

“Pearls of Wisdom” Seminar

By Marlene Malcher

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Dr. Suzy Burnham of Graham TX traveled to Olds, Alberta Canada April 23rd to 25th 1999, to provide a seminar, Pearls of Wisdom. The Friday sessions were specifically geared to veterinarians and farriers. The following is some of the things I gleaned from the Saturday and Sunday sessions.

Dr. Suzy is such an energetic, informative, engaging and enthusiastic speaker, and makes one feel like she is your friend and partner in this love of longears. Dr. Suzy spent a lot of time demonstrating on how to scratch and massage your animal, from head to toe and all places in between. She advised using gloves so as to get deeply into the skin and give a really thorough rubbing. Donkeys love to roll, so can pack a lot of dirt onto their hide! She even cleaned out those magnificent ears with gauze and rubbing alcohol. Donkeys love to have their ears scratched and you can get your fingers into them as deep as possible without worrying about harming them.

A wild donkey, unlike a horse, is best tamed from the rear end to the front! Start by rubbing around the tail head and make friends with his back end first! Scratch deep! (Mules can be handled the same way). Donkeys are tough! Tests have been done on donkeys that have gone without water for 48 hours and they can rehydrate in 15 minutes. Donkeys can look well, have good blood test and yet be in severe distress. Donkeys that colic will not show the same rolling and distress signs a horse will, they tolerate pain so well that sometimes their signs of illness are so mild they are beyond hope by the time it is realized they are sick.

When donkeys are truly afraid they will stand absolutely still and face the danger, mules will too. The donkey's instinct is to stop, not run. Test done on miniature donkeys at 54 months showed the knees were not closed yet, they mature very slowly as compared to horses. Therefore, back off on riding your donkey or mule until they are about 4 years old. They can do some driving before this, but remember they are slower maturing and don't push your animals until they are physically and mentally able to handle it. Mammoth donkeys can grow 2-3 more inches from 5 – 7 years old. Mammoth and miniatures don't live as long as standard donkeys, which can live to 40+ years.

Donkey's feet need to be kept dry!! This comes from their desert ancestry. When they lose the protective covering because of moisture, their hoof wall will crumble and look bad. If necessary a donkey can walk on its sole, which would cause a horse extreme pain. A donkey's foot is upright, 5 to 7 degrees steeper than a horse. Make sure your farrier is aware of this... they need to have short toes.

Donkeys in general are overfed! They do not need oats or alfalfa; in fact it can do them great harm if their diet is too rich. They are not able to tolerate rich feed. Only if they are being worked hard should they maybe be fed a richer feed. A donkey's digestive system is a lot more efficient than horse's and can squeeze much more nutrients out of what it eats. If you have been overfeeding your donkeys wean it off slowly and if you come across a starving donkey, like wise build it up slowly. Donkeys will store excess fat on their back or neck and it will not go away because the fat infiltrates with scar tissue and cannot be starved out. Donkeys can also founder from too much, or too rich feed. Feed by need. Make sure they have minerals, salt, (loose is best) and fresh water. Donkeys do not like dirty water!!

Donkeys also need their teeth floated. Like a horse, the donkey jaw, although heavier and wider than a horse, has a narrower top jaw than the bottom, so also gets sharp points on the molars that need to be attended to. You will not see grain spillage from a donkey like you will from a horse that needs dental attention! Your donkey may need floating when only a few years old and certainly if he has not had his teeth floated by age 6 or 7, the job is badly overdue!

Worming is, of course, necessary and should be done every two months if your animals are in close confinement. In Texas, animals are building up immunity to Ivermectin, so Dr. Suzy recommends you rotate wormers yearly. Ivermectin still does get bots and lungworm, but they are finding it isn't controlling pinworms, roundworms, etc. Donkeys can also carry tapeworms.

There have been donkeys that have tested positive for Coggins and when tested six months later are negative. Dr. Suzy recommends that if you have a donkey that test positive, wait and retest before condemning them. This has something to do with their blood cells testing different than a horse.

One of the most difficult things to teach a donkey is to teach them to lead up beside you. Indeed it can be much easier to ride them! Teaching them to lead may take two people, one at the head and one behind. Keep tension on the lead rope until they take a step ahead, reward immediately by releasing, build on one step at a time. The person behind can aggravate them with a broom on their heels, use noise or a constant tapping. DO NOT BEAT on them. If you hit them, they will realize you can't hurt them much and will stand still and bear their torment. Do not punch them for being cautious. This is what keeps them alive in the desert. They are being smart... not stubborn!! They can be trained to lead well, but you must be patient with them and not try and teach them through pain!

Castration in donkeys or mules is different in that they have extra blood vessels, and Dr. Suzy says to just crimp and cut is not adequate. She always does a figure eight suture and makes sure it holds. Mules should be castrated between six to nine months; otherwise they can become difficult to handle. Dr. Suzy advocated, "Anesthesia with amnesia," in

other wards, always lay a donkey to mule out for castration, as mules especially are very unforgiving of any pain. Mules have been said to be susceptible to Tetanus, however this has mainly been because so many were castrated with a dull, dirty knife in dirty corrals without vaccinations or penicillin, and contracted Tetanus and died, or bled to death. Make sure you keep animals up to date on vaccinations applicable to your area. Tetanus is always a must!

Dr. Suzy on Mules: Sadly, mules are very difficult to do research on because there are such differences between animal to animal, even the same parents can produce such different offspring, making them difficult critters to study. Seventy percent of mules born are mollies! And Yes, there have been very rare instances where a molly has conceived and bore offspring. Donkeys have 62 chromosomes and horses have 64 and the mules' ends up with 63, so it is next to impossible for this to happen, but you know that they say about things being impossible!

Whether you're breeding a donkey or a mare, don't breed the animal until it is at least a three-year-old. If you breed as a two year old you are depriving that animal if its own growing.

Imprinting is a must in Dr. Suzy's books, especially for a mule. When the baby is born get your hands on it and HABITUATE it to such things as having its feet handled ears and any place on its body touched, clippers, etc. Habituation means to repeat the stimuli enough times so it no longer bothers that baby. Once the resistance has stopped, repeat the stimuli at least seven more times! They must get over their resistance to the point where they remain calm, and accept the pressure. This is of utmost importance and will reduce the stress on handling as they get older.

When a mule gets a bad habit they're difficult to break, so don't let that happen. In order to train a mule he must think it's his idea. Put the pressure on him and wait, don't scream, use a whip or get harsh... just wait, wait for the correct response. He'll find the way and think it was his idea. Give him a problem, say take away his front foot, then be his savior and give it back to him. Take on the job as his "life saver". Make sure every time he's in a predicament, or in a problem "you save his life".

When tying a mule, make sure you have good strong equipment that won't break. Tie him to a tree "with deep roots". Generally a mule will pull once, then twice, and then will stand still. He realizes he's caught. Immediately turn him loose, that's his reward... you saved him! It's all a psychological game with the mule. A mule has to bond with you. Young mules get bored so quickly that you have to keep changing thing for them, even if it's just arranging the cones a different way for a pattern. Their minds need to be kept entertained as they're always thinking. Mules love routine, but because of this, can get so they don't work well if their routine isn't adhered to, so it's important to vary their activities and not let them get into a rut. Don't do everything the same every day, keep things interesting and teach them to accept variety.

Because mules *Love* horses and bond to them quickly,) that's why outfitters never need to worry about where their mules are when they have a lead mare) you will need to plan ahead so you will be able to ride away from their horse friends.

If you're on a trail with you mule and you come across something that's going to eat them, let them stop and face the danger. Don't punish them for being afraid, but encourage them by speaking to them or singing and *Exhale* your breath. It will encourage them to take a step or two forward, until they realize their bogeyman is okay.

Tail wringing is often seen in mules and Dr. Suzy feels it should be tolerated to a degree. She will not penalize a mule for tail wringing in a class when they're being obedient in everything else. Mules seem to like to have that "sass" from the back end. (To me it seems to say they always have the last word!)

A nervous mule needs to be trained to lower his head and look you in the eye. He must "hook up" with you. They need to learn to bond with you and look to you for help, other wise you may still have a mule that will work for you, but will only tolerate you and will not desire to be with you.

Mules respond well to music. If you need to do some arena work, put on some rousing music and you will find your mule keeping up the rhythm. Dr. Suzy, like many of us, admitted to singing to our mules and you know what, they like it!! Dr. Suzy says there's nothing better than a good mule and she has sold her horses and committed to her 17-hand thoroughbred molly mule, Ramona.

Donkeys and mules, with their challenging and free-thinking sprit, are such fun to work with, Dr. Suzy can think of nothing better!!