

Speed-Up Cue

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Have a lazy mule or a mule that just will not move forward off your leg pressure? Do you have trouble keeping your mule in a jog on the rail? Is your mule naturally slow moving? If so, how can you teach your mule to move out and respond better to your leg cue? Introducing and teaching “The Speed-Up Cue” will be the answer to all of these questions.

The key to teaching your mule to stay at a certain speed is to constantly change your mule’s speed. For instance, if your mule will not stay in a trot, do not ask your mule to trot, then keep kicking your mule to keep him in that same trot. Instead, you must ask your mule to trot for a couple of steps then ask for a walk for a couple of steps. Next, ask your mule to lope for a couple of steps, then trot, then walk. You get the idea.

Another important aspect of this exercise is to make sure you ask your mule to slow his speed **BEFORE** he does so himself. You want the mule to always look to you for direction.

The Speed-Up Cue is essentially bumping the mule with both legs until the mule increases his leg speed. The second the mule increases leg speed, you stop bumping. This is very simple but takes commitment from the rider to be consistent.

When a mule feels an irritation he will do whatever he can to stop the irritation. Think about the fly that lands on the back of a mule. The mule will swish his tail without think-

ing to remove the fly. But the same mule will ignore a rider kicking him to move faster. Why?

When a mule swishes his tail to rid himself of the fly, the fly immediately leaves. The mule has learned that in order to get the fly to stop “bugging” him, he should move his tail.

Now think about a rider. Most riders are constantly moving in the saddle. They turn to the side to talk to a friend and the rider’s legs are still moving and rubbing or bumping the mule without the rider being aware.

Because the rider is always moving, the mule will start to decide on his own which movements he should respond to and which movements he should ignore.

Mules are not born knowing that a kick or bump means “go.” So we must find a way to tell the mule to move forward without aggravating the mule. The mule then learns that there is a relief from kicking and bumping.

The easiest way for anyone to see a change in leg speed is from the mule standing still to a mule walking. This is also the easiest way for the rider to learn how to teach the cue.

In a nut shell; from the stop, lightly bump the mule and continue bumping until the mule increases his leg speed to the walk. Stop bumping the second the mule speeds up. If the mule backs up instead of going forward, continue bumping until the mule moves forward.

Use the Speed-Up Cue only when you want the mule to increase his leg speed, not as a way to keep the mule moving forward.

To begin the exercise, start with the mule standing still. Begin bumping the mule’s sides lightly with both legs. Do not give any other cues to the mule. The mule must learn that you will keep bumping until one of two things happen: 1) The mule steps forward or 2) you die from exhaustion from bumping the mule. That is why you must start with light



Constantly ask the mule to change speed



Allow your mule to move forward after he speeds up



Set up cones 20 to 30 feet apart and ask the mule to change speed at each cone

pressure. Most people will get tired of bumping and stop, which teaches the mule to stand still.

Remember the mule learns from the release of pressure, not by applying pressure. Whatever the mule is doing when you stop bumping tells the mule he did the right thing.

If the mule is not moving when you stop bumping, it teaches the mule to stand still.

As soon as the mule picks up a foot to begin walking, stop bumping. Allow the mule to walk without giving the mule any cues. Sit calmly in the saddle and let the mule go. If the mule breaks into a trot, let him.

Ask the mule to stop after he travels 20-30 feet. Let the mule stand quietly. Then ask for forward movement again.

As you work through the lesson the mule will learn the sequence. You bump, the mule moves forward. You stop the mule, he stands quietly.

When the mule will walk forward with light pressure, we will now ask for more. With the mule walking forward, squeeze or bump the mule to speed up. Keep bumping lightly until the mule either walks faster or trots. Again allow the mule to go 20-30 feet then slow the mule to a walk.

Practice this sequence until you can constantly ask the mule to trot 30 feet then walk. Next ask the mule to trot 40 feet then walk. Then 50, 60 and 70 feet, always remember to ask the mule to walk **BEFORE** he walks on his own.

If the mule walks on his own, ask the mule to trot immediately, then walk. You must slow the mule before the mule slows on his own. If not you will find yourself bumping the mule to keep him going. If you do this, you are now bumping the mule when he is moving **AND** bumping the mule when he is not moving. So the mule says, "He kicks me when I move and kicks me when I don't move. I might as well not move".

Once the mule has learned the cue, you can advance the cue. You will need to practice the cue a lot and at different speeds. This will teach the mule to react to the cue without thinking, like swishing his tail to remove the fly. As you

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Refine your cue by picking up the rein, then sliding the rein forward

practice you will notice that it takes less bumping to move the mule forward and the mule's stop is also improving.

A fun game is to place cones 20 to 30 feet apart. At each cone you will vary the speed of the mule. So we will start walking towards the first cone, let's say at three mph. At the first cone we will ask the mule to move at five mph for 30 feet, then slow to four mph for 30 feet, then up to seven mph, then down to four mph then up to eight mph. You get it.

Don't get caught up on the exact numbers, just remember faster then slower, faster then slower. But think more than just a walk, trot or lope.

Now you should be at a point with your mule that you are refining the cue. If you have started with a squeeze of your leg before a bump, your mule should be moving forward with a squeeze instead of a bump.

You should be looking at refining your cue so the mule will respond from a light cue.

If you pick up your reins, then move the reins forward, then slightly lean forward in the saddle, then squeeze your legs, then bump; the mule will start to respond from the squeeze, then from the lean, then from the forward movement of the reins and finally from picking up your reins.

Make sure you practice this lesson at all gaits. Remember, when you are working at higher gaits, your mule will be working harder. If you work the mule without a break, the mule will become less responsive.

The nice part about this lesson is that you can practice the lesson anywhere, in the arena, out on the trail or even in a pasture. As with any lesson, the more you practice, the better the mule will be.

Once you have taught your mule this lesson, you will have the ability to ask your mule to move at any speed you wish and your mule will respond.

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