saddle classes 'cause they were considered open classes. And when they started with side saddle, there were two basic side saddles you could use, English and Western. And then, of course, there were the Vintage saddles, which were a third thing. And when women began riding side saddle and off- they offered classes in side saddle, the women started fighting about p- the other women in the class weren't, weren't wearing the right thing.

And, uh, they were convinced finally that if they wanted to have side saddle classes in a show, they were going to have to get a little bit less particular about who was riding how. And just make sure that the costumes fit the saddle and the tack that they were riding. And they just made them open classes. And at the most, they would split these classes into English and Western when they had enough riders, but most of the time they didn't, so they combined the classes and the ladies learned to just tolerate each other. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) Oh, right?

Meredith Hodges:

And be nice and, and exhibit polite manners along with their elegant dress, you know? So...

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

Um, and then, of course, mules can be lovely, obedient, and secure side saddle mounts when they're brought along correctly, and that was exhibited by Crystal Ward who used to ride at Bishop Mule Days, and I got to know her and she was an inspiration to me and my daughter to begin riding side saddle, and so we did that. And we not only rode in Bishop Mule Days, we also rode at the National Western Stock Show. And, uh, our local club, the Colorado Donkey & Mule Society, they promoted and endorsed the side saddle classes so that we had plenty of entries in the parades that we had locally, and that inspired other people to ride in the parades.

I also met Anne Hathaway who had this lovely dressage mule, Baby Huey, who was 16 two-hands, and they exhibited in the Bishop Mule Days Parade. I judged the American Donkey & Mule Society Nationals in Austin, Minnesota. And again, I saw a sprinkle of elegant mule side saddle riders on mules there. And in, like I was saying, in Colorado, there was a real surge of side saddle riders beginning in 1983. The side saddle classes for the mules at National Western Stock Show in Denver had no less than 10 entries in its beginning in '83 when the Mule Division was brought back after a long absence from the show.

Generally speaking, people are quite impressed with the ladies who ride aside. And a common question often arises, "You sure look elegant, but how on earth can you stay on that way?"

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

(laughs) And we-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

... boldly reply, "Our mules teach us and we learn. We are lady mule skimmers."

Audio:

That is the correct answer.

Meredith Hodges:

(laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

There you go.

Meredith Hodges:

You either, yeah, you either get totter or you get dumped off. You know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

Mules don't take any BS from anybody. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

So you learn to be polite to your mule and your mule will be polite to you, and it works really well. And I think they even feel a little gi- bit elegant too because they get a little more suspension to their gait and they, they act a little more prissy when we're up there on our side saddles, you know? The- they don't really want you to fall off either, you know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

They would rather you just-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

... use your good manners and, and ride the right way.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

You know? And like I said, riding aside is much more secure than riding astride because of the grip you can achieve with your legs around the pommel and the leaping horn of the side saddle. But you will need to use your stomach muscles to settle your seat smoothly at the trot and canter because when you're jumping, unlike riding the balance seat to a fence with both legs forward and deep in your heels, you will need to lean forward and bend at the waist a bit to remain stable in your seat. Because you have... you haven't got the same kind of balance, I guess you'd say.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

And so to help maintain that center of balance over the spine, you practice by holding the mane in your left hand and reach behind and hang onto your crupper, or the back of a saddle, with your right hand. This keeps your center of gravity so you don't slide to one side or the other. And regardless of whether your balance is wrapped around those horns in front, which kinda throws you sideways, the stirrup on the left will be enough to allow the femur to make contact with the left horn while your right leg keeps the femur parallel to the spine when you put, not the crux of your knee, but the top of the calf up against the other horn. And you always look up and ahead.

This was demonstrated clearly at a side saddle clinic given by Patti Chadwick at the Bitterroot Mule Company in Bennett on March 23rd of 1993 when I went down there. Six beginning side saddle riders of various equitation skills proved to be quite secure in their seats by the end of the clinic and no one had any problems to speak of that day. All levels of the rider were jumping cavaletti by the end of the clinic.

So you see it isn't as insecure as one might think, and with an instructor like Patti, it was, it was a s- snap. The name of the game is balance, and whether riding astride on a mule, horse, pony, or donkey, it's always a rewarding challenge to finally be able to master this art. My daughter, Dena, and I enjoyed riding aside both in the shows and in the parades. Dena was really thrilled to be able to compete against the best seasoned side saddle rider, Crystal Ward, in the Bishop Mule Days Side Saddle class. And she actually beat her one year.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

And she was-

Audio:

That is really cool.

Meredith Hodges:

... tickled to be able to do that 'cause Crystal was an impeccable rider.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

Side saddle especially.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm-hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

She rode everything like we did. She did everything from g- gymkhana to pleasure to reining to all these other things, but she was so elegant in side saddles. And side saddles do come in three basic categories, English, Western, and Period saddles, otherwise known as Vintage saddles. The English side saddle is probably the best one in which to learn since the seat is better balanced over your animal. You have to realize that different people try their skills at building these different side saddles. And most of the older ones are pretty torn up, you know? The people didn't take care of 'em as well as we do now.

And the other thing was, the older side saddles were built to fit a smaller framed rider and larger animals.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm-hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

Because yesterday's animals were a lot bigger than they are today. And so the side saddles of yesterday don't necessarily fit the conformation of the animals and the size of the ladies today.

Although most side saddles today are bought used, there are side saddle companies that are making them again due to the increased demand. If you buy a side saddle, make sure it fits your equine as well as yourself to assure the best ride. There are also Vintage side saddles from different cultures. Just make sure that the tack and equipment and the equine match the accessories that you wear.

For instance, Joan Triolo, that rode with us in the 1988 Rose Parade, was in a beautiful Mexican-made side saddle and bridle made of horse hair and everything. And she, of course, wore a Mexican outfit, a Mexican dress with a sombrero. So you wanna make sure that... You know, the ladies, like I said, they did accept the new rules of riding together, but they would not tolerate if your side saddle attire did not match your side saddle.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

Now, when you are riding in a regular side saddle, there are several basic side saddles like I said. There are English, Western, and Vintage or a Period saddle, and you wanna make sure they're in good repair and pick the size that fits both you and your animal.

The proper bit for a side saddle is either a full bridle, full double bridle with a bridoon direct rein contact, like a snaffle, and a leverage bit, and they both go in the mouth at the same time. To make sure that your smaller-mouthed animals don't have too much in their mouth, an accepted bridle is the pelham, which is a direct rein bridle, but it also, it has a short shank on it and it's got rings up by the, the corners of the mouth and a ring at the bottom of the shank. But it only has one bar going across the animal's tongue, and that can either be a broken mouthpiece or it can be a mullen straight bar mouthpiece on it.

Any horse, mule, donkey, or pony can be used for side saddle, provided that they are a calm, suitable mount and that you can find the right side saddle to fit properly. Many off-track thoroughbreds are extremely athletic and preferred by riders for dressage, jumping, and fox hunting, and so a lot of those off-track thoroughbreds are very popular for side saddle.

There are three types of side saddles that'll be term- determined by use. The near-side side saddle is most common, but the off-side and two-sided saddles... The

two-sided saddles have horns on both sides. And in the article that I'm gonna post with this, this interview, it's got pictures of all these side saddles. The off-side use is a good saddle for somebody who is injured in their left leg and needs to be able to have that left leg hung over the horn, or if they are an amputee, they will need to just have that, the option of just being supported on the one side and hanging your leg on the right side instead of on the left side. So they do build saddles, you know, to accommodate these kinds of things.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

And, and in the instance of, say, the lady that goes ahead and buys an off-track thoroughbred to ride side saddle and they, they make really nice side saddle mounts, but a lot of the times these off-track thoroughbreds are trained to go around to the left on an arc (laughs) because that's the way the track is.

So a lot of these animals are one-sided and kind of off-balance animals. When these ladies use one for side saddle, they often have a groom that will exercise the horse for them for balance so they don't have to do it when they're riding side saddle. So these guys need to be able to exercise the horse both ways, and that's the side saddle that has the, the horns on both sides.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

So that these exercise guys can go out there and ride it for a while one way, then loop their legs off the other side and ride it the other way, and then they can put the lady's side saddle on it, give it to her, and the horse is balanced.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Hm.

Meredith Hodges:

Does that make sense?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure. Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

Yeah. You don't think about that part of it, do you? (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

No. I mean... (laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

And then, yeah, it's, it's very different. But, you know, when you're thinking about uses like that and you don't want a lady having to balance her horse from one side-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

... and it's easier to have a groom exercising that horse and doing it for both sides when nobody's watching at five o'clock in the morning! (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

You know? 'Cause these guys don't-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Good point.

Meredith Hodges:

... necessarily wanna be seen riding side saddle either.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

Although there are those, like this one guy that had a wife that rode side saddle, so he thought that he would ride side saddle too. And I do have a picture of him in a Western side saddle so that you can see that he, he... The way picture is taken from the off-side, so you can see how the saddle is rigged.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh.

Meredith Hodges:

It's a Western saddle and, and they're rigged a little differently than the English saddles are.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

Um, in the article, like I said, he's in the article and he can show you the Western rigging. And then there is a, a diagram that I put in it how to, to rig an English side saddle with all the different straps that there are. You have the regular girth that goes right underneath it, but then you also have, you have all of this other stuff. You've got an over-girth that goes over the, the, the girth right behind the fore legs. But then you have what's called a balance strap that comes diagonally across from the off-side, underneath diagonally to the front girth. So it's a diagonal from the back of the saddle on the off-side to the front of the saddle on the near-side.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

And this diagram can kinda show you, you know, how that's all rigged.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

Now, with these Period dresses that we're using and everything, you have to wear different hats. And so for the classes, it would not be acceptable really when you're talking about scoring from judges on the appropriateness of your attire because if you're wearing a vintage dress, for an instance, you need a vintage hat. If you're riding Western, you need a Western hat.

And so what they have done is they have used jockey helmets so that you are in line with wearing a helmet, but they make these jockey ha- helmets so they go

underneath the hats of the ladies that are appropriate for their attire. And so that's how you see them, and still, they're protected and they're wearing a safety helmet.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, wow. Huh.

Meredith Hodges:

You know? Yeah. So you just wear it underneath your period hat.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

Or under your Western hat. And then with, of course, with the English side saddle there are, with Vintage, there are dresses, but most often with the English attire, you're going to have what's called an apron that you can put over your English pants that will... It's like a skirt. It is short around the back and the off-side so that it shows the full rigging of the saddle, where the vintage dresses will drape over on both sides and cover everything up so you can go ahead and wear whatever you want underneath those dresses. And, and that also goes with boots.

When you're showing English, the apron makes it so much easier to get on because it, it comes together with ve- Velcro and you just wrap it around your English pants. And so if you're in an English outfit, it makes it real easy. You know, you can get on your animal first and then wrap the apron around you and Velcro it to you. Kinda hard to do in a dress 'cause-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

... you can't take the dress off and put it back on, you know? It's kinda hard to do that. But this apron English thing is really, really nice. And then the other thing is, is that you can just go ahead and wear your English competition helmet. You just wear a dressy one that's made of, you know, that has a velvet finish on it.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

You wouldn't, you know, you wouldn't wear the, the hokey ones. You wanna still look elegant.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm-hmm.

Meredith Hodges:

So you would wear the velvet colored helmets with those.

Audio:

That is the correct answer.

Meredith Hodges:

And then they also, ladies that ride aside typically wear what's called a veil. And it's a netting that covers the hat from the brim and across their face. And I think those veils have functions too because if you're out fox hunting or anything, or out riding in the bug, it keeps the bugs outta your face. If you're riding in bad weather, it can even keep the rain off your face because it's a very thin netting. You can see through it, but it doesn't let a lot through. That was just one of the things that ladies wear in their attire.

And then, again, when you're fox hunting or something like that where you're gonna get bugs, you're obviously not in a class so you don't have to have a helmet on per se. The top hats that you wear are typically tight enough on your head, so if you did come off, it's still gonna protect your head upon impact. And having that netting held, holding the hat down over your head, keeps it from popping off right away. So it'll still protect your head, so you don't necessarily need a helmet, you know, if you're wearing the hat. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

That's if you want full garb, you know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

If you want full garb in the fox hunting and you wanna look elegant, that's the way to do it. You just-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right, right.

Meredith Hodges:

... combine, you know, that on an English saddle and both ways are okay. If you feel concerned about the helmet, then, you know, about not having your helmet on, then you just forego the top hat and the netting and just put on your helmet. And then you still have your English outfit, although that will still be preferred to going ahead and riding in the apron, which comes off and goes back on really easily and allows a dismount and mount really to be easy.

But then what you might do with your English side saddle is when you get done with the fox hunting, they generally have a, a breakfast before the fox hunting where you can wear a vintage dress. And when you come in again, then they have a vintage, you're in a vintage outfit, you wear the dress for the, for the end of, uh, fox hunting dinner.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

And then just wear the apron in between.

The other thing that you'll always be wearing is a shirt with a stock tie. And your stock ties are made such that they are very hardy material and their actual use is to be used as an emergency bandage.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh.

Meredith Hodges:

Or a tourniquet on an injured horse, hound-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

... or person. And then the stock pin that you wear to pin it together serves to fasten the bandage. Most ties on the market today are not strong and large enough to use for that purpose. So be careful when you buy your stock tie that it really is a real old-fashioned stock tie, or at least made heavy, of heavy cotton material like that and double-stitched, and that your pin is suitable to use to fast- fasten that bandage. The, the stock tie itself is longer, the real ones are longer and sturdier than what they make on market today. The ones today are not all so long enough to really serve the purpose. You also wanna wear boots that are appropriate to your habit or apron, which habit is the term they use for your dress.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

And your boots should match the side saddle style. Tall or short boots are acceptable as they're most likely gonna be, going to be hidden underneath the apron or the skirt. Whips are somewhat numerous in their style and they are often used on the off-side where you do not have a leg and you can't have leg pressure. The habit that you wear, like I said, should always be appropriate to the costume that you're wearing.

The boots are hidden under the skirt, but if the skirt comes up, you wanna... If you're in a side saddle class and the judge gets a glimpse of your boots, you definitely wanna wear English boots for the English outfit. Tall or short are acceptable, but you better be putting on black English, English riding pants to match the skirt. In other words, don't put white dressage pants underneath a black skirt-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

... because if it does fly up, you don't wanna draw attention to it that way.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) Right.

Meredith Hodges:

And especially the taller boots can be hid- hidden a lot better than the shorter boots, but that's all the more reason to have black English riding pants so they do not draw attention to the short boots-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

... which should also be black. Any other color is really not acceptable in the side saddle class. They're only used for schooling.

Um, there are certain whips that are particular to the style that you're riding and the horse that you have. For instance, a gated mule, you would use the gated mule whip or the cane. With a dressage mule, you use a dressage whip. If you're gonna be jumping, you use a jumping bat. If you are riding English, you use the English, English crop, riding crop. And if you're riding hunter classes or on a fox hunt, you would use the hunt whip that is like a cane with a lash on it.

The other thing that's really important is the stirrup that you put on your side saddle. It's imperative that the leather on the side saddle be completely clean before applying conditioner, and they should be kept conditioned to avoid mold, mildew, and that sorta thing that can rot the leather. You need to have your side saddle in top condition.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

The other thing that we kinda do since it... Side saddles, when they're in top condition, can be very slippery and so you don't want anything that's going to affect your riding and make you slip sideways 'cause it's already hard enough. If you've got your right leg in the right position, that will help, but sometimes it just doesn't. So you get yourself a little bit of rosin that's really sticky and you put it on the seat of the saddle.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Really?

Meredith Hodges:

So that you're glued there! (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

You put rosin there? Is that what you said?

Meredith Hodges:

Rosin.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

Rosin, R-O-S-I-N.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

It's a sticky, waxy substance.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

And it comes in a little, kind of a, a little tube thing and you unscrew it. It's, it's like ChapStick. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh!

Meredith Hodges:

Only it's a bigger tube.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

And, and you just, yeah, and you just go ahead and put that on the seat of your saddle and, before you get up there, and when you sit down, make sure you're sitting down in the right place. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:  
It will be very hard to move once you get... once you sit on it.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
Well, that's good to know.

Meredith Hodges:  
(laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:  
Yeah. Well, it really is good to know when you're showing, you know, 'cause then you're really impressive to the judge 'cause you don't move.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:  
You know? (laughs) You stay right where you sat.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
All right.

Meredith Hodges:  
And the other thing that's good to use is to use breakaway stirrups on your side saddle.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):  
Oh.

Meredith Hodges:  
And when you a- when you adjust them, you go ahead and put your, your foot in the stirrup and then you attach your stirrup. Uh, where the stirrup's attached with

the stirrup leather, you, uh, adjust the length of the stirrup leather to where the knee is not even, well, an inch at the most from the horn at the top. Because what you're gonna have to do is you're gonna have to brace yourself with the top of your femur up against that horn. And if your stirrup leather is too long, it'll be really hard for you to make contact with that horn. So your leg on your left side is going to be bent in kind of a jumping position-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Mm.

Meredith Hodges:

... more than a long-legged position.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

So that will allow you to get that left leg come up against that horn for balance and that will help hold you in the right position.

The saddle pad should complement the tack and attire. And for English saddles, typically the close-fitted dressage fleece pads usually fit the best, and that's because the side saddle is designed for a balanced seat. The side saddle is more like a saddle seat saddle. The flap, the flap that comes down over the stirrup or behind over the stirrup on that left side, needs to be in a balanced position. So you want the fleece pad to follow that flap that is going straight down the side. And the only other saddle that really has a straight-down flap on it is a dressage saddle. And that's why I say you can usually fit your side saddles with dressage fleece pads that will lay down right underneath that flap and will only leave at most an inch showing all the way around.

If you get a pad that is for an all-purpose jumping saddle, all-purpose saddle, or any other saddle that has any contour to it, the pad that goes underneath the side saddle, if you use one of those kinds of pads, is gonna stick out an inch in one place, you know, maybe two inches in another place and it looks kinda shoddy and it takes away from that elegant look. So you want the fleece pad to go ahead and conform to the contour of your side saddle. And like I said, a dressage fleece pad works really good for the English.

Now, with a Western, Western gives you a little more leeway. And a Western side saddle will have a pad that is squared off.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

And it can be of any kind of Western design that they may put on the Navajo blankets and everything. Do not use the Western pads that are designed therapeutically or anything like that. They have no style. You really need something that has a Western style print on it, and that's what you would use for your Western side saddle.

If you are interested in learning to ride aside, you can contact one of these organizations to find out what people you should contact in your area to help you and others that share your in- interest, and they will be able to tell you where to find an instructor or somebody to coach you. And the feeling of elegance and accomplishment is unmatched. Especially after so much time spent in blue jeans and mucking boots, it's kinda fun to have a place where you can really get dressed up. Anymore these days the only place you can really get dressed up is at fundraisers and other since planned, elegant events, and they usually take place in the city where you don't live-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

... or you just don't wanna be there with all the politicians or anything, you know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

'Cause they're the ones that like getting dressed up like that and kinda flaunting it. But this is a place where we can flaunt elegance is in our side saddle classes, and we can do it (laughs) with mules, which is even, even just more cool, you know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

I went to the 1993 Inaugural Parade in, uh, and I rode side saddle in that parade in front of the president back then who was being inaugurated, which-

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Cool.

Meredith Hodges:

... was great. But you should have seen all the disdain from all these other riders that rode horses. (laughs) You know, anybody that rides a mule knows that we get condescending looks all the time.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

But when our mules perform, that's where the line is drawn because people are just stunned at what we are able to do with our mules.

Audio:

Woo! Woo-hoo! Woo-hoo!

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

And they can, they can, they can do anything horses can do and most times they do it better. And they can even do things that horses don't do, like roping from chariots, you know?

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, sure.

Meredith Hodges:

And stuff like that. We get a little crazy sometimes, you know? But I think the world could use a little more whimsy and romance to help the modern woman to enjoy her dignity and elegance in this fast-paced world. Hats off to the lovely ladies who ride aside.

You can contact the International Side Saddle Organization, and in the Mule Crossing article that will accompany this interview, there's all the contact information for that. The American Sidesaddle Organization, I've got the contact information for that one. And there's a little bit more about side saddles in my book, a Guide to Raising and Showing Mules, that you can buy on my website at [www.luckythreeranch.com](http://www.luckythreeranch.com). I have another website for children, [jasperthemule.com](http://jasperthemule.com).

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

I have a Facebook page at Meredith Hodges public figure Facebook page. And if you do have questions or concerns and you've looked at the website and you can't find your answers, feel free to email me at [meredith@luckythreeranch.com](mailto:meredith@luckythreeranch.com), or call me at 800-816-7566. And if you don't get me straight up, le- leave a message. I answer every email, every letter, and every phone call.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

All right. Meredith, you have a wonderful day and we will talk soon.

Meredith Hodges:

Thank you.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Gotta go. My mule is looking for me.

Audio:

Mule Talk is an Every Cowgirl's Dream production.

## **RESOURCES:**

**WEBSITE at [www.LuckyThreeRanch.com](http://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](http://www.JasperTheMule.com) for books & videos