

LIGHTNESS

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We've all heard it.....Mules are Hard Mouthed. In some situations this is true. However, any equine, mules included, can have a very soft mouth, no matter what the past history of the animal is.

Keep in mind....a mule cannot be light if the rider is not light. When you pick up a rein, how much pressure would you like your mule to respond to? Fifteen, 10, four, three, two pounds? How about one-half, one-quarter, or one-eighth of a pound? Is this possible to take a mule and have him respond to one-eighth of a pound of pressure, or less? Yes, it is. Every mule can respond to a cue using one-eighth of a pound of pressure if he is trained

to do so.

All of us know of a friend that shakes our hand so hard we think our fingers will fall off. We see them and say, "Hi". They quickly grab our hand and we immediately tense all our muscles in our shoulder, arm, hand and fingers. Bracing against the pressure we shake their hand. Our shoulder, arm and hand move as if it weighs a ton. We are 'Hard Mouthed'.

Walking down the street we see another friend. They slowly extend their arm and we shake their hand. Our friend shakes our hand, using very little pressure. Our upper body is almost weightless and moves with ease because we aren't

anticipating a 'hard shake'. by slowly moving his hand towards us our friend gives us time to reach out and calmly shake.

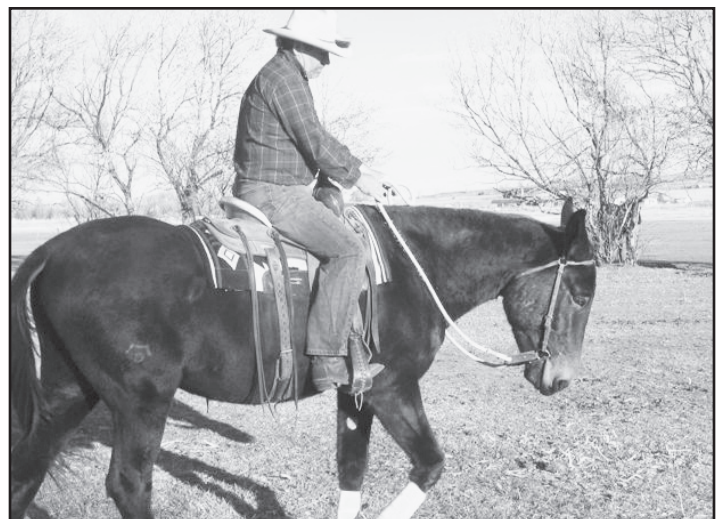
This is the same with a mule. When we grab a rein quickly and pull the mule's head to the side it causes resistance. The mule will raise his head, stiffen his neck muscles and brace for the pressure he knows is coming. On the other hand if we slowly pick up a rein and add one-eighth of a pound of pressure to the bit and hold, we are giving the mule a chance to respond to one-eighth of a pound of pressure.

What do you do if you apply the pressure and the mule will not respond? Increase the pressure to one-quarter of a pound and hold. Then increase pressure to one-half pound and hold, then one pound and hold. Remember to increase pressure in small amounts, then hold the pressure. By holding the pressure we are giving the mule an opportunity to respond.

When the mule responds correctly to the cue release the rein completely. A complete release of



TIM DOUD picks up a rein and Diamond Creek Grover responds to TIM'S cue before he can apply pressure



WITH TRAINING any mule can respond to rein pressure by using two fingers

pressure tells the mule he responded correctly. What is a correct response? A correct response is when the mule moves a body part in the direction you are asking. In this case the mule moves his head towards the pressure of the rein and you release; hence the correct response.

The slower we go the faster our mule will get there. By going slower we are giving the mule more time to think about what we are asking for. But, we must be constant with our cues.

Start by picking up a rein; then slowly add pressure and hold. Next step is to increase pressure and hold. The mule will learn that when we pick up a rein we are asking the mule for a response. He will start looking to respond the moment we

pick up the rein in order to keep pressure off the bit. The mule is learning to respond with less pressure.

As with any training this will take many repetitions in order for the mule to respond lightly every time. The mule will need time to learn to respond to the cue without thinking about it --- your mule will begin to give you an automatic response.

Your friends will be amazed when you pick up on the rein with two fingers and your 'Hard Mouthed' mule turns his head in the direction of your light cue.

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