

Buying a Mule the Right Way

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Purchasing a mule is a big decision. Knowing important information from the seller can save you money and stress



Have the seller catch the mule in the pasture

A neighbor brought a sorrel molly mule to my ranch the other day because she had decided she no longer wanted the mule. My neighbor, who is new to mules and buying equines, purchased the mule from a mule-dealer. The mule, we will call her “Maggie,” was sold to her as a “kid broke” mule and she paid \$3,500.

The woman that sold Maggie told the new owners that Maggie could be ridden by anyone, was safe for children, ridden in parades, was trained to lie down, and came with a money back guarantee.

The buyers saw the seller ride Maggie on a few occasions and were actually acquaintances with the seller. When the time came to purchase Maggie, they asked the seller if they could ride Maggie. The seller said Maggie had a cracked

hoof and was lame so she should not be ridden.

The significant other of the seller was a farrier. He informed the buyers that Maggie would be OK and he would trim her for free until she was no longer lame. The buyers were reluctant, but Maggie came with a money back guarantee, so they purchased Maggie.

As the new owners started riding Maggie, they found out that outside of an arena, Maggie would not respond to a rein cue. If they applied pressure to the bit, Maggie would brace against the bit, tighten her neck muscles and run off. The new owners found out later that Maggie had run off with the previous woman and dumped her.

The new owners would be riding Maggie, then for no reason and with no warning, Maggie would stop and lay down or roll with them.

Remember, when they purchased Maggie, she came with a money back guarantee. Unfortunately the buyers did not get the guarantee in writing.

After the issues with Maggie started, the new owners contacted the woman who sold them the mule to get their money back. However, the seller informed the buyer that she spent the money, but would make it right with them. Then the seller stopped answering their calls.

Several weeks later, after trying to work with Maggie, they contacted me and asked me if I would take the mule; they just wanted to get rid of Maggie because she was too dangerous for their family.

So, how do you buy a mule without being taken? First let's talk about a guarantee. If you do not have a guarantee in writing, signed by the seller, you have no guarantee.

Many sellers make a buyer feel better about their purchase by offering a “soundness guarantee.” What is a “soundness



Ask the seller to saddle the mule. Does the mule stand calmly?

guarantee?" A "soundness guarantee" is a guarantee the mule is sound, not lame, by the seller. It has nothing to do with the training of the mule. Most "soundness guarantees" will have a clause in the guarantee that the seller or the auction determines the soundness of the mule. Most auctions will only make a guarantee while the mule is being sold at auction. They will make no written guarantees other than soundness.

So how do you get a guarantee? When you go look at the mule you want to buy, write down on a piece of paper what you think you are buying. Do this in the presence of the owner. List all training you believe the mule has; that way the owner is there to agree or disagree with what you are buying. After, you and the seller agree to the guarantee, both the seller and buyer should sign the paper, preferably in front of a notary public.

This must be taken seriously. If not, it could mean the difference between a safe mule or you getting seriously hurt or the mule getting seriously hurt.

If the seller is not willing to sign a guarantee, then this is "Red Flag Number One!" You should not buy this mule. A written guarantee is the single most important item you can get when you buy a mule.

As a buyer you should remember that all equines will perform better for their current owner in their normal setting – where they live now. This does not mean that when you take your new mule home he will run away with you or buck you off. If the mule is trained to the standards the seller is insisting, then it should not matter where the mule is... he or she should respond the same.

Furthermore, anyone selling a mule that has special cues should teach you how to apply those cues so you can "operate" the mule safely and correctly. I have many mules in my outfitting business that anyone can ride, even someone that has never ridden before. I always explain to each client I have how to ride these mules. Even dude mules must be cued to go forward, stop, etc. So if a seller does not show you how to ride the mule how will you know what his or her cues are?

Ultimately, when you go to buy a mule, how will you know what the mule can or can not do? Listen to the mule!

All mules are at different stages of training. Some owners may not care if the mule is hard to catch, starts to walk off when they mount, or that they must warm up the mule so he will not buck. All people have a different opinion of a "broke" mule. The best thing to do is to listen to the mule. The mule will show you what training it has. If the mule is telling you something that you don't want in a mule, then don't buy that mule.

When you go buy a mule, have the seller catch the mule in the pen or pasture. If the mule is already caught, then he or she is probably hard to catch. Ask the seller to show you how he catches the mule. Does the mule walk up to the seller when called or run away?

If the mule is already saddled, ask the seller to unsaddle the mule and saddle it so you can see. Watch the seller sad-

dle and bridle the mule. Does the mule stand calmly when saddled and bridled?

Have the seller ride the mule. Ask the seller to demonstrate anything you need the mule to do, remembering that not every mule can do everything. If the mule can not perform a task you would like you will know that. If the seller will not ride the mule then this tells you the mule is probably not safe.

What type of bit is the seller using on the mule? Is it a harsh bit like a shank or twisted wire? Does the mule respond lightly to the bit or does he open his mouth, swish his tail or tighten his neck muscles. These are signs of aggravation from the mule. This probably means the mule does not like this bit or has not been taught how to respond correctly to a less severe bit like a full cheek snaffle.

All mules should disengage their hind quarters with light pressure from the rein. This is your emergency brake should the mule spook and/or run off. Ask the owner to demonstrate this while riding the mule so you know if the mule can do this.

After the seller rides the mule safely inside and outside an arena, you should do the same. This will show you how, or if, you can control the mule. Remember to ask the seller about any special cues you should know.

Ask the seller to load the mule in a trailer and leave him tied for awhile. Does the mule stand calmly or paw the trailer?

If possible, go more than once to ride and see the mule. Go back another day and ask the seller if you can walk to the pasture or pen, catch the mule and ride the mule again.

Purchasing a mule is a big decision. No equine is perfect, but knowing what to look for and what to do when buying a mule will save you hundreds or thousands of dollars and many sleepless nights. Do not forget the written guarantee!



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Ask the seller to demonstrate anything you need the mule to do