

Problem Solving

How to Choose the Right Instruction ——— Monica Erman

It's wintertime. It's cold outside! It gets dark much earlier than in the warmer months. It's a great season to stay inside with a cup of coffee. These months also offer an opportunity to read and learn, advancing our journey in mulemanship. Online videos, blogs, and articles, information is instantly available. And there is a lot of information out there, some of it conflicting or contrary. How do we know who to listen to? When you've got thousands of choices, it's easy to get overwhelmed and give up the search for good instruction.

Here are 5 tips for evaluating mulemanship instruction. Hopefully these thoughts will encourage you to continue building your knowledge and vision for your mulemanship.

1. Be willing to spend some time listening. When we want answers, we want a two second answer. Patiently listening to recounts of history, details, pre-requisites, and credits is often not into account. But it should be. Patience can be interrupted as perseverance. When starting a training blog or video, resist the temptation to skim or scrub to whatever may seem like the 'best part'. Don't pass over a training video because the speaker or author doesn't talk the fastest or isn't as eloquent as a critic may allow. An unfamous trainer may have a single sentence or thought that proves to be the key to solving a problem you have.

2. Don't get hung up on breed or discipline differences. A rider who loves to trail ride can learn a lot from a dressage trainer, and vice versa. A harness mule could benefit by having a driver understand the fundamentals of training a reined cow-mule stop. A trick trainer could teach a mule good stable manners. And dare I say it...yes, I will; a good horse trainer can teach good mule training. Of course, different mules and disciplines have very different looks and frames but there are principles and goals that carry true to all of them. The best equestrian builds well rounded knowledge and extracts components that are needed for the current goal.

3. Apply what makes sense to you. Don't memorize a lesson plan and then determine to apply it to your mule's training if it doesn't make sense to you. A teacher who memorizes a curriculum but has zero belief or understanding in it, will make a very poor courier. If you read an article or watch a video that makes you scratch your head or furrow your brows in



concern or confusion, don't take it to the barn! What's more, if you get a knot in your stomach because applying a certain method may get you or your mule hurt, don't use that method. Always trust your own judgement. We are talking about your mule and your safety.

4. Watch the trainer's mule. The sum of all training is the mule's behavior. When evaluating a trainer in person or via a video, even pictures, take note of how his or her mule is responding. Is the mule's head and neck relaxed, showing understanding? Does the rider need to pull on the reins or kick his legs harder than is reasonable? Does care for the mule emanate from the trainer, conveying a teacher's heart? Or is the trainer more concerned with looking good for the audience? If the trainer's mule doesn't behave as you would want yours to, don't instantly turn off the teaching. Try to fig-

ure out why the mule behaves that way. Learning what not to do, and why, is part of being a balanced mule rider.

5. Don't let a trainer's big barn or facility sway you, one way or another. I cannot tell you how many trainers I have met who taught me things of great value, but they didn't have fancy barns, tack, or equipment. In fact, some of the trainers I respect the most, the ones I would trust with my own mules, have trucks with rusty fenders, grass studded arenas, and halters older than their trailers. A solid mule trainer or rider is one dedicated to the quality of their work, period. Remember that when you are reading an article or viewing a video, you are seeking information to advance your personal journey in mulemanship, not looking for tips on keeping up with the Joneses.

There are literally endless topics that a good mule owner should learn. Anatomy, nutrition, hoof care, health, stable management, current equine laws, and research, just to name the basics. Mulemanship is a practice, an ongoing process, a journey. Even in the months or seasons when we can't be in the saddle, we can still become better equestrians.

About the Author:

Monica has offered quality equine training consultations to mule and horse owners for more than 25 years. She is a graduate of the 1999 John & Josh Lyons Certification Program and completed the course with a mule and an Arabian. Each year, she takes advantage of any opportunity for advanced equine education, including multiple Lyons Advanced Trainer Courses.

In 2012, she competed with two mustangs in the Extreme Mustang Makeover held in New Jersey, receiving 1st in Horse Pattern, 4th and 6th in Legends Finals as well as taking home the trophy saddle for the Double Downer Championship. At the 2010 Extreme Mustang Makeover, her mustang, Danny, carried her to 1st in Trail and 4th in the Legends Finals before he was adopted by the Kentucky Horse Park Mustang Troop.

Since 1998, Monica has served trainers, riders and owners across the country with monthly training, boarding, teaching clinics, riding lessons and problem solving. Her facilities in Missouri and Pennsylvania offered colt starting, harness training, show and sale preparation and injury care. She has written articles for Western Mule Magazine, John Lyons' Perfect Horse Magazine, InfoHorse.com and others.

Today, Monica lives in southwest Missouri, giving owners the knowledge and support they are looking for to build their own equestrian goals. Find her on Facebook or contact her through ben@westernmulemagazine.com.



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I would love to hear from you! If you have a training problem or question, feel free to email me at monica_417@outlook.com

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