

Hands Free

Trailer Loading

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Iwork with a lot of mules that have never been touched or taught to lead. In order for these things to happen the mule must be loaded into a trailer and driven to my ranch. The first question I get from every client with a mule of this nature is, “How can you load a mule safely and calmly into a trailer if you cannot even touch the mule?”

My reply, “Anything is possible.” Many times I will go to the owner’s home, even several hours away, and load the mule for them.

This lesson is also a great lesson to teach a mule that kicks or strikes when you try to load him or her in a trailer.

If you are one whose mule already loads into a trailer, this lesson will teach your mule to stand quietly beside you 30 feet from the trailer. Then on your cue, the mule will calmly walk into the trailer with no rope or halter and load himself into the trailer and calmly wait for you to close the door.

The first thing you will need to begin the lesson is a safe area to work the mule. A 60-foot round and six-foot tall round-pen is ideal. If you do not have this, do not use a pen any smaller than 50x50 or a pen any larger than 65x65. You do not want a pen so small that the mule will feel trapped and try to jump out; too large of a pen and your mule will out-run you and be “training” you.

A pen with corners will cause the mule to get “stuck” in the corners and think about jumping out. However, if your only option is a small pen or a pen with corners, you must work the mule slower and with less pressure in order to accomplish your goal. If you push a mule too hard in a small or square pen, you could have a wreck.

You can make a round pen out of any square pen by blocking off the corners by tying a panel or place bales of hay in each corner to make it round.

Remember, it is our job to work the mule in a safe environ-

ment. There should be nothing in the pen that could hurt the mule.

Next, back your trailer up to the open part of the pen, open the trailer door and securely tie the panels to the trailer door. Any trailer will work, but a two-mule straight load trailer is best. By using a two-mule trailer, the mule must back out of the trailer.

We will start the lesson working on outside turns with the mule away from the trailer. Normally, we work on inside turns with a mule as we want the mule thinking “inside” the pen at us.

This time we want the mule thinking “outside” the pen and at the trailer. Do not let the mule turn inside. The mule must think “outside,” the trailer is outside. If he does turn inside, immediately turn him back and ask again for an outside turn.

The harder you work the mule, meaning the more frequently you ask for outside turns, the quicker the mule will load in the trailer and the harder you will work. But always remember never to push the mule so hard that he feels he must jump the fence and injure himself.

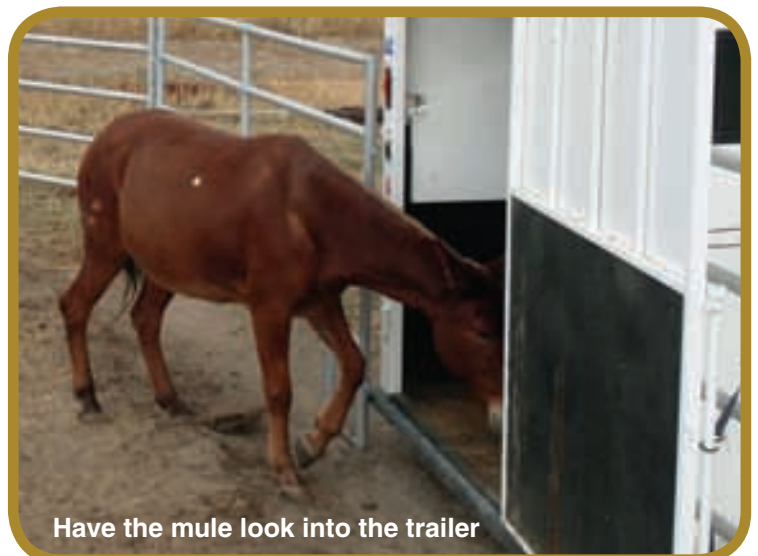
After the mule is making outside turns consistently away from the trailer we will send the mule towards the trailer and make the trailer our focal point.

When the mule passes the trailer opening, ask the mule for an outside turn and send him back towards the trailer. Every time the mule walks, trots, lopez past the trailer, ask for an outside turn. Eventually, the space between your mule’s outside turn and the trailer will get less and less and your mule will start to realize that the trailer is his “escape” from the work. Soon, the mule is standing at the back of the trailer.

When your mule eventually goes into the trailer, allow the mule to rest. If the mule comes back out of the trailer, immediately go back to outside turns to reposition the mule back



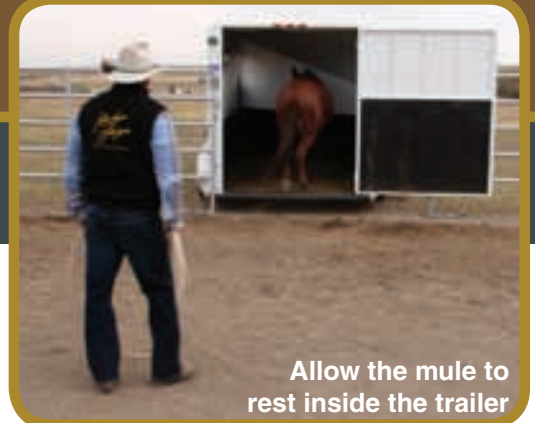
Practice outside turns away from the trailer



Have the mule look into the trailer



Get one foot in the trailer first



Allow the mule to rest inside the trailer

in the trailer. The mule will soon learn that he can rest at the trailer but will have to work when he is away from the trailer.

To break the lesson down into simpler steps, you can first use outside turns to have the mule look inside the trailer. Ask the mule for an outside turn, when the mule turns his head towards the trailer, immediately release the cue pressure. You are using an outside turn to move the mule's head, not his feet.

If the mule does move his feet, use outside turns to reposition the mule back to the rear of the trailer. The mule is telling us that we are using too much pressure. Allow the mule to rest for a second anytime he gives us a correct answer.

Next, with the mule calmly looking into the trailer, cue the mule's hip and ask the mule to move forward and place one foot in the trailer. Work with one foot, then two feet, then three feet until the mule has all four feet inside the trailer.

When the mule steps inside the trailer, allow the mule to walk out of the trailer on his own. Give him a small break, then load him up again. Practice with the mule until he runs into the trailer.

We will now allow him to rest inside the trailer. This will get the mule wanting to load. If the mule comes out of the trailer, immediately load him back into the trailer.

Now you can work on unloading the mule. Load the mule into the trailer. When the mule is standing calmly inside the trailer and not wanting to back out we will ask the mule to unload.

If the mule is safe to get inside the trailer with walk up in front of the mule, kiss or cluck to the mule and back the mule out. If it is not safe to get in the trailer with the mule or the mule is not halter trained, get in front of the mule from the

outside. Place your hand through the escape door or window and ask the mule to back out.

Always kiss or cluck to the mule before you have him back out of the trailer. This is our cue for him to unload. We are looking for a step backward. Praise the mule, then ask for another step. Keep this up until the mule is outside the trailer.

The mule may run out of the trailer, which is fine to start with. First we have to get the mule to back out, then we can fine tune the mule so he is backing out calmly. We will work with the mule loading and unloading the mule until he will load and unload calmly.

As we work through the lesson the mule we start to load and unload by our kiss or cluck.

If the mule is halter trained, place a halter and rope on the mule. Lead the mule up to the trailer. Stop about 10' from the trailer. Make sure the mule is lined up with the trailer door. Remove the lead rope and ask the mule to load into the trailer.

Continue working with the mule starting farther and farther from the trailer until we can load the mule from the center of the pen.

If you have previously taught your mule to lead without a halter, you can walk to the center of the pen with the mule right beside you and ask the mule to load from the center of the pen with no halter or rope on the mule.

By using this lesson you can load any mule into a trailer, safely and calmly.

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We can now load the mule from the center of the pen