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

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Hard To Bridle

Dear Cindy,

I have a three year old john mule that has had about five rides and is developing a habit of being hard to bridle. What do you suggest? Thanks very much. Pat

Hi Pat,

I am assuming you are starting this young mule out in a snaffle. Have a treat ready for your mule (yes I am approving treats for your mule.) With your right hand, press down on his poll area to encourage him to drop his head down - with your left hand - reward him with the treat. That is phase I. Teach your mule to drop his head while applying pressure on the poll - then reward. Next, play the finger game with him. Go slow - rub his muzzle and slip your finger in and out of the corner of his mouth. This takes several times of doing this -- you are desensitizing the mule to stick things in and out of his mouth. Reward again with a treat. Next, take the bridle (right hand on headstall at top) and apply pressure on his poll - asking him to drop his head, slide the bit in and give him a treat at the same time. Also have the mule's teeth checked and be considerate while taking his bridle off - being careful not to bump his teeth. Most bridling problems develop from going too fast with a mule, teeth problems, incorrect fitting headstalls, using too harsh of a bit and bumping teeth while taking off the bridle. I did have a big mule that was reluctant to taking the bit - I soaked the bit in Apple Pucker Schnapps and he didn't mind being bridled after that. There are no set rules to training mules - what works for one may not work for another. Using a common sense approach while thinking on your feet will keep you in the game. Go slow -- let me know how you are doing. Cindy K. Roberts

A note about rewarding with treats: do not let your mule ask for treats. When rewarding with a treat, it is natural for the animal to ask for a treat. Push the mule's muzzle away and say no. The time to give a treat is for reward and when you want to reinforce the positive result.

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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