

Maybeline the Mule Stands Out in the Field

Helen Stapleton

Reprinted from the Masters of Foxhounds Association of America

Editor's Note: Reviewing photos to share on MFHA social media, we noticed a perfectly turned out, long-eared equine in the galleries from River Hills Foxhounds (PA). We inquired and learned that Maybeline the mule is owned by Helen Stapleton, who shares some of her experiences with this unusual - but capable - field hunter: When I start talking about my mules, I don't know where to start - or end. We currently have five mules. Helen Stapleton



Maybeline displays tight knees and a nice bascule over this coop.

Photo by Mary Ann Reise.

Skeeter (out of a Quarter Horse) is now age twenty-nine, hunted with Andrews Bridge from age four to about sixteen and is still okay for light trail work. Echo (out of a Paso Fino) is also twenty-nine, never hunted but was fantastic in the mountains and we used her as a pack mule and for trail

riding, she's now a retired pasture pet. Nellie, age twenty-three (out of a Thoroughbred) rides and drives, but is mostly retired. Number four is Ruby, age nine, my husband's Western riding mule. And then there is Maybeline.

I bought Mabeline in Kentucky a month before she turned two years old

from a Tennessee Walking Horse farm. She is now fourteen years old and sixteen hands. She had about thirty days training on her when I bought her. She knew the basics, barely. She is not gaited.

They shipped her to Roanoke, Virginia, and we met them there and brought her home to Pennsylvania. We were leaving for Wyoming in ten days (with her), so I rode her a few times, made sure she understood about going down steep hills, loaded her and Echo and Nellie and headed for Wyoming.

So we got acquainted with each other in the mountains. She understood what moose were before she understood cows. My husband and I hosted the Hunter Trailhead camp site in the Big Horn Mountains for twenty-five years for the month of July. We retired from that after the summer of 2017. Maybeline went with us every year after we purchased her.

I started her with River Hills Foxhounds that first fall. She still hadn't developed (only two years old), all legs, no body. I stayed in the back, she was very, very green. Back to the mountains the next summer and as a three year old, the following fall, she was much better in the hunt field. I was having health issues with my hips, however, so we stayed in the back again. The next season, we started moving up to the front. She now prefers to be in the front. We take the field at times. She and I have been hunting with River Hills Foxhounds and quite a few of our joint away meets through the years.

My father was a foxhunter and he took me out the first time when I was



*Maybeline is always beautifully turned out in the field.
Photo by Karen L. Kennedy.*

thirteen. I hunted regularly after that with a farmer pack (Fretz's) every weekend. Rose Tree Hounds met next to my dad's farm every other Thursday. So, I was pretty much absent from school every other Thursday all through high school. One could get away with that in those days. Through the years I rode mostly grade horses and/or Thoroughbreds.

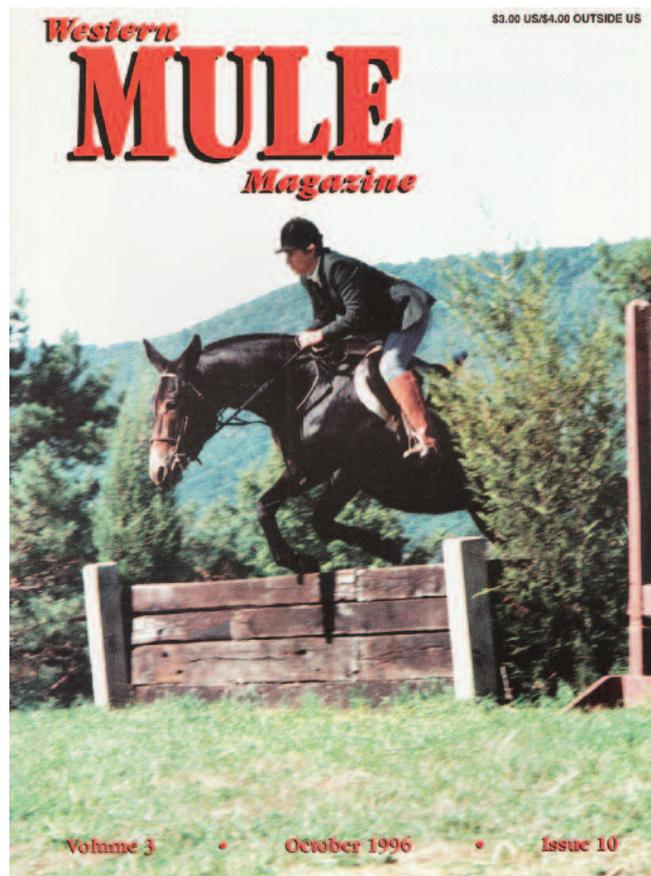
Sometime in the '80's my last Thoroughbred was put down and I was without a horse. We did, however, have a team of mules that we wagon-trained with. At the time, Jody Murtagh was huntsman for Bob Crompton (Andrews Bridge Foxhounds) and would stop by our farm to build or repair their jumps in our fences. He asked why I hadn't been out and I explained that my horse had died and I was just trail riding one of the mules. He kept telling me to "Bring her out." I never even considered bringing a mule into the hunt field. But he kept telling me to bring her, so I did.

She was fantastic and (sort of) accepted. Then we raised a baby mule out

of one of our mares and I hunted him. Every one loved to follow him over fences because he just never stopped. Then came a quarter horse mare and Skeeter, (in those days I hunted enough to keep two fit). And now I have Maybeline. Maybeline is about as steady and unflappable a mount that you can find. I figure since she is fourteen and I am seventy-five, we will get old and retire together hopefully many years from now.

I find mules to be very intelligent and willing to please, if treated with respect. If you never give them cause to mistrust your judgment, they are a willing, dependable partner. Many will bond with their owners much like a dog. Mules were a perfect fit for my husband and myself because of the years we spent in Wyoming. Extremely sure-footed, they love the trail.

Gosh, never ask a gal about her mule unless you want a book!



Editor's note: In October 1996 Helen and Skeeter were on the front cover of Western Mule Magazine. It's great to see Helen is still showing everyone what these wonderful mules can do. — Western Mule Magazine

