

Mules and More: Building a Safe Ride May 2011

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Have you ever considered why mules are so unique? Think of the donkey and the horse as the bookends for the mule. The breeding of your mule influences how they think and operate, since they take traits from both the horse and the donkey.

Let's consider the characteristics of the donkey. There are two main breeding lines of donkeys: the small Spanish Jacks, which more often have quicker movement with a slender build, and the Mammoth Jacks which are a heavier boned breed with a slower demeanor. By nature,

donkeys are more conservative in all aspects because they slow down and protect themselves in a slower manner. It can be said that donkeys usually do everything in moderation. They reserve their energy and are more thoughtful and logical, especially when thinking through a problem. It is like the story of the old bull and the young bull that were standing on a hill admiring the cows down in the valley. The young bull said to the old bull "Let's run down there and mate with one of those fine-looking cows." But the old bull replied "Let's walk and we can mate with all of them." When donkeys find themselves in a tough or unsure situation they slow down and can also shut off their movement; they don't panic. This behavior is most often viewed as being stubborn, when in reality they are much more in control of their self-preservation. Donkeys are also more timid or afraid, which might not be exhibited through his behavior, but he is still afraid on the inside. In general, the donkey shows less concern on the outside and this helps maintain his overall confidence in response to situations he finds himself in.



Now let's consider the characteristics of the horse. The saddle or pleasure horses have quicker movement and therefore the draft horse is used differently based on their body types and agility. Horses display more energy and movement than donkeys do, but the horse's response to difficult situations is revealed in a different way. The horse gain confidence and courage by leaving the perceived threat or danger. The further they distance themselves the braver they become. They develop courage by being afraid and leaving the threat or concern behind. Both horses and donkeys have a high level of self-preservation, but each handles it very differently. For example, a donkey will only go the distance he needs to get away from the threat, which may be only six inches, versus a horse which may run a quarter of a mile in order to insure more distance between himself and the threat or concern.

As a result of the characteristics of the donkey and the horse, mules possess sure-footedness, better movement, durability, and the ability to operate better under tough circumstances. We must take into consideration the characteristics of the animals we are breeding and the results we are getting. If the mule takes the dominant gene of the Jack you will have more donkey-like characteristics in the mule. If it receives more of the gene from the mare you will have more dominant horse characteristics. If you have a balance of genes from the Jack and the mare you will have a little bit of both qualities in the mule. This is the best of both worlds! With this in mind, we need to be more careful about what we breed. If you breed to a Jack of lesser quality with a bad disposition or poor conformation to a bad dispositioned, high-headed, flighty mare you will get a mule that is wired for sound with the ability of a black-belt martial arts expert when you go to confront him. But if you breed a Jack with good movement, good temperament, and good conformation to a mare with the same characteristics, then you will have a good chance of producing an excellent mule. Keep in mind, its best to consider what the mule will be used for, then breed or purchase one for that use.

If a person gets a mule and expects him to act like a horse, but they don't factor in the donkey side of him they might not understand why the mule acts the way he does. When all is said and done, donkeys, horses, and mules are all the same in that they walk, trot, lope, stop, and turn around; but how they think, process, and react to situations can be very different. They are similar to people in that we are all different, but we are all human.

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