

MULES AND HINNIES

Mules

A mule is the result of breeding between a female horse and a male donkey.

A mule is said to have the body of the horse with extremities of a donkey. Mules can range in height from 36 inches up to 17 hands, depending on the size of the mare and stallion used. In Britain larger mules are less common than in the USA where they have been used for draught and riding animals since America was colonised. Mules were extremely popular with the British army and were used in both World Wars and during campaigns in India and Asia.

Mules have smaller ears than their donkey fathers but larger, although the same shape, as their horse mothers. Their tails are similar to that of a horse. If they try to bray it usually starts out with a horse's whinny and ends with a donkey's distinctive bray.

Male Mule The correct name for a male mule is a Horse Mule, but they are sometimes referred to as a John or Jack Mule.

Female Mule The correct name for a female mule is a Mare Mule, sometimes females are informally called Molly Mules.

Mule Colt or Mule Filly refers to a mule that is less than 3 years of age.

Hinnies

A hinny is the result of breeding between a female donkey and a male horse. A hinny is said to have the body of a donkey and the extremities of a horse.

Because a donkey mare is smaller than most horses, hinnies are generally smaller than mules and are less common than mules. It is extremely difficult to tell the differences between a mule and hinny, therefore hinnies are often mistaken for mules.

Male and female hinnies are generally referred to in the same way as male and female mules.

Male mules and male hinnies are anatomically normal. They are extremely difficult to handle and should be castrated, to help with their temperament and make them safer to manage.

Mules and hinnies come in a wide range of colours depending on their parents: from plain solid colours to paint and appaloosa markings.

As donkeys have 62 chromosomes and horses have 64 chromosomes the result of their inter-breeding, a mule or hinny, has 63 chromosomes. This odd number of chromosomes makes it extremely rare for a mule to breed. In fact, since records began in 1527 there have only been 61 reported cases of mules giving birth.

The Best of Both Worlds

Mules have many of the best traits of their parents. They can withstand extremes of climate, perhaps due to the origins of the donkey from Africa and Asia. Faced with a dangerous situation mules will choose either to use a flight or fight response depending on individual circumstances compared with a horse that would always prefer to run away. This tends to make a well trained mule very calm and steady which is why they were so popular with the armed forces for carrying explosives and ammunition. They were less likely than horses to panic in dangerous situations and could carry much more than donkeys. However, in common with their horse parent mules and hinnies can be more "flighty" than donkeys.

Care of the Mule

In most aspects of their care mules can be treated and cared for in a similar way to other equines. However, there are a few extra considerations.

Mules are intelligent and sensitive and therefore do not settle well during long periods of being stabled. They need the companionship of other mules or equines and should have as much time out in the paddock, where they can keep active and as mentally stimulated as possible.

Just like donkeys and horses, mules need fresh water and feed. It does appear that mules require slightly less food than a horse of similar size, although feeding requirements do depend on the individual animal. Mules can be fed on haylage, hay and straw like donkeys. See The Donkey Sanctuary guide to Caring For Your Donkey for detailed information.

Due to their hybrid vigour the mules are often less prone to ailments than their parents, however they can suffer from the same illnesses and are still prone to laminitis.

Mules, just like donkeys and horses, should have their feet trimmed every 6-10 weeks. *Mules and hinnies need an understanding farrier as they can be nervous of having their feet trimmed if they have not been fully trained.*

So What Can a Mule Do?

The common conception that mules are stubborn, is **not** true. They are intelligent and very trainable, however they are careful and will not be over worked. The mules' instinct for self-preservation means they will not put themselves in danger, or be over-worked which has led to the misconception of stubbornness.

If someone says a mule is stubborn it is probable that "they have just been outsmarted by one."

Mules are very quick to learn and will learn from good or bad training equally, so when training a mule, the trainer should be very clear in what they are asking for. Mules need to be trained calmly, patiently and with a great deal of understanding. Mules' long memories mean that if they experience frightening or painful training they will not forget and they take a long time to forgive bad handling.

Depending on their size and conformation, mules can do anything a horse or donkey can do and in some cases do them better. Mules can be used for riding and riding events such as dressage, show jumping, endurance events and western riding events. Mules are particularly suited to driving. They are suitable for farms and smallholdings where they can be used as pack animals or for draught work.

Mules do have a great ability to high jump. This is not from a gallop as in show jumping but from a standing start inside a marked area, over a single pole. Mules 125cms at the wither have been known to clear jumps of 178cms.

In Britain, the relatively small size of the mule makes them suited for children's riding providing they have received sufficient training.

Other sources of mule information can be found at <http://www.britishmulesociety.org.uk>

