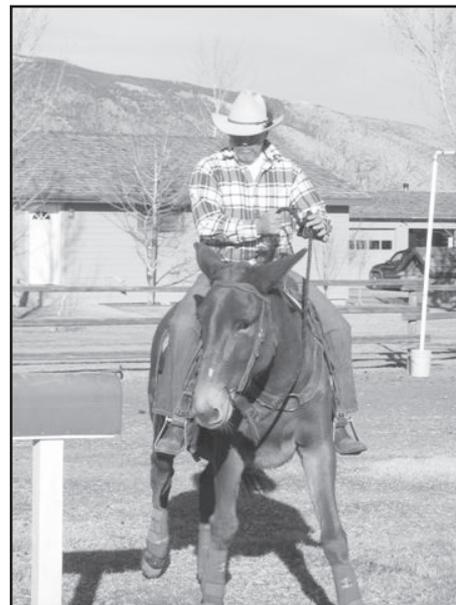


PROBLEM SOLVING

By *Tim Doud*
Diamond Creek Mules
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TIM DOUD gives Angel a cue to move her shoulder to the left. Angel concentrates on TIM'S cue and forgets about the spooky mailbox

Problem solving can be very frustrating for many riders; it is actually simple if you take a step back and really look at the situation. Instead of focusing on what your mule is not doing, ask yourself, what do I want my mule to do?

For instance, if you are riding your mule back to the barn and he suddenly stops. You notice him looking at a mailbox and then without warning he bolts for the barn. Pulling on the reins does no good as the mule keeps gaining speed until he reaches the barn. It was such a great ride until you rode by the mailbox.

After un-saddling and feeding your mule you call your friend. Explaining what happened you tell her, "My mule is afraid of the mailbox and I am getting frustrated". But, looking at the situation....is the mailbox really the



TIM DOUD asks Angel to respond to his cue to move forward and walk through the foam strips

problem?

It could have been another mule, a plastic bag or a million other things that caused the reaction it did. However, the real problem is not what caused it.....the problem is the mule is not responding to your cue to disengage his hindquarters and stop.

Now, let's say you take your mule up to the trailer and he will not load. Is he afraid of the trailer? No, he is not responding to your cue for him to move forward. In other words, if he knows the cue to move forward he should move forward, if he is in the middle of a pasture, walking into the vet's clinic

or into the trailer.

The mailbox and the trailer raise the emotions of the mule. The mule is telling you, "I know the cue when I am calm and quiet, riding in the arena, but I do not know the cue well enough to respond 100 percent of the time, especially when my emotional level is raised."

Just like a professional basketball player practices his shot, every day, so must you and your mule. Teaching a cue is not enough. A mule must respond to a cue 100 percent of the time, no matter what.

One hour of teaching is not enough; it takes many hours of practice for the mule to learn the cue, and you to learn how to be consistent when giving a cue. The mule must respond to the cue without thinking. This is an automatic response, no matter his emotional level. If he does not respond he does not know the cue.

So, next time you have a problem with your mule, go back to the barn, grab a chair and a cold drink. Then ask yourself, "What cue is the mule not responding to?"

Tim Doud is a John and Josh Lyons Certified Trainer. If you have training questions you can email Tim at bliss@wavecom.net, or call 307/899-1089.



FOAM STRIPS Blow in the wind and spook Diamond Creek Angel