

# RUNNING OFF AT THE GATE

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*A mule that bolts at the gate puts you in a dangerous situation. Tim Doud explains how to fix this bad habit*



**Start with the mule moving forward, apply pressure to the lariat, and teach the mule to stop his feet and face you**

**H**ave you seen or owned a mule that will bolt away at the pasture gate? The mule knows exactly when he is being turned back out to pasture and will bolt off as soon as he feels the halter unbuckle and loosen. Soon enough, the mule does not wait for you to release the buckle and rips the lead rope from your hand, giving you a nice burn.

The mule may start to kick out as he rips the rope from your hand making the situation more dangerous. Most mules that will bolt off as you turn them out or are leading them will almost always bolt off when under saddle.

In training you must look at what you would like the mule to do, not what the mule is doing. I would like all my mules and all mules I train, to turn, face me and stand quietly while I remove the halter and remain standing until I walk away from the mule.

This habit can be fixed, but like any training scenario, it will take time. Once a mule develops a bad habit it normally takes longer to fix the problem than if a horse had the same issue. But, once you fix the problem, a mule will understand it better than a horse. Training takes a commitment by the trainer to take the time needed to fix the problem. You can not buy a piece of equipment to fix the problem. The only training equipment I ever use is a lariat, my full cheek snaffle bridle, a dressage whip, my saddle and some spooky objects, such as a plastic bag or tarp. That's it!

To start off, you will need to take the mule to a round pen or safe enclosure. If the mule responds to a bridle, place a bridle with a full cheek snaffle bit on the mule. A snaffle bit will get a faster response from the mule than a halter. A mule that has not been trained to accept and respond to a bit should have a halter placed on him.

If you start with a snaffle bit, teach the lesson with that bit, then switch to a halter and review all lessons. This is a much faster way to teach the lessons even though it may sound

slower. We will start with a mule wearing a halter, so those of you with a young un-trained mule will know what to do.

With the haltered mule inside the round pen, attach a lariat or soft lunge line to the halter. Standing on the left side of the mule, hold the lariat or lunge line two inches from the halter with your left hand. Hold the remainder of the rope in your right hand.

Ask the mule to "Go Forward" in a small circle around you. Allow the mule to walk off. As he walks off, take the slack out of the rope and ask the mule to give to the pressure of the rope and disengage his hip. (Disengaging the hip is when the hip of the mule moves away from you. The mule should stop his feet and face you. If he does not stop his feet, keep moving his hip away from you until he stops his feet).

You will need to practice this maneuver many, many times. Be sure to alternate from his right side to his left side. So you will ask the right side to disengage, then ask the left, then back to the right, and so on. With practice the mule will get softer and softer, until you feel no pressure on the rope.

You are ready for the next step when you can send the mule off, apply light pressure on the rope and the mule will disengage his hip, stop his feet and face you.

Next, you will build on the first step by sending the mule out farther away from you and asking him to disengage and stop. When you send the mule farther you are not chasing him away; you are cuing him to walk forward but giving him more slack in the lariat. When the mule will disengage and stop with light pressure all the way to the end of the lariat, we will then ask the mule for more speed.

Repeat this same exercise at the trot and lope, teaching the mule to disengage his hind quarters and stop. Remember to teach all lessons from both sides of the mule. Adding speed will get the mule more emotional and therefore more responsive to pressure.



**Work with the mule until he will trot off and turn and face you with light pressure on the rope**



**Take the halter off the mule and immediately put the halter back on**

Ultimately, if your mule understands to stop with this pressure you can make him stand when you are turning him out.

Next, we will teach the mule to stand still as we take the halter off. Break down the act of taking the halter off the mule into many small steps. Our goal is to stop taking the halter off the mule BEFORE he moves away. If at any time the mule moves away, the mule is telling us we are moving too fast. We must then back up to a point the mule will not move away. That is the spot the mule is comfortable.


With the lead rope in your hand, walk up to the mule and touch the mule's neck and walk away. If the mule does move away, apply light pressure to the lead rope and ask the mule to disengage his hip, stop his feet and face you.

Next walk up and touch the halter, then walk up and move the halter back and forth. As the mule is comfortable with the this step move on to the next step.

As the mule relaxes walk up and unbuckle the halter, then immediately re-buckle the halter and walk away. Then walk up unbuckle the halter, slide the halter back an inch, slide it back forward, re-buckle the halter and walk away. The more steps you create the easier and faster the mule will learn. Remember to walk away after each step. This gives the mule a chance to relax and tells him that he did want we wanted him to do. It also teaches the mule to stand still while we take the halter off the mule.

Keep working with the mule until you can walk up to the mule, take the halter off and place the halter back on the mule and he will

not move.

With many repetitions your mule will walk through a gate, turn and face you, and stand still as you take the halter off and walk away. You and your mule will be much happier at turnout time. 

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**TIM takes the halter off of Diamond Creek Grover and Grover stands as TIM walks away**