



# Ground Driving

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(above) Twist the reins and use the throat latch to secure them in a safe manner • (below) Take the loose end of your lariat through the stirrup



I am often asked, “Should I ground drive my mule?” The answer I give is “maybe.” In order to properly train a mule, you must look at each mule individually. Some characteristics in a mule may warrant ground driving while others may not.

Any good training lesson is good to teach a mule, but may not be necessary because all mules are different. A mule that has a lot of energy or a mule that does not like to move out must be trained differently.

If I have a mule that needs bridle work and does not like things behind him, he is a good candidate for ground driving. Another good candidate is a mule that is a little spooky to new surroundings. Ground driving allows me to walk a safe distance behind the mule and ask the mule to respond to my rein cues. In some respects it simulates me being on the mules back because I am behind him and out of sight to a degree, giving him cues to get a response.

I ground drive many of the young mules I train because it adds another layer of training to the bridle work; it gives them a better understanding of cues I will give once I am in the saddle.

Before you begin ground driving your mule, you will need to teach the mule to accept ropes around his legs, feet and hind quarters. If you are unsure how to do this, give me a call and I will be happy to help you. This will also be covered in a future article.

You will also need to have a saddle and a snaffle bit on your mule. Twist the reins of the bridle under the mule’s throat and run the throat latch of the bridle through the twist and buckle to the bridle. I start ground driving a new mule in a round pen using two 30-foot lariats as driving reins.

With your mule in a round pen or other safe area, take the loop end of one lariat and run the end through the left ring of the snaffle bit, then close the loop with the loose end of your lariat by pulling it through the loop. Then after your lariat is closed, take your loose end through the left stirrup. Repeat this on the right side so you have two 30-foot reins.

It is important to remember when you ground drive, handle the reins the same as when you ride. If you want the mule to respond to the bridle with little pressure, you must ask with little pressure. It is impossible for a mule to respond lightly if we grab the rein and jerk.

To get started, kiss or cluck to the mule and ask the mule to walk forward. If the mule does not like things behind him, he will walk keeping



you to one side or the other until he is comfortable with you behind him. Remember to stay far enough back that the mule can not kick you.

When ground driving the mule, ask for changes of direction often with the reins, this will get the mule to forget about things behind him and concentrate on your cues. If he is asked to respond to a cue, he will not have time to think of anything else.

If at any time you feel unsafe or the mule is out of control, put pressure on one rein and disengage the mule's hind quarters, just as we did earlier with bridle work. Work on getting the mule to respond to light pressure on the reins. When the mule accepts me behind him I will switch to a 40-foot lounge line with a snap at each end.

This is the same as the single rope rein I ride with. This allows me to slide the rein through my hands like when I am riding. It is very important when using your reins not to have pressure on the off-side rein. I slide the rein through my hands so the off-side has the entire extra rein and there is no pressure applied.

Once the mule is responding to my light cues, I will ground drive the mule over tarps, around tires, etc. This will raise the level of excitement of the mule. Once your mule raises his excitement and responds to your light cue, he is telling you that he is learning the cue.

Now you can think of things to ground drive your mule around, over and through. Make sure every item is safe. Your mule needs to have a safe experience in order to build trust in you.

I have many items I use in my trail clinics that work great for ground driving. I will ground drive the mule over a bridge, around a mail box, through a small jump, through a rope gate and under a noodle wall, through a small water-obstacle and so on. The more things you can use the better the mule will respond to you rein cues.

By ground driving your mule, you have not only taught him to accept things behind him, you have improved his response to your rein cues.

To learn more about Tim Doud or if you have any questions, visit [www.diamondcreekmules.com](http://www.diamondcreekmules.com). Tim accepts outside mules in training and offers private weekly or daily lessons for mules and their owners at your ranch/farm or his. To book a lesson, training or to host a clinic at your facility, contact Tim at 307-899-1089 or email at [bliss@wavecom.net](mailto:bliss@wavecom.net).



**Begin ground driving in a safe place such as a round pen. Use this space to teach your mule**



**(above) If your mule spooks, disengage his hind quarters with the reins and take his nose towards the fence • (below) Use ground driving to teach your mule to listen to cues, even while walking over obstacles**

