

Head: Making Friends

Subhead: Meredith Hodges Teaches Resistance-free Equine Training Techniques
by Helen T. Hertz

Resistance-free training. What does it mean? And why is it essential to building a good relationship with your equine? Meredith Hodges has pondered the answers to those questions for years. During two decades of study and practice, she's had her share of victories and failures and solved some of the mysteries of equine behavior, but the one lesson—the guiding principle—that has informed her work more than any other is that the only way to win the heart and mind, and therefore the cooperation, of any animal is through patience, kindness and consideration.

Mules and donkeys are Meredith's equines of choice, but her methods work well with horses, too, and her correspondence training course, *Training Mules and Donkeys*, has been popular with equine lovers of every persuasion for years. The 10-videotape series offers step-by-step instruction and detailed techniques designed to help her students and their animals reach their potential, while keeping safe and developing a true bond of friendship.

"I think people want a better understanding of their animal, whether it's a horse, mule or donkey," says Meredith. "Gone are the days when, because we were short on time or patience, we forced our animals into submission and made them comply out of fear. Today we understand that by using positive reinforcement—by rewarding them for the things they do right—we can develop that invaluable bond of trust.

"An animal that trusts you is calmer and happier," she adds. "That means he's more reliable, and a reliable animal is a safe animal."

Another key to safety is a well-paced, progressive program. In training, as in any endeavor, time and consistency are essential to success, and shortcuts are deadly.

"It takes discipline to be patient and stick with the program," says Meredith, "but it's like grade school; you have to learn your ABCs before you can write words, and you have to write words before you can compose sentences."

No one has a greater appreciation for the amount of work it takes to train an equine than Meredith. She has many memories of frustration and defeat, and she wants to help all her students through those inevitable challenges. That's why hers is the first correspondence equine training course. Students receive her home phone number and personal e-mail, and she encourages them contact her with any questions or problems.

"I'm here to help," she says. "I know how tough it can get sometimes and that when a problem comes up, you need an answer right away—not a week or a month from now."

Of course Meredith isn't the only trainer to embrace the resistance-free method. She has good company, including famed trainer and clinician Richard Shrake. Richard mentored her, as she developed her program, and he shared with her techniques that have proved effective with all equines.

"Richard really set the bar when it comes to developing a cooperative, understanding relationship with the animal," she says. "He taught me so much, and now we work together to get the word out on resistance-free training."

As part of that effort, this season Meredith's television show *Training Mules and Donkeys*, on RFD-TV, will feature new training segments with Richard. During these 2-to-3-minute segments, he will demonstrate a specific resistance-free technique and explain why it works.

Also new this season, the latest in Meredith's Jasper the Mule children's series. This fall she will release *Jasper: A Fabulous Fourth*, the fourth holiday-themed book in the series. Meredith hopes parents will find these wholesome, kid-friendly stories a great way to introduce youngsters to longears and share with them the important values of compassion and understanding.

You'll find the entire Jasper the Mule series and new, interactive games for kids on the new Jasper web site. Recently redesigned and enhanced, both www.luckythreeranch.com and www.jasperthemule.com offer a wealth of information on everything longears.

As we look forward to a new year, it's time to think about new goals and how we'll reach them. If you're working with an equine or plan to, you'll find an endless array of resources to assist you. If you're looking to develop a lasting bond of trust and friendship with your animal, try *Training Mules and Donkeys* with Meredith Hodges.

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