

Chapter 12

Understanding the Mule's Thought Process

The mule is a thinking machine. He thinks while he is on his feet, he thinks in his sleep and yes, he dreams. The mule gives much thought about how to do something and how not to do something, whichever is to his advantage. He is not interested in leaving his pasture pals to perform boring schooling or work. He doesn't care to leave his comfortable surroundings for any menial task or activity. The mule is curious about his surroundings and anything new. He doesn't like repetition and while learning something new, the mule has the capability getting it right the first time around. The trouble with this is, few handlers and trainers are able to "perfect" the task at hand the first time around while working with a mule and more often will push for that perfect ride or perfect result.

The mule would like to think that it is his idea. Since it is the mule's idea, then that in effect, means the task has his stamp of approval on it. It's a done deal, he likes it, move ahead with it. Remember to convey each lesson or task to him as though it were his idea. That means it must be intriguing enough to keeping his interest and that is part of the deal, right? Everything must be fun. No unpleasant classroom atmosphere, please.



While training your mule, set him up to succeed during each lesson. To do this, you will teach the simplest exercise first. It would make sense to teach whoa from the walk first, then the trot, and so on. Praise will immediately follow, and your mule will be pleased with himself. I call this creating "atta-boys."

Teach more than one exercise at a time to hold the mule's interest. It would be very boring to the mule if you were to teach just one exercise. It would also be intense for the mule. This is because you, the trainer, would be striving for perfection before moving on. Therefore, teach several exercises that can be learned at the same time. For example, teaching the mule to back through poles as well as learning serpentines, bending exercises (circling), working through cones as well as tires will keep the mule's mind fresh and willing. Be sure that your exercises are at the same level of schooling to avoid confusing your mule. You wouldn't teach geometry before addition, right?

Strive for perfection (without drilling your mule) before developing speed during any exercise. Teach each exercise at a slow speed. Only