

## **Comparison in the Behavior of Horses, Donkeys, Mules, and Hinnies**

Our topics for this week are:

- **Behaviors of donkeys compared to horses**
- **Physical characteristics of horse hybrids: mules and hinnies**
- **Behavior characteristics of mules and hinnies**

### **DONKEYS, MULES, AND HINNIES**

Donkeys have served as a beast of burden for humans for about 5,000 years. They have been used for riding, pulling wagons and carts, and guarding livestock, especially sheep from canine predators. Donkeys bred to horses produce the hybrids, mules and hinnies.

### **Gender and Species Terminology for Donkeys and Mules**

- Jack - male donkey (also called an ass)
- Jenny - female donkey
- Mule - offspring of a jack and mare
- John - male mule or hinny
- Molly - female mule or hinny
- Hinny - offspring of a stallion and a jenny
- Burro - donkey in Spanish

### **Comparisons of Mules and Hinnies**

The parents of a mule are a donkey father and mother horse. A hinny has a donkey mother and a father horse. Mules are about the size of its mother horse. A hinny is smaller than its father horse. Mules have donkey-like ears. Hinnies have horse-like ears. Mules have a haircoat color more like a donkey. A hinny has a haircoat color similar to its horse father. The behavior of a mule is more like a donkey than a horse and the behavior of a hinny is even more like a donkey than a mule. Mule are more popular than hinnies because it is easier to breed a jack to a mare than a stallion to a jenny and mules are larger and able to pull more weight.

### **Natural Donkeys**

Donkeys evolved in rocky, arid, semi-desert conditions which required the ability to defend themselves from predators since they were unlikely to outrun them. Food was scarce and large

groups could not find enough food in one location. Their social structure became based on family units rather than herds.

The family unit is typically a jenny, foal, and yearling protected by a dominant jack. Less dominant males usually form bachelor groups. Within families and bachelor groups, a donkey will form strong bonds with just one or two other donkeys and become very distressed if separated from their preferred herd mate. If they do not have a donkey herd mate, they will bond with a horse or pony which if removed from the pasture for training or work will cause the donkey to become distressed.

Donkeys' ability to flee from danger is less than that of horses, so they are less flighty (less likely to easily startle and run) and more fighty (they are more likely to attack or freeze in place, if threatened). They will bray loudly to either communicate with scattered members of the family unit foraging for food or to deter a predator. Mules retain most of these donkey characteristics. Donkeys have a natural aversion to dogs. Desensitization to dogs usually requires a longer period than in horses.

Donkeys become very territorial and are intolerant of new animals in their environment or smaller animals such as dogs, cats, sheep, and chickens if not desensitized to them. Because of their calm disposition, jennies have been used to teach foals to be led by a halter and lead rope and to develop patience in being handled.

### **Mule Behavior**

Mules more independent than horses, but like donkeys, they will not entrust as much leadership to humans as horses do. Mules will defer to human leadership, but they are less submissive than horses. They are less herd bound and less inclined to spook and bolt. Mules are less prone to forgive rough handling than horses. Difficulty in handling mules may be from bad experiences the mule had earlier in life. A mule will remember specific individuals who have been unkind to them.

Mules have exceptional strength, endurance, and donkey-like, hard feet that are small for their size designed for rocks and desert conditions. The manes of mules are roached (cut short) because the mane is stiff and sticks up getting in the way of a pulling collar. They are less athletic in turning and running than horses.

### **Hinny Behavior**

Hinnies have a more horse-like appearance than mules. However, they tend to have more behavioral characteristics of a donkey since they are imprinted by their jenny mother around donkeys, compared to mules being raised by their mare mother around horses.

Mules and hinnies are handled similarly to horses.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at [CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com](mailto:CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com)

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Donkeys are less able to flee from a threat than a horse and therefore, more willing to fight a threat.**
- 2. Mules and hinnies are horse hybrids that gain some of the body size of their horse parent and much of the endurance and behavior of a donkey.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources. My new spiral-bound handbook, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling* was recently published and can be found on Amazon as well as from other book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: [www.betteranimalhandling.com](http://www.betteranimalhandling.com) . This website has more than 150 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.