

## Whoa! A Trip to Bishop Makes One Rethink Goals

By Helen T. Hertz

What an event! Full stands, great performances, and plenty of chuckles made the 40<sup>th</sup> annual Bishop Mule Days one to remember. Old friends got caught up and new ones were made during sunny days and warm evenings filled with tough, but always friendly, competition.

What makes Bishop so fun is the exhibitors' incredible range of experience and the sheer love of mules and donkeys shared by pro and novice alike. These people have a hunger for knowledge; they want a better understanding of these animals. Not in order to bend them to their will—'cause anyone who knows anything about longears knows that won't work—but to win them over, so to speak, to make that mule an ally and a friend.

Progress toward that goal sometimes means stopping what you've been doing and trying something new. No one knows that better than Meredith Hodges, who's been coming to Bishop Mule Days for more than 30 years and whose mules have been show champions in jumping, driving, dressage, sidesaddle and other events. This year Meredith spent much of her time at Bishop at Bonnie Shields's booth, signing books and answering questions from people seeking sage advice.

Her counsel in a nutshell: "Whoa!" That is, slow down there. Don't get ahead of yourself and your mule by placing all your focus on what you want to achieve. You've got to stop and smell the roses...and so does he.

One petite woman was consumed with concern for the abuse her mule had suffered at the hands of another. "I just feel so sorry for her," she repeated. A fellow who'd recently acquired a mule and wanted to ride, wanted more control over his animal, and another was confounded by his donkey's behavior. Meredith's advice to all of them was essentially the same:

"Forget about what the past has been and set the right goal going forward, which should be to put your animal at ease and build a relationship with him based on trust, period. To do that, you've got to set a routine he can rely on and go slow.

"There are lots of ways to train an equine," says Meredith, "but there's only one best way. It's the way to build a solid physical and psychological foundation that enables the animal to perform safely and reliably. There are no shortcuts, no gimmicks. Only time and consistency produce these results."

Meredith explains why these techniques work and why they're necessary in "Equus Revisited." The two-DVD set and companion manual that complement her video correspondence training series *Training Mules and Donkeys* take some of the mystery out of the painstaking process of understanding the equine mind.

“It’s tough, because we want our animals to excel—to be the best,” says Meredith, “and sometimes we forget what’s best for them. Some people don’t want to hear that they’re doing too much too fast, and believe me, I made plenty of mistakes along the way. But years of experience have given me the skills to work with these animals and a mission to share what I’ve learned with as many people as I can.”

So while plenty of folks left the 40<sup>th</sup> annual Bishop Mule Days with ribbons and trophies, some left with new goals and a fresh perspective on training. Perhaps we’ll see them collecting their event ribbons in years to come.

*To find answers to your training-related questions and learn more about “Training Mules and Donkeys” and “Equus Revisited”, please visit [www.luckythreeranch.com](http://www.luckythreeranch.com) or call 800-816-7566.*