

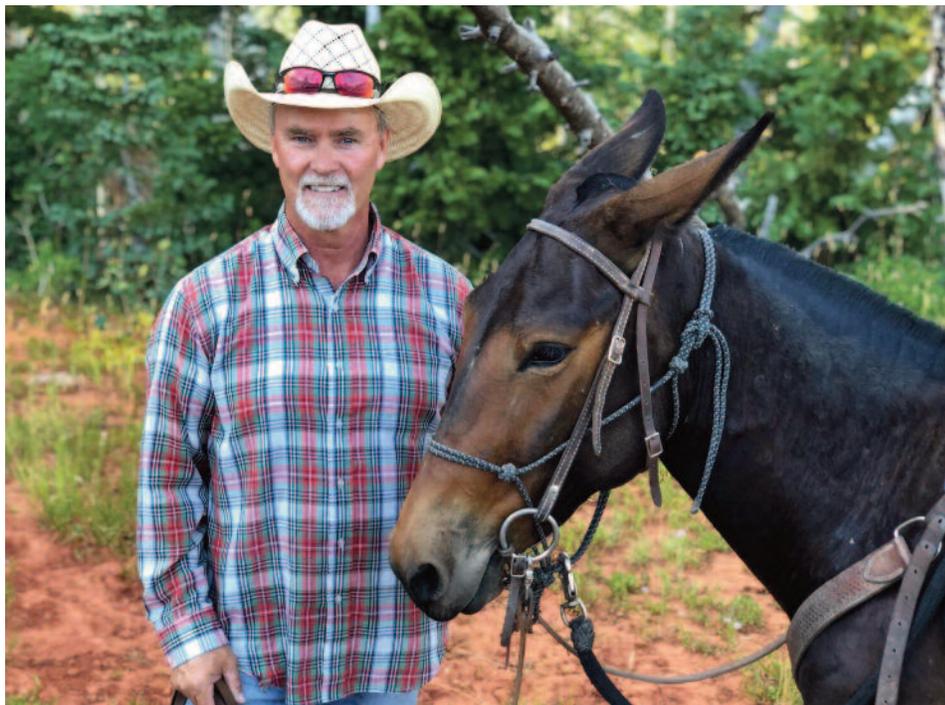
# The First Trail Ride for a Young Mule

By Ty Evans

I had the opportunity to go for a ride with my father-in-law Larry Pincock the other day. This was no ordinary trail ride. It was the first trail ride for his young mule, Cupcake (she came with the name and no matter how he tried to change it, it stuck!). We rode up a nice little canyon near Larry's home. This particular trail offered many opportunities for working with mules. There were multiple water crossings. All the crossings were shallow, wide, clear and simple for the mule to navigate through. There were many areas where dead-fall had littered the trail and the mule had to figure out how to get through it all. We passed a few hikers and a few scary things in the brush. We climbed some hills and came back down. Most of the time I would lead and Larry would follow but by the end of the ride, Larry had Cupcake out in the front, and my goodness can that little mule walk out. The ride lasted about three hours and was a total success.

I have had hundreds of "first rides" on the trail and so has Larry. Some went this well and others didn't. But in my mind, anything less than this quality of experience for the mule and rider is unacceptable. So what was it that Larry did to prepare for the first trail ride on his young molly mule Cupcake, and what can you do to prepare your mule? Here are three tips that will help you make your mule's first trail ride a success to be proud of.

**Pony your young mule as much as you can as a youngster.** It is amazing how much confidence can be built from doing this. As you pony your mule they will gain valuable experience by following your riding mule along. Having that lead mule in front



*Larry Pincock (My father in law, Skye's dad) and his mule Cupcake, photo taken by Skye Evans.*

will reduce a lot of unnecessary stress for the young one. As you introduce them to crossing water, going through deadfall, up and down grades, along with a host of other obstacles, the mule will learn to navigate and obtain proper footing, balance and experience. The mule is naturally more apt to follow than it is to get out front and lead, so ponying will serve well to get a few introductory trail miles on the resume.

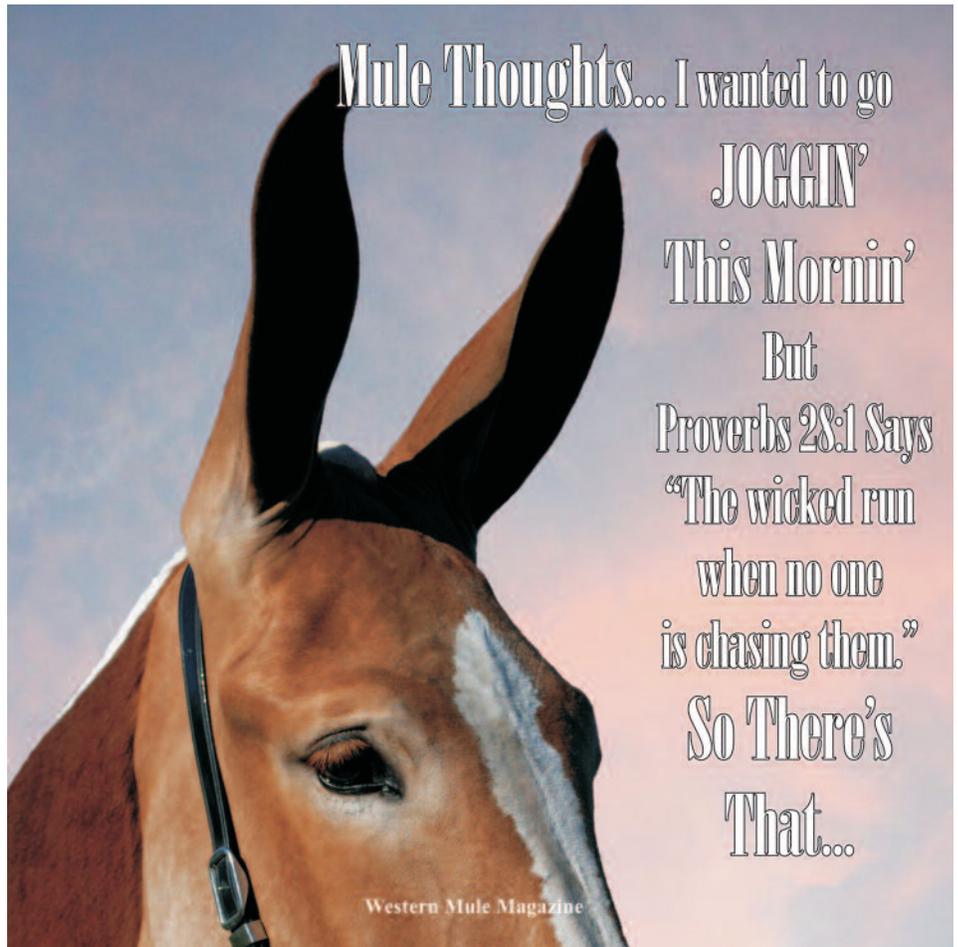
**Take your time and really get the mule handy.** I can't stress this one enough. The more control you have of the mule's feet, the safer you are. Wouldn't it make sense to get your mule as handy as you can at home before heading out on the trail? I am not saying they need to be a polished bridle mule by any means. But you need to have some confidence that you can get your mule to operate for you. That means you should have great forward

motion, the ability to move both the hind quarters and the front quarters, have a good one rein stop as well as a regular stop. I could list many other things that would add a lot of confidence and safety to the first ride. In the past I've had many first rides where none of the above existed. Those rides didn't go well for me or the mule. Nobody would take a car out on the interstate without a throttle, brakes or steering so why would we think that taking a young mule that lacks these things on the trail would be a good idea? You need to have a decent level of control. Take the time and get the mule as handy as possible. It will give you a huge boost of confidence and help you to keep that mule centered which will keep you safe.

**Take your time and make it a great experience for your mule.** Don't forget that this is your mule's FIRST ride!

Even if you have ponied the mule out on the trail before, and if you have followed my suggestion to get your mule handy, it is still going to be a new experience for them. Don't rush things. I don't like to have any plans for a first ride other than to just expose the mule to things. So I don't plan a big loop or have any real agenda. I just like to ride out and have fun. I go through my checklist of things to work on often and I keep the mule's mind on me and on the task at hand. I want this ride to be a good experience for the mule. I look for confidence building opportunities. If I see a small log, I cross it. If I see an option to go around a tree or bush, I take it. If we come upon something too challenging for the mule, I pass on it. I want to bring out the best in the mule so I try to only do things that will help me accomplish just that and help the mule gain confidence. Thanks for taking the time to read. God Bless and we hope to see you at a clinic sometime.

Ty Evans [www.tsmules.com](http://www.tsmules.com)



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This Mornin'

But

Proverbs 28:1 Says

"The wicked run when no one is chasing them."

So There's

That...

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