

New Year's Resolutions

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A new year is upon us, 2010. The beginning of every new year brings many things. We reflect on the past year, the new friends we have met, the adventures we have experienced, the changes in our life or job.

A new year also means many of us will make resolutions. "This year I am going to lose 10 pounds," or "I'll donate to charity," or "I'll spend more time with my family."

How about a resolution for your mule or donkey? This year, you could train him to catch you in the pasture, hold his foot up for the farrier, or stand still when you mount. Many times we have good intentions, but after a month or two we forget about our resolution.

Don't think of it as a resolution, think of it as a goal for the year. Training goals do not need to be time consuming ideas.

It can be as simple as asking your mule to come to you, to take two steps back, or pick up his foot. Your options are unlimited.

If you feed your mule every morning and every evening and take five minutes to train your mule each time you feed, you will have trained your mule for 60 hours in a year.

This goes without saying, but it's often cold in the winter. That makes it very easy to stay in the house by the fire. Our mules do not have that option. One of those cold days, go outside with your mules and give them a little grain and spend time with them.

It is also important to remember that every mule needs a change of scenery. Taking your mule for a trail ride is a

great way to give your mule a change of pace.

Anything you can do with your mule that is different from his day to day life will do two things. The first benefit is that it gives us the opportunity to practice our cues in a different setting. This will tell us how well the mule knows the cue.

When a mule leaves his normal surroundings, his emotions go up. This will cause his performance to go down. If he will respond to your cue to drop his head at home 80 percent of the time, when his emotions rise, he may only respond 60 percent of the time. We must train our mule to respond to a cue 100 percent of the time, no matter where he is.

The second benefit is that taking our mule away from the house or arena,

makes it fun for the mule. Just as we like to go to new or different places, so does your mule. It can get pretty boring riding around the arena everyday. Mules like to see a purpose in what they are doing. This builds excitement and confidence in your mule when they do a good job.

Another great goal would be to help out a fellow mule owner. If someone is having a problem with their mule and you can help out, great. If you do not know how to fix the problem, maybe you can help them find the answer. Look through your training books or call a professional trainer and work with the person to fix the problem.

Sometimes helping someone is as easy as going riding with them. It does not have to be an all-day trail ride. Spend an hour riding with them in the arena. While they are working with their mule, work on improving your mule and discuss it with your friend.

Anyone can train a mule and training with a friend is fun. Let's say your friend is having a problem with their mule being buddy sour. Ride side by side with your friend, then have them ride their mule away from you in a circle, then ride right back next to you. The mule has just been separated from another mule for a split second.

As the mule stays calm for that split second, increase the size of the circle of



Despite cold temperatures, TIM spends time with Diamond Creek Angel on a daily basis

the buddy sour mule. This will increase the time the buddy sour mule is separated from your mule. Continue increasing the size of the circle and the time the mules are separated. Over time, the buddy sour mule will be less anxious when he leaves the other mule.

Another great exercise you can do with a friend is play follow the leader. One rider will ride off. If the first rider takes two steps forward, then turns right three steps, stops and back up four steps, the second rider must do the same. Take turns being the leader and the follower. This will get each rider to concentrate on each step the mule makes.

This is also the time of year when we look at what we are thankful for in the past year.

One thing I am very thankful for is my girl friend, Jessica Forliano. I met Jessica when I attended the John Lyons Certification Training in 2006 in Parachute, Colo. Jessica helps me write each story printed in *Mules and More* magazine. It is easy for me to train a mule; it is hard for me to put that training on



paper.

It helps that Jessica is also a John Lyons Certified Trainer, as she knows what I am trying to say. She can take my thoughts and get them on paper for you to read.

If you have a question or a problem you would like me to cover in an article, contact me by phone at (307) 899-1089 or by email bliss@wavecom, or by visiting www.diamondcreekmules.com.

