

Manny Kicks Long Ear Lore

By Chris Stuckenschneider

CHAPTER 1: Long Ears No Laughing Stock

Mules have gotten a bad rap, and that's no hee-haw. To coin an expression from the late, great comedian Rodney Dangerfield, "We don't get no respect."

Yes, friends, that is a double negative. I've succumbed to lackluster grammar because you can't change a quote. Any journalist knows that.

But back to my point—mules have long suffered the barbs of prejudice. Oh how we've patiently plodded on, turning a deaf ear to cruel remarks and bad jokes. But I'm here to set the record straight. Long ears do not sit around with dunce hats on while twiddling their hooves, a persona that peeves me in the patootee.

Need an example of how mules have been wrongly portrayed? Take this verse from "Would You Like to Swing on a Star," a hit Bing Crosby sang in the 1940s, please take it because it's killin' me...

"A mule is an animal with long funny ears, he kicks up at anything he hears. His back is brawny but his brain is weak, he's just plain stupid with a stubborn streak, and by the way if you hate to go to school, you may grow up to be a mule."

That song makes my tail droop.

It's time for our noble breed to get its due respect, to throw off the yoke of misinformation and kick the negative stereotypes in the tush.

It takes just one animal to make a difference, and I'm the spokes-mule for the stable. In this story, I'm going to dispel ignorance about mules and elevate long ears to a more lofty status. Let's not waste any time. Now I ask you. Are those the words of a lazy boar, or a mule with hard work at his core? Believe me, pulling our weight is a common trait for mules.

First let's shed some light on our looks. It's a given we're not the Prince

Charming of the

equine set. We can't compete with horses when it comes to being easy on the eyes. Some of us have white noses and rings around our eyes, and all of us own a set of ears taller than a mug of Dad's Old Fashioned Root Beer.

But hay, as they say, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Some folks in the know appreciate our uniqueness and value our strength, smarts and big hearts. We possess all three. Mules have your back because they possess strong backs, and can work a good gelding under the table. We also are calm thinkers and problem solvers.

As far as mules being stubborn, neigh, bray, I say—no way. We're just cautious. Aware of our abilities, and limitations, we avoid putting ourselves, or our humans, in danger. Dad-gum-it, we're just plain likeable, and trainable, if you'll give us a chance.

We may look comical, but we're cool, and unique. Yet we often draw another short stick because of a delicate subject. Mules can't have little mules. Allow me to explain. To welcome a mule into the world, you must have a male donkey, a jack, and a female horse, a mare. The payoff is a hybrid, the most common one in history.

Our daddies might be donkeys, but the father of our breed in the U.S. of A., is also the father of our country. To the head of the class if you know of whom I'm braying. Correct! President George Washington. Now there was a man with mule-smarts.

Next chapter, we'll take a gander back, and learn about our first president and the role he played in creating a breed that was just what our country needed in the heyday of its infancy.



Just a little mule humor!

Links to More Learnin'

1 Listen to Bing Crosby singing his famous hit, "Would you Like to Swing on a Star," at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rATftjiWdkw.

Crosby made 23 gold and platinum records during his career, and won an academy award in 1944 for "Would You Like to Swing on a Star."

2 Pick up a copy of "Belle, the Last Mule at Gee's Bend," by Calvin Alexander Ramsey and Bettye Stroud at your local library or bookstore.

3 Read "Got Mules? A celebration of mules in Tennessee history," at: <http://www.tennessee.gov/tsla/exhibits/mules/index.htm>.

LEARN MORE!
Companion activities can be found at www.mo-nie.com using code: **teachmo13**.

Common Core Standards:
R.CCR.1, R.CCR.2, R.CCR.3, R.CCR.4, R.CCR.5, R.CCR.7,
W.CCR.4, SL.CCR.3, L.CCR.4

