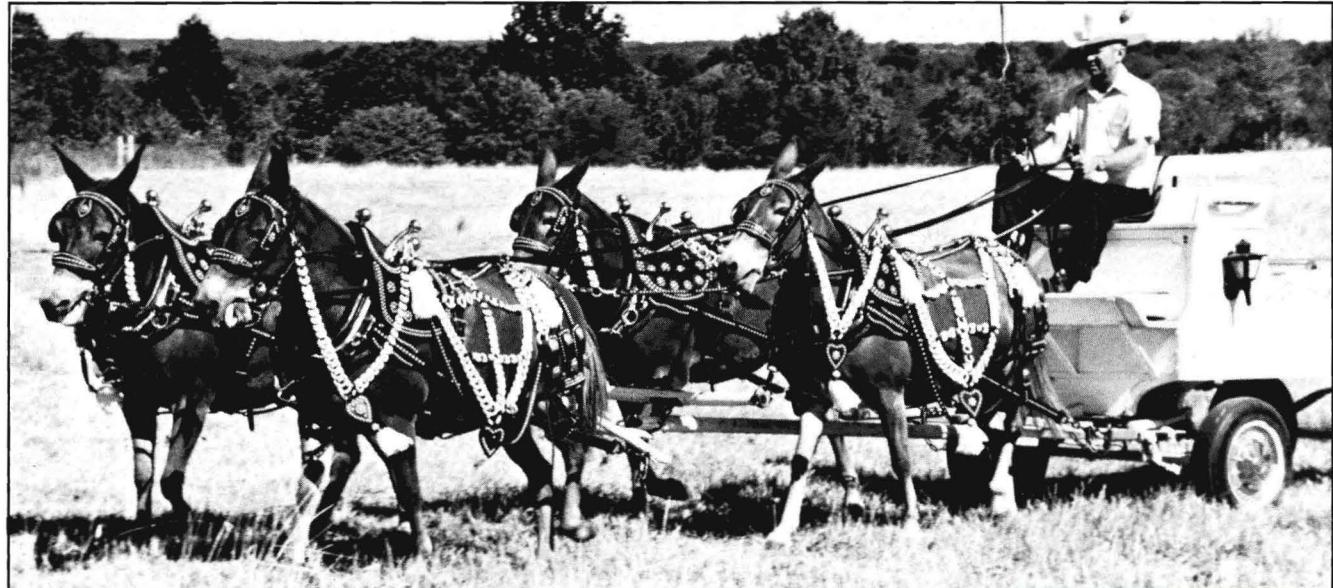


MU Guide

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A Missouri state champion miniature four-mule hitch.

Miniature and hunting mules of Missouri

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The miniature and hunting mule, tack, harness and wagon business is booming in Missouri and has spread to surrounding states. Miniature mules are 50 inches tall or under. Hunting mules can be any height, but those carrying adult riders are about 50 inches tall or taller. Size is the only visible difference, as both groups are bred alike and perform in about the same activities. Height is used mainly for show classification. Larger mules are used to carry adult and youth riders.

Members also promote mules through parades and participate in trail rides and other mixed horse activities. The main activities that association members enjoy are showing hitches, jumping, driving for fun and just plain talking about and trading mules.

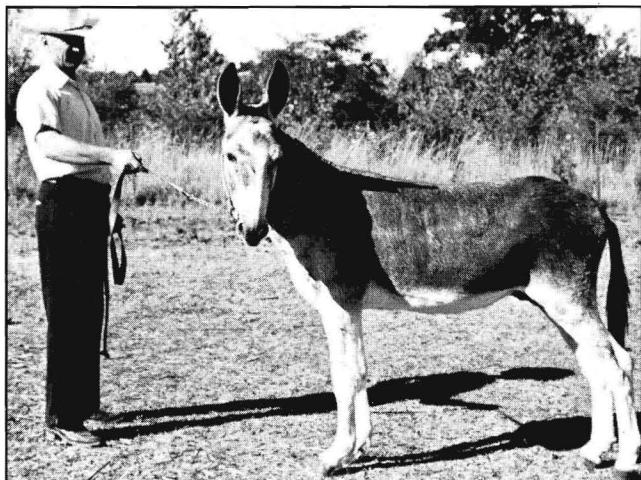
What is a mule?

A mule is a hybrid—a cross between a mare and an ass. Shetland pony mares are usually crossed with a small jack to produce miniature and hunting mules. The cross of Jennets with small stallions produces a “hinnay,” which cannot be distinguished from a mule. Some people believe “hinnies” are harder to handle than mules, but this contention is hard to confirm.

These crosses are sterile when bred back to the original cross or to each other. Mare mules have regular heat cycles, but do not settle. Uncastrated mules are aggressive breeders but are likewise sterile. Choice colors are sorrel, blond sorrel and gray. Blacks are discounted in price.

Association activities

There are more than 50 paid members in the Missouri Miniature Mule Association. The Association meets quarterly for business planning and promotional sessions. It sponsors two mule and tack sales annually, formulates policy, develops show rules and promotes shows and show classes in established horse shows.



Breeding jack for miniature mules.



Shetland pony mare and miniature mule colt.

Mule psychology

"Stubborn as a mule," "mule headed" and other less printable terms are household words in describing mules. The proverbial "getting his attention with a 2 x 4 between the ears" is an unjust inference to the disposition of a mule. The nature of a mule is different from that of a horse. He is wiser, when it comes to his own welfare, than a horse. When he is frustrated or uncertain, he stops and thinks it over. We call him stubborn for this. Unlike a horse, he almost never will over-eat or founder and will seldom run into obstacles if running away. Mules are seldom, if ever, seen in pulling contests, although they are good pullers in regular work. They learn in the first contest that punishment is not allowed so "why pull yourself to death?"

Mules are sure-footed in rough terrain. Their judgment on what is unsafe footing is quite good, and they only negotiate slick spots and quagmires only after careful appraisal.

The concern of most people not familiar with mules is getting kicked by them, while "mulemen" handle them with little concern. Mule colts communicate with each other in play and competition with body, teeth and heels. It's natural for them to do so with humans, although many never kick. Discipline for kicking at this age quickly eliminates the problem because mules respond well to discipline and seldom forget.

The disposition of mare mules is considered more desirable than that of horse mules. Horse mules play with great vigor and sometimes get injured in the process. If you are showing them, it may be necessary to keep them separated because some of them will play and wrestle with such enthusiasm that they keep spots of hide and hair knocked off. Chasing calves is sometimes a problem when cattle are kept with them. However, not all horse mules are this active.

Mules are hardier than horses. They withstand

more heat and stress, carry and pull heavier loads and live longer than horses. They take care of themselves better under conditions of hardship and probably do so with less feed.

This difference is not great, however, and over-work and stress should not be imposed upon them just because they can survive it.

Handling and training mules

Mules respond to kindness and patience just as horses do. They should be handled early in life—by 2 weeks of age. Teach them to lead, tie, have their feet handled and be groomed.

When about 18 months to 2 years of age (should be completely gentle from prior handling), the mule can be harnessed and hooked to a sled with a gentle, broke mule. Have a tongue in the sled and a helper with you. It may help to hitch while the mules are tied to the stable or a post. If the young mule is kept from running, it will break out more gentle than if let run the first time it is hooked up.

Many pairs are broken together. They are simply hitched to a weighted sled and, when they start it, the driver steps on. Weight of the outfit discourages running away. Some owners allow young mules to run in a large open field when first hitched up. They feel it gives them more spirit, and it probably does—maybe too much.

Young mules learn the commands to start and stop very quickly. Since they are natural pullers, they are easy to break and train.

After a few days on the sled, they are ready to hitch to a wagon. You may need an assistant to help hitch and keep the young team under control. Don't trot and invite runaways until they respond well to stopping and standing. When they are under good control, get them tired, then trot in a circle reversing directions frequently. Like horses, hard work at a variety of tasks teaches the young team a lot.



Well-trained riding mules engage in the same activities horses do. In addition, coon hunting mules jump fences.

Once mules are acquainted with their handler, their performance is quite predictable. For example, if you have a good-driving four-mule hitch, they will drive well almost every time they are taken on the road or into a show ring. They seldom get nervous enough to prance or refuse to walk in the show ring. Indeed, almost any mule team will make a good show with no warmup, if necessary. Because of this fact, it is important to break them out well, without serious problems, because early training is remembered a lifetime.

Breaking to ride

Gentle mules seldom buck, especially those broke to work. Many are tied with head up in a barn while saddled, "sacked out" and mounted. After a few mounts they are ridden out around the stable.

The first trips away from the stable are best made with another person on a broke mule or horse, as they may refuse to go alone. Work them as you would a horse and teach them to neck rein.

Some mules are ear shy and reluctant to be bridled. You may need to snub them for a while when bridling.

Equipment, harness, tack

Most wagons have rubber tires and good braking systems. Miniature mules will pull regular size farm wagons when the tongue is shortened, but most wagons are custom-made using small automobile-



Like horses, miniature mules should be handled early in life.

wheels and braking systems.

Show and parade wagons that are driven around crowds of people have foot brakes so both hands can be on the lines. Some show wagons are imaginative and attractive in design and build.

Work harness is often cut down by a harness maker from regular-size harness. Be sure it has not dried out too much, or it will not be strong. A satisfactory cut-down harness at a semi-annual tack sale ranges from \$100 to \$300.



Note harness decorations on this well-appointed pair of Missouri state champion mules. They are judged 50 percent on performance at walk, trot and maneuvering the vehicle forward and backward and 25 percent each on equipment and how well-matched they are.

A show harness is custom-made and much more expensive. It is adorned with extensive decorations and may range in price per set from \$500 to \$1,000.

Mules tend to have low, wide, round withers and do not hold a saddle well. A medium-wide gullet in the tree helps, but extra-wide "Quarter Horse" trees may be too wide for these small mules. Fourteen-inch seats are more appropriate than standard 15-inch seats, and medium-weight saddles are adequate in size.

Saddles should be secured by breast collars and cruppers to keep them from turning.

Riding bridles with various kinds of bits are used. Most are curb bits with enough severity to control the animal. Mules are harder-mouthed than horses and require more control. Some riders use "hackamore" bits.

Miniature mule show classes

Miniature mule conformation and driving show classes are much like adult mule show classes. In addition, there are often bareback classes and classes under saddle. They are judged on performance much like horses are.

Following are the classes offered at the Missouri State Fair. Note that this schedule is weak in riding events.

Miniature mules 50" and under—In Hand Class

Mare 50" and under and Horse
Mule Colt
Mare 50" and under Mare Colt.
Mule Colt.
Horse Mule, 1 yr.
Horse Mule, 2 yr.
Horse Mule, 3 yr. and over
Mare Mule, 1 yr.
Mare Mule, 2 yr.
Mare Mule, 3 yr.
Mare Mule, 4 yr. and over
Horse Mule, 3 yr. and older, 46" and under
Mare Mule, 3 yr. and older, 46" and under
Pair Mules, 3 yr. and older, 46" and under
Pair Mules, any age
5 Mules, any age, owned by exhibitor

Grand Champion
Reserve Grand Champion

Hitches

Two Mule Hitch, 50" and under,
Lady Driver, Must have co-driver
Two Mule Hitch; 46" and under
Mule 50" and under, Cart Class
Two Mule Hitch, 50" and under
Four Mule Hitch, 50" and under
Unicorn Hitch, 50" and under

The hitches are "shown as a heavy harness hitch to a suitable 4-wheel wagon at a flat walk and jog trot. Must back straight, swing right and left without moving rear wheels of wagon. Judged 50% on the performance, 25% equipment and 25% matched mules."

The "jog trot" is faster than most horsemen think of a jog, and some judges may want an extended trot.

The Missouri Miniature Mule Association has developed a judging score card as follows. Note that beauty or "eye appeal" in General Appearance and Head and Neck total 50 percent.

Miniature mule score card (Missouri Miniature Mule Association)

General appearance (eye appeal) 20%

Symmetrical form, stylish carriage, smoothly made, blending of all parts into a balanced animal.

Temperament alert and energetic but not wild, spoiled, or unbroken.

No serious conformation faults, such as crooked legs, low backs, plain heads, rough build, coarse bone and joints.

Head and neck 30%

Head—refined features, smartly carried.

Ears—long, pointed, alertly carried.

Eyes—large, full, clear.

Lower jaw—strong, clean, angle wide.

Muzzle—tapered, nostrils large, lips firm.

Neck—reasonably long, crested but not thick.

Clean throatlatch.

Plain heads, thick throatlatches, rolled crested necks, short ears discriminated against.

Body 30%

Back—short, strong, full coupling.

Shoulders—sloping, long, smoothly laid in.

Croup or rump—long, reasonably level. Not short, steep, nor tapered to the rear.

Thighs—full, wide from side view. Not tapered top to bottom.

Chest—wide, legs spaced apart. Narrow chests and bodies discriminated against.

Appropriate size—50 inches maximum height.

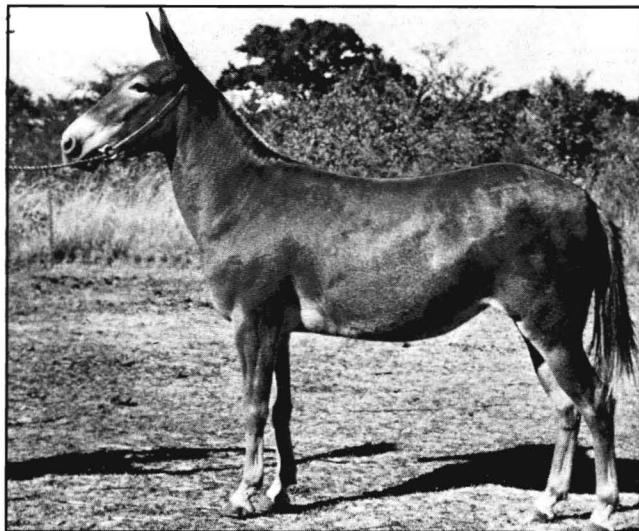
Leg set and action 20%

Legs—straight, on the corners of the body. Knock knees, crooked ankles, sickle and cow hocks discriminated against.

Soundness required.

Action—prompt, straight, true and long.

Mules should walk fast and willingly.



If they have beautiful heads, topped by long, alert ears on clean necks, and have no serious conformation faults, mules win shows and command high prices.

Hunting mules

In the beginning, "coon" hunting mules were developed to follow hounds by the rider dismounting and placing a blanket or his coat over wire fences so they could see them for jumping.

Recently the Missouri Hunting Mule Association has concerned itself mostly with show jumping. Audiences are intrigued and amazed that some mules can stand flat-footed and jump a wall 12-16 inches higher than their withers. The association prepares and revises rules, promotes mule jumps far and near and has its own special gymkana classes. Following is a typical show schedule:

Model class. (Inches refer to height of mule.)

Jump I - 48 inches and under.

Pleasure class (over 14 years of age).

Jump II - 50 inches and under.

Walk trot (14 and under).

Jump III - 52 inches and under.

Garmet race.

Jump IV - over 52 inches.

Sack race.

Pick up race.

Relay race - 2 man.

Egg and spoon.

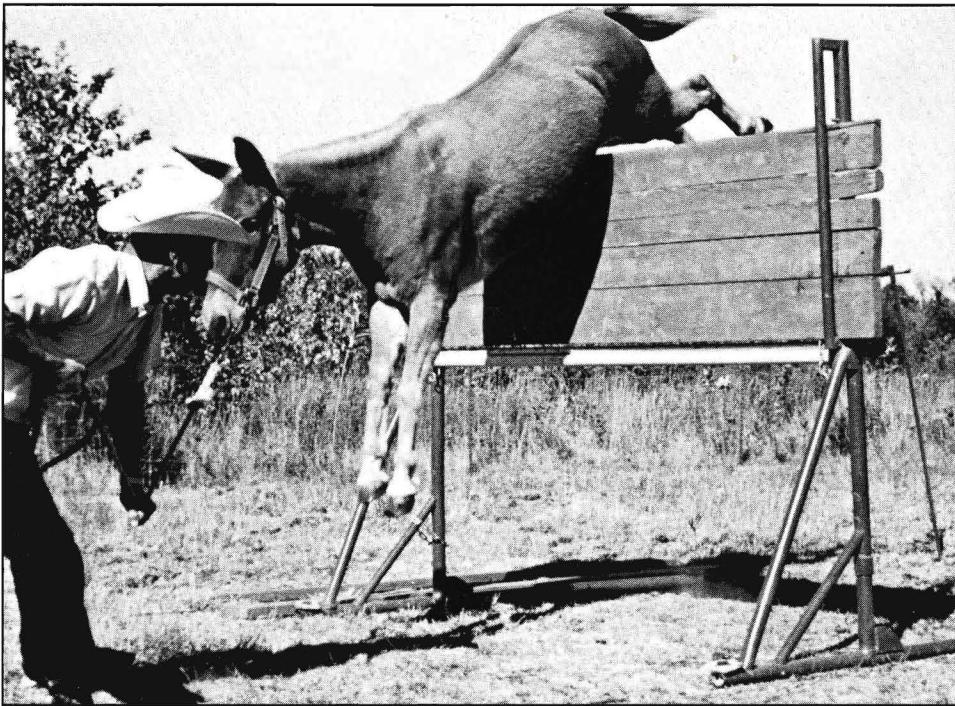
Musical chair.

Obstacle course.

Bat 'n' barrel.

How jumping mules are scored

The jump consists of a solid wall of 2-inch lumber with a "box" or 10-foot wings. Mules take their turns as the jump is raised, 2, 4 or 6 inches each time,



This 48-inch jumping mule clears 65 inches. A standing jump is required, and hind legs below hocks must not touch the top board.

starting low enough for all to jump it easily, usually 40 or 44 inches.

When led into the box, the mule has one minute to clear the jump. If he refuses in that time limit or backs out of the box with one hind foot (this keeps him from running at it) he is disqualified and is immediately given one more chance.

He can jump willingly and be disqualified by touching a back leg below the hock or "climbing" over the jump. Contact with the belly is allowed if he doesn't bear weight and balance over on it.

A good jumping mule is positioned by the handler back from the jump about the distance of its height before being permitted to jump. When his front end clears, a sharp pull downward on the halter shank helps raise the back end and clear the top board.

Many hunting mules never show jump but can jump over a tailgate into a pickup truck or over a farm fence with ease. Some coon hunters use them consistently, and some people simply pleasure ride them in rough country because they can go almost

anywhere. Recently some have been trained and used for bird hunting.

Teaching a mule to jump

Mules are natural jumpers—some more so than others. It's easy to find the talented ones by setting up a low jump and having an assistant behind them with a whip. If talented, they pick up jumping amazingly quickly. Practice can soon have them jumping 4 feet high.

Training is often started with long yearlings, although older mules will learn to jump.

There is some nostalgia in modern mule owning, although many young people are taking up the hobby also. To some, it's become a business and its growth has exceeded all expectations.

The author acknowledges the cooperation of Roger Conklin, Columbia, for providing the mules and equipment pictured in this guide.



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