

TEACHING BETTER STOPS

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I receive several calls each month from individuals who have mules that will run away with them or will not stop when asked to do so. Teaching a mule to stop when cued is essential to a rider and mule's safety.

The most effective exercise I've ever come across in teaching a mule to stop on a dime is called "Hip, Shoulder, Shoulder." Essentially, we will be using our mule's forward movement to disengage his hind-quarters and then ask him to back up.

If we think about a stop, it really is a change of direction from forward to backward. So, when teaching a better stop, we don't focus on the stop, we focus on the hip and backing up.

Anytime you increase your mule's performance in one area, you will find major improvement in several other areas. Some of the exercises I teach are better taught from the ground first. By starting on the ground, you will also be teaching your mule better ground manners. Most importantly, starting on the ground will make it easier for your mule to understand what you are asking when you begin teaching him in the saddle. Other benefits of doing ground work are that he will stand for you when you mount, groom or saddle him, and so on. He will also be more responsive to the bit and you will have your "emergency brake" to get your mule back under control.



AFTER SEVERAL repetitions, TIM is now beginning to see Diamond Creek Grover cross his inside hind leg in front of his outside hind leg

With that said, for "Hip, Shoulder, Shoulder," we will begin on the ground. Always begin any new lesson in a safe area, like a round pen. You will need to have your mule bridled with a snaffle bit. You will also need a dressage or long whip to cue the hip to move.

Step 1: Disengaging the Hip

The most important aspect of this exercise is your mule's forward movement.

Your mule must have good and consistent forward movement in order for this exercise to be successful.

To begin, position yourself facing your mule's shoulder. Hold the rein about four to six inches from the bit and ask your mule to "go forward" around you by lightly tapping his hip with your whip. You can find the lesson on teaching the "Go Forward" cue in the July issue of *Mules & More*. Your mule should now be moving around you consistently, without stopping.

While your mule is moving and you are positioned at his shoulder, slowly move your hand with the rein toward the point of his hip. Hold the rein toward the point of his hip until he moves his hind feet away from you. Then release.

Remember... do not PULL or YANK the rein toward your mule's hip, you want to slowly take the slack out of the rein. If you pull or yank, you are encouraging your mule to be heavy.

A few things that may happen...your mule may just stop and not move his hips. Or, he may just take one step with his hips and continue walking forward, or he may not move his hips at all. However, be patient. When you pick up on the rein, you want your mule to move his hips away from you.

When your mule begins moving his hips away from you more, he will begin to cross his inside hind leg in front of his outside hind leg. This means he is taking bigger and lighter steps with his hips. He will also begin to get lighter on the bridle.

Step 2: The Inside Shoulder

Now we will take it a step further. As your mule's hindquarters start moving more consistently away from you and he is crossing the inside hind leg in front of the outside hind leg, you will then begin focusing on his front inside shoulder and foot.

Again, positioned at the shoulder, ask your mule to move forward around you. You will use the same cue you just used to teach your mule to cross his hind feet, but now you will be asking him to do a little more.

As your mule is moving, take the slack out of your rein towards the point of the hip. This time, hold the rein towards the hip until your mule moves his hips away from you AND stops his inside front foot. The second your mule stops his front foot, release the rein.

Ultimately, you are looking for your mule to stop his inside front foot and pivot on that same foot while moving his hips away from you two steps.

Remember, when teaching a new or advanced maneuver, your mule is going to take time to understand what you are looking for. So, if your mule keeps walking around you and keeps moving his hips... again, be patient and hold the rein towards his hip until he stops his inside front foot. He may walk around you several times before you figure out what you are looking for.

Repeat this portion of the exercise several times (100s or even thousands) until he understands it completely. Also be sure to teach the first two steps of this exercise on both sides of your mule.

Step 3: The Outside Shoulder

So, now that you have your mule disengaging his hips and pivoting on this

front inside foot. we are going to teach the outside front shoulder to get light and give us that stop we've been looking for. Remember, a true stop is really a change in direction.

Now, repeat steps one and two. Immediately after your mule has moved his two steps away from you and has pivoted on the inside front foot, take your rein towards the point of his inside front shoulder and hold. As you hold, your mule will begin to rock backward and eventually take one step backwards. Then release. Gradually, you will get two, then three then five then 10 steps backwards. Repeat this exercise several times and you will eventually have your mule "run-



TIM IS TAKING the slack out of the rein towards the point of Diamond Creek Grover's hip. Grover will then disengage his hip

ning" backwards.

Once in the saddle, you will repeat steps one, two and three exactly as you did on the ground.

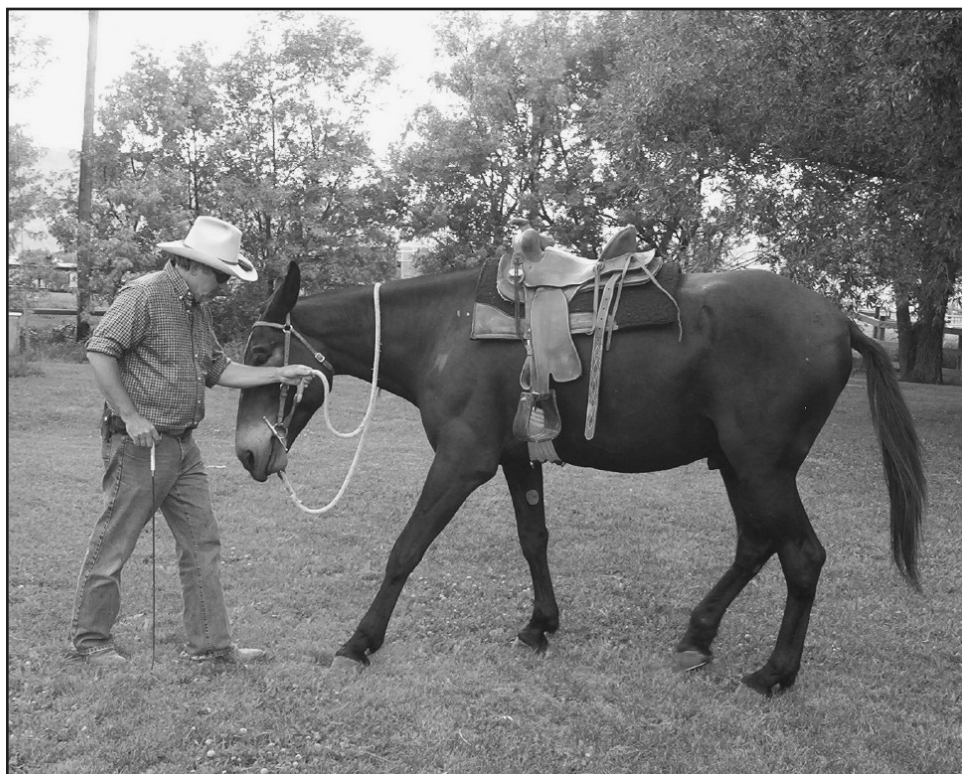
Over time, your mule will begin to understand exactly what you are looking for. Your mule will understand that as soon as you pick up a rein, you are going to want him to back up, which in our mind means STOP.

This exercise will also teach your mule to use his hind-end better. He will round his back and lift his withers and be lighter in the front end.

I have received many calls about conducting clinics throughout the United States. You may now go to my website www.diamondcreekmules.com and click on training. There you will find information on how to host a clinic in your area. I am now booking clinics for November and December of 2009 and January thru April of 2010.

You can also go to my website and view a short video of the three steps of this exercise I've just explained to you. I hope you enjoy it and I hope to see you at a clinic soon.

To reach Tim Doud and Diamond Creek Mules you can visit www.diamondcreekmules.com or call Tim at 307-899-1089.



TIM IS NOW asking "Diamond Creek Grover" to move his outside shoulder by backing up and creating a better stop