

Hi! My name is Dancer's Dream -

I'm a 16.3 saddle mule (big, like you!) I understand you go to a lot of events, from shows to the Equine Affair. You must have just crowds and crowds of people around you!

Does this every make you nervous? I've been to a few shows, and I'm fine as long as no one crowds up to me in the aisles. They all remark about how tall I am, or what pretty spotted socks I have, and want to pet my face.

I don't mind if they are outside my stall, but I just can't stand them squeezing by my rump in a narrow aisle - I start shaking! I even sat down once!

Is it just me, or is this normal? Can I learn to love crowds?

Dancer's Dream

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Hi Dreamer,

Boy, do I feel for you! I HATE everyone trying to touch me. My really BIG gripe is that EVERY SINGLE horse person in the world screams when they see me [an us mules with super hearing!] and rush to touch my EARS! What's with THAT? I really sympathize with your fear.

I expect that you know what I am going to tell you.....here is a great way to get a shy equine over anything that bothers them.....it's not rocket science...just feed them treats in times of stress. My person does this all the time. If I am apprehensive or reluctant to do something she breaks out the carrot slices. The fastest way to an equine's brain is thru their stomach...at least that is what I have convinced Kathleen....and boy, she NEVER forgets a lesson <GRIN>.

With that in mind your person should do the itty-bitty-step-at-a-time training method and break down the fear of crowd thing in to the smallest sections. Lets say she starts by inviting a small number of people to your stall or barn isle. She will let them mill around you and each and every one of them will feed you small bits of treats. After a while you will get so good that you will look forward to seeing a crowd in your barn because it will mean that they will feed you!

The next step is to have your person take you away from your barn to a local barn where there will be lots of people. There, in a different place, she should repeat the crowds-around-you experiment with all of them giving you treats when you relax and accept them.

Then it will be time to take you to an outdoor show and another repeat of the experiment. If, at any time, you regress and become afraid again your person should back down to a level where you were comfortable and practice at that level 'till you are comfortable again before moving up.

The end result is that you will LOVE crowds and get a little overweight! Not a bad plan, is it!

Now, I'm not afraid of crowds but sometimes, after 2 days, I get really tired of all the people always around me and this is what I did the last time....

Kathleen and I were at Equine Affair in Springfield, MA and after the breed demo I was parked in a presentation stall for 2 hours to be ogled at by all the horse people in attendance. But first I had to get to the stall. This building was HUGE and all the equines had to enter in the middle of the long side and walk around the end to get to the box stall isle on the opposite long side. On both sides were vendors and isles and stall decorations and wall-to-wall people and lots of stuff to look at and I bet just about EVERYONE was pushing one of those light weight strollers too.... who knew that so many equine-loving people were into breeding themselves? I had to walk on matting for the first little bit but then, for some reason, the matting ran out and I was stuck on a polished cement floor! I just about freaked out! If there is one thing in the world I HATE it is a polished cement floor! I have tap in studs on all four shoes and those studs make polished cement just like walking on waxed glass for me. I tried to sit down a number of times on the L O N G way to the stall but I got there without falling on anyone or sitting down on a stroller....but I wasn't at all happy about it. Kathleen put me in this nicely bedded box stall next to the breed information booth and tied a rope across the door opening. She also brought five pounds of carrots cut up into slices in a plastic grocery bag and never left the stall herself. I parked myself with my butt flat against the back wall facing the doorway which made my head JUST out of reach of anyone wanting to touch me thru the open stall door - YEA! For the 2 hours I was standing there I bet that there were no fewer than 5 people deep in front of my stall all screaming, asking questions and wanting to touch me. It is a good thing that Kathleen never left the door opening and fed me carrots for the entire time or I would still be running away. As it was she took me over and over again thru my small number of tricks to the amusement of all the people watching. She also had

informational hand outs for everyone. So there I stood giving Kathleen kisses, carefully taking small carrot slices out from between her lips, shaking hands [both right and left] and smiling for 2 HOURS. Even I was getting tired of carrots at the end! But I have to tell you that without the carrots I would have been really grumpy and annoyed with all the stranger attention..... and I'm used to it. One high point of those 2 hours is that NO ONE was able to touch my ears! I count that as a personal best.

Dreamer, you will get over your fear of crowds and go on to be a great ambassador of mules...or you will get really fat trying <GRIN>

Good luck and have Happy New Year!