

# TRAILER LOADING

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Trailer loading is a unique challenge for many mule owners. When loading your mule, if properly trained, he will stand at the entrance to the trailer and wait for his cue to load. Once cued, he will calmly walk into the trailer, with you outside the trailer, and wait for you to enter to secure him for the ride.

The most common misconception about trailer loading is that it is a mystical problem that is not easily solved. However, most trailer loading issues arise from leading problems. In the July issue of *Mules and More*, I discussed the “Go Forward” cue – teach-

ing your mule to go forward any time you ask, including into a trailer.

As I discussed in the the “Go Forward” cue article, once your mule learns the “Go Forward” cue, many other issues become easily solved, including trailer loading.

Once your mule understands the “Go Forward” cue, begin using your cue to teach the mule to walk over and across different obstacles. Crossing several objects before going to the trailer will give you and your mule the opportunity to refine and perfect the cue to move forward when asked. Start with a piece of plywood, a tarp, wooden bridge, sidewalk, etc; something that your mule is unsure about but not completely terrified of.

Once you are able to walk across an object, build up to objects that are more difficult. Again, this will allow you and your mule to continue to work on perfecting the cue.

When your mule is approaching any object you are going to cross, remember the following guidelines:

**1. To ask your mule to begin the process of crossing an object or entering the trailer, use your cue you have established to walk forward.** This cue will be

the only cue you need to teach your mule. When your mule takes a step or even hints at making an effort to move forward (like a lean forward), release your cue and praise him for a job well done. The more you praise him, the more forward he will get and the more confidence he will gain.

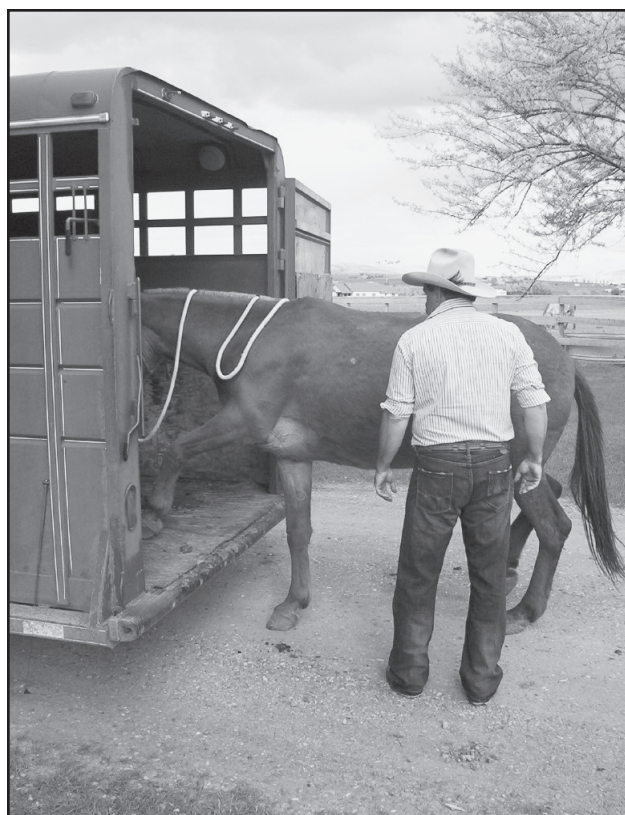
**2. Choose one specific spot on the object that you want your mule to cross. If you give your mule too much “area” to cross, it may overwhelm him.** Choose a spot the size of a quarter and keep that spot in mind while you are working towards crossing. If he moves to the left or the right of the spot you choose, take him back to the spot and ask again.

**3. When you are approaching the object, do not expect your mule to walk right up to the object and be ready to cross.** Start walking up to your object from several yards away to give your mule a chance to see what he is going to cross. Wherever your mule stops in relation to the object is where your mule feels comfortable, and that is your starting point. That is where you begin using your cue to ask your mule to move forward, closer to and eventually over the object or into the trailer.

**4. Once you find your starting point, allow your mule to stand and relax before you begin asking your mule to move forward closer to the object or trailer.**

**5. Initially, do not ask your mule to move forward until you are 99 percent certain he will make an effort to do so.** When he is relaxed and seems to be ready to move, ask. When you ask, the first movement may only be a half step, a full step or even a “lean” forward. However, BE PATIENT, it may be a minute or 10 minutes before he is entirely ready to move. Be sure to let your mule set the pace. After your first step or lean, allow your mule to stand again and relax until he is ready to move again.

**6. After several repetitions of asking and getting a step, you will find your mule getting closer to the object**



**TIM HAS CUED** Diamond Creek Angel to load into the trailer and wait for Tim to secure her inside

**or trailer.** As your mule gets closer and the object is within reach, he may begin lowering his head and trying to smell the object. He may even try to paw at the object. **LET HIM DO THIS!** These behaviors in this situation are a mule's way of determining whether or not it is safe enough to continue. Allow this to happen several times until you see your mule relaxing and feeling comfortable with the object.

**7. Your mule may try to back away from the object or trailer as you ask him to move forward.** Do not reprimand him, just simply move with the mule and continue cuing him until he takes at least one step forward. After he takes a forward step, release the cue, praise the mule and allow him to rest, then try again.

When your mule has one foot on the object or in the trailer, then follow the same steps to get two, then three, then four feet in the trailer. Be sure to repeat this process hundreds of times over several weeks. Repeating will solidify the lesson and ensure your mule understands what you want.

### What's with the noise?

After your mule is consistently walking in and out of the trailer several times, do so one more time. This time, ask your mule to stay in the trailer. Once your mule is standing inside the trailer start rattling the back door a little, open and close a window, begin making small noises around your trailer to make sure your mule is comfortable being inside. If the mule comes out of the trailer at any time, load him back inside the trailer and start with even smaller noises. Again, be patient.

The object is to get your mule use to your trailer and the noises it makes, but not to scare him enough that he feels he must leave. Slowly work up to louder and scarier noises. When the mule accepts all trailer noises, you can walk into the trailer and secure the mule for the trailer ride.



**BEFORE TEACHING YOUR mule to load in the trailer, teach him or her to cross other objects first**

As you begin to get closer to the object or trailer, continue to stay patient and be sure to praise your mule each time he takes a step or makes an effort to move forward.

Once your mule is standing right in front of the object or trailer, you are then looking to get just one foot on the object or in the trailer. The first attempt will likely be your mule lifting his foot up then putting it back down on the ground. After several "lift and lower" attempts, next he will likely place his foot on the object or in the trailer, then place it back on the ground. This is progression in the right direction. Again, be patient and allow your mule to figure out that it is safe.

As your mule places a front foot, then the other front, hind, etc, be sure to ask your mule to back out with each foot also. Just like walking in, you have to give your mule a chance to walk out of the trailer as well.

### Unloading

Many mules will not back out of a trailer. Many times mules must turn around inside the trailer in order to unload. I want my mules to slowly back out of the trailer on my cue.

In order for the mule to back out of the trailer, he must be taught to back up. Again, be sure to back the mule off the trailer after he places each foot in

the trailer. As your mule places a front foot, then the other front, hind, etc, be sure to ask your mule to back out with each foot also. Just like walking in, you have to give your mule a chance to walk out of the trailer as well.

Also, remember you do not need to load the mule in the trailer today. You can stop the lesson anytime the mule responds to your cue by moving forward. As long as your mule is calmer then when you started and has progressed, even a little, you can end your lesson.

Do not over-concentrate on your goal. Be sure to see the progression your mule is making towards your goal. If you rush or force your mule, it will take you twice as long and you will create additional hurdles to your goal.

When training your mule for anything, the slower you go, the faster you will reach your goal, whether it be teaching a sliding stop or loading in a trailer. Allow the progression to happen at the pace your mule sets. Before you know it, your mule will be eager and happy to load in the trailer.

Now, getting to that trail ride, show or clinic you have always wanted to attend is simple, let's load up and go. See you there!