

Them Mules

By Tennon

I have some wonderful opportunities in this mule business and I am thankful that I'm not greedy about sharing what I see, what I hear and what I learn. Once or twice a year I have the opportunity to sit and talk with a fellow by the name of Sam Powell, who lives in Shelbyville, Tennessee. I always walk away with a wealth of knowledge after a visit with Sam and I know you would too given the same opportunity.

Sam is an equine consultant, clinician and author. He has partnered with Lisa Wycosky on a new lecture series tour that will start early 2010. "Power of a Whisper". And now this country boy, Sam Powell, is soon to be the host of his own equine radio show out of Nashville, Tennessee, covering such topics as mental and physical behavior,

desensitization, health, nutrition, leadership, safety, teambuilding and understanding yourself by learning about the mind of equine. Yes, Sam is a country boy pure and simple and you won't be long catching this in a conversation with him, which makes Sam easy listening and easily understood.

I sat in on one of Sam's clinics sponsored by Purina some ten years ago. Sam's simple straight forward way of getting a point across had me captured from the beginning to the end and I've had the pleasure to sit in and listen to Sam many times since and this country boy always took something back to the mule pen, more understanding about my mules and more understanding about the one handling them, ME.

Sam living in Shelbyville, Tennessee, has had plenty of exposure to mules

over the years and when you ask him what's different between horses and mules, Sam says without hesitation, "Mules Are Smarter".

Sitting with Sam one-on-one during the Great Celebration Mule and Donkey Show back in July, I revealed to Sam my desire to help people have more understanding and knowledge about their mules, the very reason I write "Them Mules" and publish the Western Mule Magazine. Sam handed me this paper and I want to share it with you in this month, "Them Mules".

Sam has teamed up with Rocky Comfort Records, (Tracy Lawrence Record Company) to produce and promote Sam's videos, radio show and tours. Please see at the end of "Them Mules" contact information for Sam Powell's videos and tours.

Lead Your Mule with the Fine Line Between Too Much and Too Little

By Sam Powell, Equine Consultant/Clinician

In trying to help people develop a better relationship with their equine, we often hear people talk about developing harmony with the horse or mule. This is a simple and necessary concept but sometimes a difficult one to master. I recently came across some excerpts from a German horse publication that I think explains this concept exceptionally well. I will agree with the writer, whose name is Wilfried Bach, that "we are treading in a sensitive area". But I believe if we look at the whole picture with an open mind, which is a necessary aspect of working with mules or horses, if we are to be successful handlers we can understand the credibility of the thought.

We are all striving for that gentle and loving relationship with our mule, but if we believe in the law of polarity we can under-

stand that when we remove one pole, disharmony manifests in varying degrees. If we continue to work a mule gently, gently, gently the mule will likely come from the other side stronger, stronger and stronger in an effort to balance the energies and restore harmony.

Mule and horse owners today have the very best intentions in their efforts to achieve that gentle and harmonious partnership with their mule or horse. They have total respect for the mule but they do not expect it from the mule in return. We want our mules to respond to our requests but we allow them to be pushy, rude, disrespectful and disobedient. In the mule culture this does not happen. The top mule or horse in the pecking order never allows a lower ranking member from the herd to be disrespectful. We should bear in mind that

in order to be successful with our equine relationships we need to

understand the mule culture. Only then will we be able to communicate with the mule effectively. If mule owners are reluctant to ask the mule to expand the limits of his comfort zone or they back down when the mule shows signs of rebellion, it is often because they do not fully understand the meaning this has in the mule's mind. In the human mind it is done with a well-intended desire to keep the peace.

Humans generally will not tolerate such disrespect from members of our own species. So why I wonder, are we so quick to ignore it when a 1200-pound animal does it? It seem that rules, guidelines and clear, firm, respectful boundaries should be



a priority when trying to establish a relationship with these magnificent creatures. A disrespectful mule can be a very dangerous mule. All too often in the human equine relationship the human fails at being the leader. Kindness and gentleness on the part of the mule owner, when carried to the extreme, is viewed by the mule as weakness. The well-meaning owner thinks that the way to restore harmony to the situation is more kindness and gentleness. A strong leader's kindness and gentleness will be seen by the mule for what it is...effective leadership. And that is what the mule is looking for.

In equine culture if the herd leader fails to live up to his responsibility as leader then number two equine in the herd steps up and immediately assumes the position of leader. The safety and survival of the entire herd depends on it. There can NEVER be an authority vacuum in the equine world. It is immediately filled. In the mule/human relationship the same principle applies. If you are unable or unwilling to establish yourself as the leader in this herd of two, then the mule will assume the role.

If we fail to maintain our position as

leader with the mule, even for a brief period of time the mule immediately steps in and assumes the role. This is the main reason some mules will be so sweet and do perfect during the groundwork but as soon as you put them to work, even within reasonable limits, they just flat out refuse to try. If we do not regain our position as leader then the mule becomes so secure and comfortable in the role he will not give it up without a great deal of opposition even to a more competent rider. If they have learned to refuse by bucking, rearing or refusing to go forward, these mules will double their efforts to disobey the most competent rider. He will fight to maintain his role as herd leader.

If you will work at becoming more aware of your mule you will be able to keep this situation from developing. You will always encounter obstacles when you work with a mule. The important thing to remember is, don't lose your cool. A man by the name of E. F. Siedler in 1846 said, "Discipline should only be directed at the disobedience never at the equine". As soon as the disobedience is over he is our good mule again. My father drilled that statement into

me when I was a youngster. I never forgot it, but when I ran across this bit of information, today it makes even more sense.

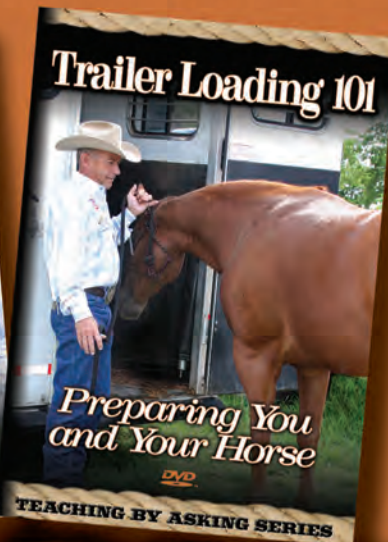
To quote Dr. Thomas Ritter, "There is a fine line between leadership and tyranny, between gentleness and cowardice, between strength and harshness. Always finding just the right tone in the conversation with the equine is an art that takes a lifetime to learn and refine. Praising your animal at just the right moment but also knowing how to be strict without pampering or being harsh is the harmony we all need to seek." I think you can sum it up by saying that we should all learn to lead our mule with that fine line that runs between too much and too little.

I want to mention once again my father, Del Powell, who was a great horseman and had an enormous influence on my quest to learn all I could about equine. He passed away much too soon. I have been fortunate to have met some great equine trainers from all over the world and in a wide variety of riding disciplines. While the number of great horseman I have met is far fewer, they have all strengthened my determination to become one of them.

SAM POWELL

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