

The Myler Miracle

By Susan Soderbergh

Why am I sitting in a wheelchair inside the hallway of a hospital? My head hurts and I feel so sick to my stomach. Who is this man sitting next to me holding a clipboard dressed like a fireman?

My day started out with my kids at the mall and we planned to meet later that evening to see a movie. I went to the barn to get my molly mule, Arrow, out for some exercise. I remember parking in the lot next to the corrals, tacking up my mule, taking her out to a large round arena and getting on to ride. What took place between then and waking up in an ER was told to me by eyewitnesses “at the scene”.

I spent the night in the hospital undergoing a battery of tests to check for internal bleeding and had a chest tube put into my partially collapsed lung. I had sustained a concussion and several cracked ribs as well. Had I not been wearing a helmet and vest, this tale would never have been told. Bottom line— I was the victim of a runaway mule. Witnesses told me that I actually had the mule stopped but that she took off again in a mad fright until I went flying off of her in to a pole. I was summarily served with written notice that I was to move my “dangerous” mule to another boarding facility.

Moving Arrow to another barn turned out to be a blessing in disguise as, after hearing my sad tale, the facility manager handed me a new bit to try. She said her big thoroughbred was trying to take off with her daughter and the bit resolved the problem.

So I started my mule all over again from square one with one key difference— the bit, a Myler combo bit to be exact. Within two weeks Arrow’s entire personality started to change. This is not to say that all of her issues went away but her whole overall demeanor was different.

Over the next few weeks she was voluntarily dropping her head down to get bridled. While under saddle, if she got excited, or attempted to scoot, a little rein pressure stopped the silliness. Pressure being the operative word as I came to realize that she was anticipating “pain” and discomfort instead.

Working with mules and donkeys by



Susan Soderbergh with “Arrow”

trade, the incident just described has probably been the single biggest turning point in my training career. What started out, as an experiment with one mule has become a regular practice over the last

several years. Since the Myler combo bit worked so well on my “difficult” mule I was anxious to see how it would work for other mules and donkeys and for my favorite task of starting colts.

I had just started using the combination bit when I met Ben and Neta at Mule Days in Bishop, California. Ever since, we have been on non-stop tangents comparing notes and experiences on Myler combo bits and their applications. During the years that have passed, the Myler combo bit has been the basic building block of my biting strategy and a critical part of each mule’s foundation.

And as others have discovered the effectiveness of the combo bit and the comfort snaffle, so has Myler. The selection of combo bits available today allows for your mules and donkeys continued education on the same basic platform.

In working with longears, I have observed that the key difference between mules and donkeys versus horses is the mental approach. If you are not fond of playing the game of chess, mules may not be for you. But let’s say the adage “never enter a battle you know you can’t win” is basic belief to start with. The Myler combo bits have time and time again given me the physical and most important

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psychological edge in the most comfortable way possible.

The combo bit communicates clearly to your mule that trying to take over is a waste of time. As such, their donkey sense (their better half) sees the wisdom of cooperation and they move on to some other way to test. Mules never stop “testing” no matter how old or broke they are.

While at first glance, the Myler combo bit may look like overkill to some, it is actually in many ways more comfortable and humane than the plain broken snaffle that has historically been used across the board and most especially for starting colts.

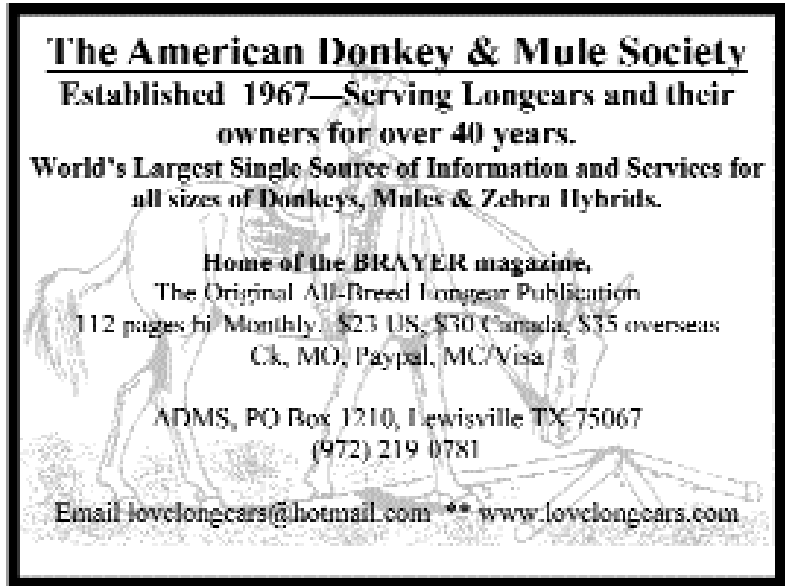
From working cows to working jumps, the combo bit is a perfect stepping stone to a bezel or hackamore. I have also found the combo bit to be particularly effective as a starting bit for donkeys who are prone to bracing at the first hint of coercion.

To this day I still use a Myler combo bit on my “runaway” mule and she has improved so much over time that I was able to ride her in a drill team practice carrying a flag. Who would have thought it possible? Arrow and I have been able to build a bond of trust thanks to an invaluable

step-one tool— the Myler combination bit. As for Arrow before I changed

bits, the transformation she has undergone is truly a miracle.

Susan Soderbergh, BA is the head trainer and sole proprietor of Blazin Arrow Foundation Training, which operates out of Rock-n-Easy Ranch in Caliente, CA. Along with being a former mule consultant for Pierce College in Woodland Hills, CA, Ms Soderbergh has also taken all Mule Handling and Horse Science classes at the college. She has an extensive background in mule and donkey training holding a certificate in Mule Handling from Queen Valley Mule Ranch. She specializes in helping owners build a solid working foundation of trust and respect with their mules and donkeys.



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