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

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Mounting

Cindy-

I have a nice mule I have been working with for a couple of years. She is seven years old. I can tell she has been abused in the past.

I have to use a mounting block to get on. On two occasions, she has whirled away from me just as my leg was swinging over her back. I "crash and burn," of course, and she runs off. I have my reins short when I mount, but here is no holding the reins when she jumps away and I am airborne. She has done this twice over the two years I've had her. Any suggestions on how to address this problem?

Sheryl

Hello Sheryl,

Ideally getting on and off with ease and confidence at the mounting block is the answer. I suspect that when you are in the saddle and everything is OK -- you give a sigh of relief and then ride on. I would get on and off several times at the mounting block. Reward your mule for just standing there. Make sure you are not dragging your boot heel across her rump when you are getting on or off. I would also lean over the saddle and practice touching her on her sides and caress her -- slowly -- let her know that this is a good thing. Your mule has to understand and respond to whoa. Getting on and riding off is not good training for any mule -- because mules anticipate what happens next and tend to want to take off as soon as a rider is in the saddle. In the future on this mule and every mule from this day forward, get on, relax your seat, keep your mule at a standstill for a minute before riding off. Have another person assist you by standing at your mule's shoulder and feeding mule cookies. This is a positive diversion until you are seated. Then offer an apple wafer cookie to your mule before taking off. That way, your mule anticipates getting the cookie next. Never offer the cookie from any other point in your riding or your mule will "stop" for cookies.

I hope this works for you -- please let me know how things work out. Thanks for

your email. [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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