

Fall 2009

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# Mule Pen

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## TRAINING TIPS by Brad Cameron

### Leads

In this issue I am going to talk to you about putting your mule in the correct lead. I know a lot of you out there might say "Well I really don't care what lead my mule's in, as long as he is loping". But no matter what type of riding you're doing you should be aware of what lead your mule is loping in and how to put him in the lead you want. If you are in the show ring, then of course it is mandatory that your mule be in the correct lead, but even if you are out trail, pleasure riding, moving cows, or whatever, you should realize that loping in the wrong lead can cause the mule to stumble and even fall.

Before I begin explaining the process of getting a specific lead it's important that you first understand the footfall pattern that actually creates the lead. If you are loping a circle to the right, then you should be in the right lead. If you are moving to the left then you should be in the left lead.

Let's say we are going to lope to the left and want the mule to go into the left lead. Understand first that the lope is a three-beat gait. In other words you will hear and feel three beats for every complete revolution of the four feet.

This is how it happens. If the mule goes into the left lead the first foot to hit the ground and initiate the lead is going to be the right hind. This makes the first beat. The second beat will be the left hind and right front hitting the ground at the same time. The third and last beat for the left lead

is the left front foot, then the sequence starts all over again with the right hind.

If you've ever attended one of my Mulemanship clinics you have seen and understood the importance of hind quarter control, especially with the mule. Control of the hindquarters can do everything from saving you in a panic situation to helping you attain upper level maneuvers, a basic control of the hindquarters is all that is necessary to ask your mule for a correct lead.

Your first step in achieving leads will have to be establishing control of your mule's hindquarters. The amount of control you eventually have will depend on you. You will only get out of it as much as you put in, but the more hindquarter control the better off you'll be. You want your mule moving off your leg in response to a cue, in mulemanship we make it very easy for the mule to understand what we are asking by the way we give our cues. For example, when asking the hindquarters to move or yield to leg pressure, you move your leg back slightly from where it would naturally hang. This makes it real clear to the mule what it is your asking for and when you are ready to lope it sets your body into the exact position it will need



The right hind hits the ground followed by the left hind and right front.

to be in for the lead.

To begin with, you will ask your mule for a lope into a specific lead going naturally into the lope from the trot. While at the trot, try and feel the rhythm of the mule underneath you as you move along. If you are going to ask for a right lead, do it at the exact moment the left hind is under the mule.

*Continued on page 2*

### 2009 FALL CLINICS

SEPT. 18-21: Medina, Ohio, Contact Jo Lytle  
419-651-1411

SEPT. 25-28: Martin, Tennessee  
Contact: Lake Nowhere Mule & Donkey Farm 731-364-9572

OCT. 2-4: Reidsville, N. Carolina  
Contact: Holly & Bruce Fisher  
828-894-5783

# Leads con't



**JJ has three legs in the air. His right hind is pushing off, starting the left lead.**

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Since the lead comes from the hindquarters you will cue the hindquarters by moving your left leg back just like you have been doing to teach hindquarter control. Your body position is important here, do not lean off to the right. You should never lean off to the side for any reason in riding, this can really mess things up by throwing the mule off balance. What you do want is to weight your outside stirrup slightly. In a right lead this would be your left stirrup or the one you are using to initiate the lead, this doesn't mean lean left but just put some weight in your left stirrup while cuing for that left hind. Then, sit down, relax, throw some slack in the reins and float off into the lope.

Now I know what you're asking, "how do I know if I'm in the right lead?" Good

Question! There are two ways to tell what lead you are in. The best way is to actually feel the lead under you, but it takes time and practice to develop feel for anything. The other way is to simply look down.

Remember the footfall sequence? In a left lead the last foot to land is going to be the left front, so see if the left shoulder is moving forward last. If it is, you've got the lead, if the right shoulder is moving forward last then you missed the left lead and need to come back to the trot and try again. Now looking down is a bad habit to get into but you have to start somewhere to begin developing the feel for it.

Have you noticed that every time you lope your mule, no matter what lead he's in it seems like things just aren't straight? Do you always feel kind of lopsided? Congrat-

ulations! You have more feel than you probably give yourself credit for. I mentioned that by cueing for the lead correctly it will automatically put your body in the position it needs to be in for the lope. This means when your mule is loping, say in the left lead, he is moving under you in such a way that it causes your left hip and left leg to be slightly more forward than your right. If you're in the right lead your right leg will be forward, practice building a feel for the lope so that you can look straight ahead and be able to tell what lead you are in without looking down.

You can practice putting your mule into his lead in an arena, pasture, open meadow, or even on a good clear trail. It's a great way to have fun and develop your riding skills at the same time.

## Do something positive for you and your mule... Join the BRAD CAMERON MOVEMENT!

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Well another season has almost come and gone and a big **THANKS** to all of you that attended one of my clinics and to those I will see this fall. Please keep in mind that these clinics will start again in Spring 2010. I hope to see you all again, as well as some new faces. Think of these clinics as an investment, put a little aside each month to do something **POSITIVE** for yourself and something rewarding for your mule!

**Keep checking our websites at [www.cameronequine.com](http://www.cameronequine.com) and [www.muletrainer.com](http://www.muletrainer.com) for updated newsletters, product sales and we're hoping a REDESIGN in 2010!**