



A group of 2-3 year old mules.

Carmack Gaited Mules

By Angie J. Mayfield

In my numerous mule meanderings, I've been fortunate to make some wonderful friends who are as passionate about their equines and trail riding as I am. One family we've grown to love and trust in the mule world is the Carmacks from Glasgow, Missouri. Rick and Diane Carmack have been a part of all things mule for more than 40 years, but Rick realized finding good gaited mules was difficult, so for the past 20 years, he's been breeding, raising, and training his own, along with help from a couple mule savvy Amish trainers with years of experience.

In addition to farming, Rick has always been an entrepreneur, enjoying business ventures that involved unique products and services that are hard to find. He raised buffalo and elk for years on the farm until government regulations made it difficult to

make a profit. At 6'3" plus his cowboy hat and boots, Rick tends to stand out and seems very serious, just taking it all in - until you get to know him. He laughs about the time he sold two buffalo to a man and they escaped a week later and swam the Missouri River to return home. Rick joked with the owner that they were trained to come back so he could sell them again and again. But only one mule ever returned after the new owner decided he didn't want a mule after all. Carmack has a reputation for being honest, knowledgeable, and consistent in selling quality gaited mules. He knows each mule personally: its breeding, personality, strengths, quirks, and price based on years invested in care and training. He doesn't barter, and he doesn't beat around the bush. What you see is what you get - and that's refreshing in today's society.

Carmack loves what he does, and even at age 72, he has no plans to retire. He takes pride in his busy life, his farm, his family, and his equines. Rick showed me his 1-year-old gaited Jack with a gleam in his eye and said, "I think he's going to sire some of the best mules yet."

A bad back led Rick to the smooth ride of gaited mules and then to raise and train them for others who are also looking for a safe, one-of-a-kind companion. Carmack selects and raises the best gaited jack and mare bloodlines he can find to create premium gaited mules. Rick owns three gaited jacks and a Rocky Mountain gaited stud horse and finds mares with exceptional genetics, disposition, beauty, intelligence, and gait from Rocky Mountain, Missouri Fox Trotter, Paso Fino, Peruvian Paso, Tennessee Walking, Spotted Saddle Bred, Spot-

ted Mountain, and others. He has also been experimenting with crosses of various breeds to perfect the gait he wants, continually improving his stock.

I'd never seen such a large herd of beautiful, well-behaved equines until I visited the Carmack farm. Rick farms 500 acres, while the remaining 350 acres is dedicated to pasture and ponds for his more than 275 mules, horses, and donkeys. In the mule pasture, I tried to pet and count each of the 125 one to three-year-old mules that all came up to the truck for attention. Rick brought a trailer and showed us how the young mules had been taught to load from an early age. When he opened the door, the mules lined up and began jumping into the trailer. They were even taught to load through the small, side door. I was amazed. But my favorite animal on the farm was Triple J, a beautiful red roan gaited jack with a white streak down his forehead. He nuzzled against me as I scratched his ears, and he seemed to pose each time I lifted my camera. When we went riding, he followed along, braying and begging for more attention. Triple J is also broke to ride, and Rick enjoys leading him around the farm with the grandkids stacked on his bare back.

There were also a dozen new mule babies frolicking in one pasture I was able to pet during our visit, including an exquisite bay with stripes, a black mule baby with white socks, and a palomino colored foal out of a chocolate Rocky Mountain mare. Plus, another dozen babies were due within a week. Color is an added bonus for a foal, but Carmack admits trying to breed for color is a crap shoot, and mares often throw foals of different colors every year, even if bred to the same jack.

All Carmack mares are micro-chipped, and foals are micro-chipped as well before weaning so that all equines are accounted for and their lineage easily tracked. Some customers pick out their forever mule from babies and custom-design their training, while others wait to choose from the finished mules. Carmack gives a lot of credit to his Amish trainer Sam Shetler for helping him produce safe, talented mules and exceptional service. Rick and Sam meet with



Triple J, one of Carmack's four gaited jacks. Triple J rides, drives, and shows as well.

prospective buyers to match them with the mule most compatible to their preferences and needs and keeps them informed of the mule's progress and level of training. They even help buyers with saddle fitting and riding tips and give each buyer a custom-made saddle pad for their new gaited mule.

At age three, the mules begin their intensive year of training to work, drive, ride, and even lay down to mount and dismount. They are desensitized to dogs, traffic and obstacles, and you can even shoot off of a Carmack mule. The pasture of finished

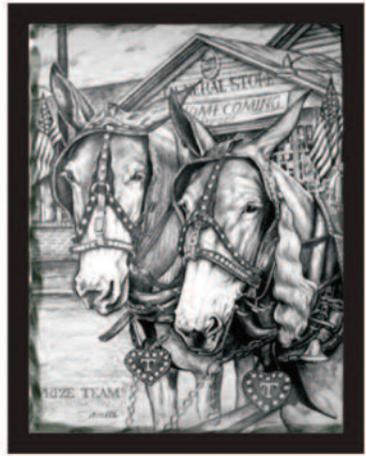
mules for sale was like walking into a show arena and trying to decide which one was the best. I loved them all. My husband and boys rode a few mules with Rick and were amazed at how gentle, smooth, and fun to ride they were. Doug and Hunter, our 13-year-old, had never ridden a gaited mule before, and they were quickly hooked. Fortunately, I didn't take a trailer or a checkbook to the Carmack farm, or I would never have made it out of there without at least two mules – but I'll be back.

It's obvious why Carmack Gaited Mules

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continue to be the highest priced stock selling at the Boone County Mule Sales year after year and have won world championships in several different classes in the show arena. Their equines are not only gorgeous, exceptionally trained, and guaranteed to gait - but they are as capable of working the fields as they are of driving on a busy road, riding endurance, hunting in the mountains, trail riding, or winning trophies. I've ridden mules in 48 states and 6 countries, and so far, the best, gaited mules I've seen are bred and trained in central Missouri. To pick out your once-in-a-lifetime premium mule, call Rick at (660) 338-2393 or check out the Carmack website at www.carmackgaitedmules.com. Life is too short to ride a less than what you really want mule.



Rick Carmack teaching some of his young mules to load.

Angie J. Mayfield is a mule enthusiast, professor, author, and columnist who has been riding mules for 48 years and has logged more than 6,500 miles just since she started keeping track in 1999. She can be contacted at profmayfield@yahoo.com

Happy Father's Day!