

# “THEM MULES”

## *Why A Mule*

*By Tennison*

The number one asked question to mule owners new and old is “Why A Mule?”

The answers vary as widely as the personalities that own them and I might add, I’ve never heard anyone give just one answer to this question.

I’m going to give you my reason’s, “Why A Mule”. I’m not any different than anyone else. I don’t have just one reason for preferring a mule and I grew up around both horses and mules having wonderful experiences with both. Many of my reasons mirror many of the reasons I’ve heard over the years. The more you understand about these mules, I warn you, the longer your list of reasons of owning a mule will grow.

Perhaps in order to answer this most frequently asked question “Why A Mule” with any accuracy one might need to understand what the question really is. A person sitting in the middle of a horse asking this question is really asking, “Why a mule and not a horse like mine?” If a horse owner asks that same question in the coffee shop really what they means is “why a mule and not a horse like the one I have back home?” Because this is truly what is being asked we cannot leave the horse out of some of the answers. If a mule owner asked that question the horse would not have to be mentioned in an explanation.

History is very clear on the superiority of the mule over horses as both a draft animal and riding animal. Now I want you to know here and now, I ain’t mad at no horse, I like horses and I ain’t mad at anyone that owns one, I just call’em like I see’em. Really, Mr. Tabor, in a resent article (Western Mule Magazine April 2005, see “A Family Tradition” page 16) settled all this quite simply when he was asked “Why Mules”? His answer was, “Mule people like mules and horse people like horses.”

History tells us the mule was more desired than horses in the days before the car and the tractor. But I want to take you farther back than that. Long ago I saw a mural on a wall of an old broken down barn with loads of yellow daisies around



it and written on it were some words that I can no longer quote but it’s jest was, “we need to know about our past before we plunge into the future.” We’ve plunged into the future and I’m always looking for answers found often from the past.

I accept the Bible as Gods word and in it is a lot of history. When I see the word mule mentioned in the Bible it has my full attention. In the beginning of the Bible mules are mentioned (Genesis 36:24). Proof positive mules have been around a long time. One of the great King’s of the Bible, King David, who was very much favored by God, was very fond of mules. He himself rode them, his sons rode them and his high-ranking officers rode mules. When King David’s son, Solomon, was crowned King, David insisted that he ride his mule (I Kings 1:33). Now in all the scriptures it doesn’t mention why King David preferred mules. Lots of history doesn’t tell us why they preferred mules. My belief is it was such common knowledge then that a mule could out work a horse in most all task on the farms and out last them, generally out do horses in the mountains, it wasn’t thought of to mention. However I really don’t have any explanation why King David rode mules unless it was mentioned and that information didn’t make it past the editors. Things

like that did happen I understand, when it came to writing history taken from journals and diaries of the 19th century. Horses and mules got lumped together by nerds that knew how to spell but didn’t know a thing about what they were spelling, like mules or horses.

Back to King David, now think about this. This is the mightiest man in the entire kingdom. He could have anything in that kingdom he wished. Did they have horses in the kingdom? They must have, you’ve got to have a horse to have mules. This King who could have anything in the kingdom, choose to ride a mule and thought enough of his mule to offer it as royal transportation upon his son’s crowning as King. I say he liked mules. He must of felt they rode better, don’t ya think? Mr. Tabor, I believe this kingdom was mule people.

George Washington, though not a king (he refused that appointment if you remember) the father of this country preferred mules to horses not as ridding animals but as draft animals. Washington believed horses ate too much, worked too little and died too young. Not only did this man whip the British, establish a new nation, serve as its president twice, took off five years to amass huge land holdings, supervised a new improved cropping systems but he started a mule breeding program. It is widely believed that Washington’s mule breeding program enormously benefited the development of this nation history tells us. These facts and others can be found in a two volume book “The Missouri Mule: His Origin and Times by Melvin Bradley. Many believe this two-volume book is Missouri bragging on its famous mules. It is, but it does lots of bragging on lots of other countries, states and people in the making of the famous Missouri Mule. It’s a book sincerely worth reading.

Histories other accounts can be found in another great book “The Mule Alternative” The saddle mule in the American West, by Mike Stamm. This is one of my favorite books. In it are dozens of exciting experiences of early western pioneers, explorers, mountain men, trap-

pers, Indian fighters and others taken from their journals and diaries that give us lots of insight, factual information on mules and how mules compared to other means of draft, packing and riding animals available in the 1800's. In this book you'll find out a mules worth when the going got tough.

The mules colorful history is just one of the reasons I have a great respect for them. It's that strength, stamina, ability to keep going when food and water was scarce, that smooth way of going, the ability to negotiate rough, rocky steep country, the mules ability to handle the heat, the cold, all conditions and Its also that hybrid vigor. Not many of us would ever tap into those qualities, but it does do something for me just knowing those qualities are there. They were back then and they are today.

Dr. Duke Dana, DVM with the state of Missouri along with his wife Joyce, loves and rides mules. Meet Duke on one of his mule and he will likely be setting in one of a few saddles he has won team rope off his mule against horses. Dr. Dana once said in an interview with Western Mule Magazine "Mules want to participate in the decision making more than a horse does." A greater statement perhaps has never been made. A mule will argue I call it, and a mule well question a decision you might make in what the two of you might do or where you might go. As for me making business decisions as I so often do, I'm not intimidated by someone throwing their opinion out when a decision is at hand, as a matter of fact I welcome a fresh idea. I don't mind my mule having an opinion either, as a matter of fact I admire him for having enough intelligence to throw an opinion out. However during that decision making process he must understand I own 51% of the company. They call a mule with this understanding "a trained mule". I like the mule's intelligence and I like it that he hasn't caved in to all of mans ideals. He has always questioned mans thinking, mans thinking isn't like a mules thinking. He questioned it way back then and he still does today. I appreciate mules because they are thinkers. Someone once said, "you need to be fifty or over before being allowed to own a mule. That statement was likely made because at that age most have very few people they need to impress and because of it, life gets easier for them and those around them, people

and mules.

These mules like calmness, consistency and someone distinctly in charge, so do I. If you're not in charge the mule soon will be and they're not trying to hide it or fool anyone about it.

- \* I like mules because of what they have done for those before me.
- \* I like mules because of what they do for me and what they could do for me.
- \* I like mules because of their toughness.
- \* I like mules because of their agility.
- \* I like mules because of their smooth way of going.
- \* I like mules because they are humble one minute and proud the next.
- \* I like mules because I think their pretty.
- \* I like mules because I think some look homely.
- \* I like mules because they are thinkers.
- \* I like mules because they are intelligent.
- \* I like mules because my daddy does.
- \* I like mules because both my grandpa's did.
- \* I like mules because of a boyhood with mules.
- \* I like mules because there is a history there I can pass on to my grandchildren.
- \* I like mules because they keep my pride in check.
- \* I like mules because they are tougher than a horse.
- \* I like mules because God favored a King who I believe thought a lot of mules.

There's one other reason I like mules, maybe why I like them best. I like the mule's personality. I could write a book on this subject alone. I believe a mules' personality is the number one contributing factor to why folks are coming over to the mule industry today. It does my heart good to see one of my mules do something...mulish. Just this morning Neta and I were looking out the window and saw the little rabbit that has been living in the barn with our mules all spring, hop across the lot among those mules. Not a one has stomped at it or tried to run it off all spring. They will walk behind it smelling of it or cock their head as it hops by within inches. To my amazement they have not bothered it. I have on more than one occasion seen that little rabbit sitting under one mule or the other's feed trough when I go to let them out of the barn after feeding. I believe the rabbit doesn't have understanding as to why our dog doesn't bother it there, but I do. The mules would stomp a mud hole in the dog. As long as

I've been around these mules and as much as I've seen out of mules they still amaze me.

The mule's personality has often been described as dog like, I agree. Whatever personality they might have it's not hard to pick up on and I believe lots of folks see it and like it. Mules like lots of attention and folks with just a few mules will and like to give them lots of attention, a perfect scenario for mule lovers and people loving mules.

I've still got a lot to say but I must end. Without knowing something about the mules past it could be hard to understand why a mule at all, I want you to understand the mules past so you have better understanding so you can educate those who don't have that understanding. Truly it is possible that you don't have mules because of what they were but only because of what they are. I agree, but those asking the question don't know why mules even or ever existed at all. When they know that much lay on them why you personally like mules.

Always remember this "Mules are not for everyone, not everyone will get along with a mule", (maybe we'll cover that subject someday), but because you do, you never need bow your head to anyone because you own a mule. Hollywood's version of mules is what has caused the question in the first place. Their version is hillbillies, the poor, and or the funny guy. It was common knowledge "Why A Mule" in the 19th century. Show a little patience to those who don't know. They ask because they don't know, if you can get them to hold still long enough tell'em why. Then they'll know too.

Today, I've shortened my explanation as to "Why A Mule". My answer has become simple, "BECAUSE THEY'RE MULES". Because you've read this or own them yourself I believe you understand better if not perfectly. I've had more than one person look at me like a mule looking at a new gate after making that statement. A mule gets over that look as soon as he can't see the gate anymore. I believe humans loose the look too, but I don't know how far it is down the trail before that look goes away.

If you have something you would like me to write on in the future, fire away I'll try my best to oblige you. (If that's Sliding Stops, perfect Reining Spins or Dressage consult Brad Cameron, Monica Erman or Terry Nichols).