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Answers To Your Mule Questions with Cindy K (McKinnon) Roberts

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BIT EVASION

Dear Cindy,

I just got your book and I really enjoy all of the mule information. However, I have another question. My mule is evading the bit by putting his head on his chest when I ask him to turn. I have tried several bits including: a Tom Thumb, grazing bit, mullen mouth Pee Wee bit, and most recently a Billy Allen type bit. I had his teeth floated and his wolf teeth removed earlier this spring. I have tried being gentle to firm.

When we begin riding he does everything right-stops, backs, and turns. Then he decides he is not going to turn, and puts his head down to his chest. I am assuming this is his way of saying "we are done". I feel really out of control when he does this. Today I decided to lunge him when he did this, and then I remounted. I didn't want him to think we were done when he pulls this stunt. How can I safely handle this in the saddle? I would like to hit the trails, once this stops, and I feel like I can steer him properly. This is his only problem.

Thanks Sharon.

Hi Sharon,

I am assuming you are riding Western from the mention of the curb bits. Keep in mind that a mule's back is not round as compared to the horse. The mule's back is more flat. This makes it difficult for him to turn with ease. I would use a snaffle such as an O ring or D ring or full cheek. You will want to use your leg to aid your mule in turning. Say, you want to go right. Pick up on the right rein and pull toward the right slightly back toward your hip (not your waist). Apply your left heel at the girth to encourage your mule to move to the right. Use your right heel to help "balance" the right side by placing it slightly behind the girth as you tap your left heel to move his body to the right. Are you with me? Make sure you are not over doing smaller circle work. It takes time to build up your mule for this type of work.

Your mule will work better with praise and reward throughout his sessions. I suggested a snaffle because your mule is using evasion in the western curb and that tells me he is not ready for a curb bit as of yet. It sounds like your mule is doing nice work for you. Keep your sessions under 30 minutes. There will be times when your mule is very willing to work beyond 30 minutes; be sensitive to your mule and keep things positive.

Let me know how things work out for you Sharon -- thanks for your email.

Warning! Under Missouri law, an equine professional is not liable for an injury to or the death of a participant in equine activities resulting from the inherent risks of equine activities pursuant to the Revised Statutes of Missouri. Your participation in training your own mule or horse by following the advice given in this column and throughout Every Cowgirl's Dream web site is a risk that may result in permanent disability and even death to you and/or your animal. Advice in this column is given through 20 plus years of professional and private mule training experience. The unique personality of your animal and the individual reader's skill level will vary greatly. This column is not a substitute for a qualified mule trainer in your area. Always utilize a professional and knowledgeable trainer to assist you. The author asks each reader to evaluate his or her skill level, athletic ability and mule sense prior to attempting any training technique. By submitting your question, you agree to having your inquiry and answer posted on Every Cowgirl's Dream web site and possibly published in upcoming literature and books.

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