

Buddy Sour Mules

By Tim Doud

Diamond Creek Mules

Cody, Wyo.



TIM rides Angel in a small circle next to her pasture buddies

Have you ever had a mule that refused to leave other mules? Maybe you own more than one mule. Does your mule get nervous or excited when riding alone? Does he ignore your cues when his buddy is out of sight?

This can be a very frustrating and dangerous problem. But the good news is you can fix the problem and have a well mannered mule whether you are riding with a group or

alone.

First, you must understand that mules are herd animals. They are used to living and being around other mules or horses. When in a herd setting, the mule relies on other animals in the herd to keep him safe. In the wild, it is much easier for a herd of animals to detect predators, than a single animal. This gives the individual animals of the herd a sense of security and comfort.

So, just as your mule would with his herd, always start your training where you and your mule are safe and comfortable. This may mean starting your training in an arena, or from the ground.

If your mule is unsafe to ride when he or she is “buddy sour” or will not respond to your basic cues away from his buddy, start your training from the ground. We will teach you how to solve the problem as if you are riding your mule, but if you are starting from the ground, the lesson will be the same.

You will need a friend and your mule’s “buddy.” Have a friend ride the mule’s buddy. Ride side by side for a couple of minutes. When both mules are calm and relaxed, turn your mule, the buddy sour mule, in a small 10 meter or 20 meter



Start with your mule next to his buddy

circle away from his buddy. What you are doing is separating the mules for a split second.

The buddy sour mule will think that his buddy is gone when you turn him away in a circle. But, before he gets excited, he will be back next to his buddy. You are teaching your mule that there is nothing to get excited about, but in small increments.

A few minutes later, repeat your circle again. Remember you are making a small easy circle, separating the mules for one or two seconds. Do not spin the mule in a tight circle or ride a large circle. Keep the mule calm and relaxed by doing 10 meter or 20 meter circles, ensuring he will be back to his buddy in a few seconds. If the mule gets excited from the separation, you are making too large of a circle.

Once the mule is calm and responsive to your cues, when you make a small circle away from his buddy, increase the size of the circle. You want to slowly increase the amount of time the mule is separated from his buddy. Make sure the mule is always calm and relaxed before you increase the time of separation.

If the mule does not respond to your cues, decrease the size of your circle until the mule responds; your mule is telling you that you are going too fast. Slowly build the time and distance you separate the mules.

Some examples would be to ride out on the trail or pasture instead of the arena. Trot the mules instead of walking. Always remember to ride where you can, not where you can't.

If you feel unsafe and your mule does not respond to your cues out on the trail or at the trot, then ride in an arena or walk. Build a positive experience for you and your mule. Remember you are teaching your mule that there is nothing to be afraid of. So, do not place your mule in a situation where he is unresponsive. You want your mule to raise his level of fear, but only a little so you can control it and have him respond safely. Over time you can increase the fear level and because of your repetition, you will get a safe response.

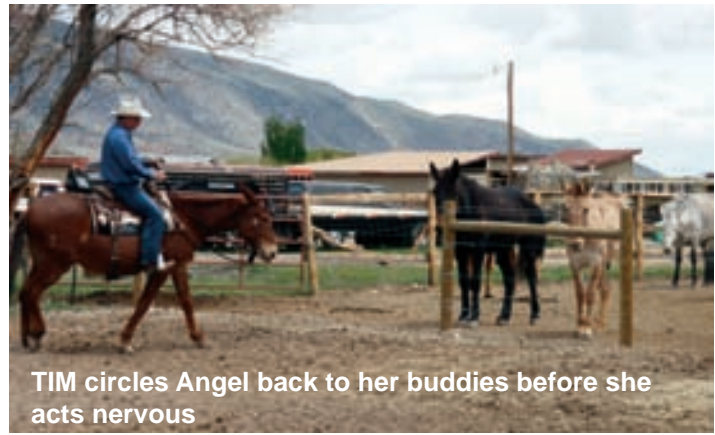
A good trainer is constantly evaluating the current situation, the lesson being taught, and the mule being trained. What if you do not have a friend to help you? You must think of safe options to teach the lesson to the mule.

Ride the mule next to the pasture or pen where his buddy is. Make sure the pasture or pen is not so large that your mule's buddy can get far away from the mule you are riding.

If your mule's buddy is trained to stand calmly when tied, tie your mule's buddy in the arena you are riding in. Teach the lesson the same way. The other mule will be in a small area as not to get too far from the mule you are riding.

With this lesson, you can teach your mule that riding out alone can be a safe, calm and good experience. Your mule will soon understand that his or her buddy will always be waiting when you return.

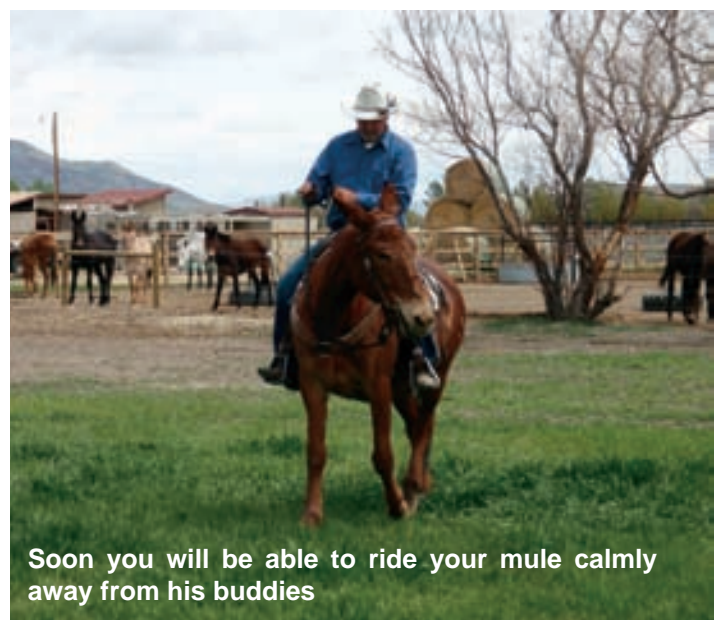
Tim can be reached at www.diamondcreekmules.com, by phone at 307-899-1089 or by email at bliss@wavecom.net.



TIM circles Angel back to her buddies before she acts nervous



When your mule is calm, increase the size of your circle



Soon you will be able to ride your mule calmly away from his buddies