

Hay John Henry!

I hear you have a new stable mate! I don't know if I should say Congratulations or Condolences! I hear it's a MARE MULE - Ugh, those girls! Bossy!!!

My name is The Fuzzbuster (well, that's one of them) and I live at a stable with a couple of other mules and a bunch of horses. My person is a nice young lady who rides all of us as often as possible. The riding part I don't mind, and I love the jumping. I just have one problem that I'm not sure is normal or not.

My rider will sometime get up on me first, sometimes last. I don't get ridden every single day, either, but usually 2-3 times each week.

I have noticed a real difference when I'm ridden first, as to when I'm ridden last. Sometimes I feel she's tired, other times like she's rushed, and she doesn't take the time to go through the warm-up phases.

Would it help me and her both if she kept to a routine (halter, tie up, groom, lunge, cavalettis, then dressage or jumping) or is it okay if she just brings me out, saddles up, we canter, and then I get put away. When we do the shorter workout, I am usually still ready to go do other things!

Do you run into a problem like this with Kathleen?

The Fuzzbuster (aka Dusty's Baron)

Hay Fuzzy,

Nice to hear from you. You have brought up a really interesting topic of discussion.

I think what you are talking about on the part of your rider is lack of consistency. I hate to say this but I think that we as mules [equines?] need an owner/trainer who is very, VERY consistent.

Here is an example.... I know this woman who owns a horse that she only drives. I have watched amazed as this woman enters the stable yard and gets

her horse out of the barn and starts to harness up. Never, NOT ONCE, have I ever see her do that simple thing in the same way twice. She will put the breast collar on and then try to find both traces because she didn't put them away in the harness box last time. Then she will put on the harness saddle but not the crupper. She won't be able to find the reins.... you get the picture. Now I have heard Kathleen say that this woman has advanced college degrees – can you believe it? Kathleen thinks it might actually be a learning disability of some kind. Anyway, this lack of an organized mind permeates her thinking and is especially difficult on her horse.

Over the years her horse has come to realize one important thing...he is in charge and under no circumstances should he let his person make any important decision. Thank goodness that horse is a clearer thinker than his person because he has saved their bacon on many, many occasions.

Now, I like variety.... but consistent variety. Don't you dare ask me to do the very same thing day after day after day. That said, I DO really appreciate knowing what to expect. Let's see if I can explain it....

Kathleen is VERY consistent. Every day when I see her for the first time she will enter the barn and yell hello to Agnes and me from the entry door. By the time she walks to our yard and run-under [attached to the barn] she has a handful of treats. She walks out in our yard and gives us each a good scratch, a treat and a hug. Then she goes back in to get the gator [6-wheeled dump vehicle about the size of a golf cart] to do the daily clean up patrol. On the way out of the barn she picks up a bale of hay and distributes it in our favorite places in the yard. Then she goes about cleaning up...if that Agnes ever gives her enough space. Agnes usually parks herself directly in front of the gator and doesn't move...she is such a suck-up! Anyway, that is the beginning of our training day and it is ALWAYS the same and something that we count on.

The next step is for us both to be brought into the barn one at a time and put on xties for brushing and also vacuuming at this time of year. When we are as pretty as is possible Kathleen will then saddle one or both of us. If she is riding me and ponying Agnes she will saddle me up and then Agnes [with either her riding saddle/crupper or her harness saddle/crupper]. If we are going out alone without Agnes then Kathleen takes her back after grooming into the run-under without any tack on and ties her to a chain that drops down from the ceiling beam. Kathleen thinks that Agnes should understand

that it isn't the end of the world if we walk away from her while she is tied. The next step will be to practice this while Agnes is tied to the trailer away from home...I got off the subject [AGAIN!].

Now for the fun part.... If we are going to pony Agnes after we are all dressed Kathleen walks Agnes up on my right side and then she takes me and we all walk to the mounting block side-by-side-by-side. Kathleen gets on and there we stand, completely still, for about a minute before we are asked to walk off. It doesn't matter what is planned for the day's ride we ALWAYS walk the first mile out and the last mile back. Or if we are just going around the farm fields we walk for the first 10 min and the last 10 min. Oh, and Kathleen always says "and walk" or "and trot" or "and canter" or "and ho" for changes of gait...drawing out the "aaaaand" to give me the cue that something is going to be asked of me.... of course we are only walking with two or three bits of trotting when we have Agnes with us. It is still really nice to have a consistent verbal cue for what is going to be asked of us. Agnes is "getting" with the program too and understanding what is expected of her.

We have many other things that we can count on in our training and that makes the things that come up that are not in the routine MUCH easier to deal with.

Your comment about how your person will take you out last and just canter and put you away is very sad. Maybe your person has too many equines to deal with? If that is the case maybe you could tell her that she should make a written schedule with each equine given specific weekly riding days and times. It will be up to her to try and give you all equal time and energy and thought. Personally, I would rather be groomed and turned back out than saddled and just cantered and then put away. We need much more time with our people than that and a lot of different things to do too.

Speaking of different things to do...Kathleen just told me that she is borrowing a fore cart from Agnes' people – Hamilton Rare Breeds Foundation. A fore cart is a farm version of a full-sized Hummer. It is made up of a car axel and tires and a seat and shafts for a single equine or a pole for a pair. Farmers use a fore cart to hitch equipment to for working the fields. I think it will be a lot of fun to pull because Agnes can be ponied tied to the back or tied up front with me. Now that I think about it Agnes had better be tied to the back because every once in a while, when I am ponying

her, she decides that she just can't stand me and bares her teeth and bites me on the top of my crest! Good thing I have lots of muscle up there or she might hurt me <GRIN>... actually, I don't even let her see that I notice what she has done!

So Fuzzy, I hope you have some new ideas you can talk over with your person...but maybe it would be better if you just gave her this little article and she can read it for herself and think on what I said. Keep in touch and be sure you and write to tell me if things change with your person.