

Dear JH

I am a 10 year old miniature mule (about 48" tall). I go to lots of shows, I enter in the Youth classes with my girl, and then in the coon-jump classes. The problem is, the shows sometimes are 3 days, and sometimes there are a bunch of classes all crammed into one day. The longer shows are okay at first, but then by the end I am tired of going in and out of the ring, and the my people feel I don't show so well on the last day. At one-day shows, I get irritated because I am hot and tired and have to go back in, one more time, and then it is usually a speed class.

Is there something they can do to help keep me occupied during long shows? Or what about keeping me calm and in tune for the one-days. How do you handle long, boring shows? Do you have a toy from home you bring? Or do you get to trail ride and do different things while you are away from home?

Bit O Fire

Hay Bit O Fire,

I thought that equines were supposed to live up to their names! <grin>. What's this about getting tired?

You know that you aren't the only one who gets tired of showing by the end of a one day show with lots of classes or a 3 day show either. My person decided several years ago that I might be getting tired at shows because I had "tired blood" so she gave me a supplement called "Red Cell". WOW, is all I can say! I was supercharged. You know I couldn't even walk down the driveway at home without spooking at EVERYTHING. I was so high I became impossible to deal with. I felt that I could just jump right out of my skin....and, believe me, I have a lot of skin to jump out of! My person stopped giving me "Red Cell" right away - and not a moment too soon - I was considering getting ready to break land speed records - with her riding <G>.

Anyway, Kathleen decided that "Red Cell" didn't work - or worked too well - and she needed to re-think my tiredness at shows. Well, she thought and thought and then thought some more. It finally occurred to her that I was a MULE [duh!] and mules need diversion not repetition!

The very first thing she did was to give me time off before a show - I mean now she doesn't ride or drive me for 4-5 days before a 3 day show. I am just turned out on pasture and groomed every day - boy, does she like to clip me..her middle name should be "Oster". But I digress... you might have more "umph" than I do and need to be ridden before a show. Only your people can decided the best program to follow to prepare you for a show.

The next thing she decided to try was NOT to practice for shows in a ring. On the theory that I was getting bored with being in a ring she would only practice around the edges of fields and on trails. Like bending around corners and practicing canter departs on a straight part in a trail or 3 levels of trot on portions of a trail or a field with good footing. It has worked for me. I don't get as bored as I did.

Another thing that I think might work for you is to decide just what classes are important to you. You know, just because you CAN enter a class doesn't mean that you HAVE to. Tell your person to only enter the classes that are REALLY important or only go in one division not two at the same show. Kathleen has been known to be so satisfied with the way I went in a class that she scratches all the rest and just takes me home - weather or not we get a good ribbon. Kathleen only cares about how I perform compared to how I performed the last time - not how I compare to the other horses in the class or how I get pinned. That is the judges opinion, not hers, and she thinks that her opinion of how my performance has improved is more important than the opinion of someone in the middle of the ring that she doesn't even know and who doesn't know me. Now, don't get me wrong, Kathleen and I like to show but the judge's opinion is secondary to how much fun we are having and how well she thinks I am doing compared to my last time out.

The next thing you and your person can do is see to it that you are untacked or at least unbridled between classes and offered a drink and then tied to the trailer to eat hay. I personally like it when Kathleen takes off my saddle or harness and puts me inside my stock trailer to stand in the shade and sleep and eat between classes. This seems to help my disposition a lot and I come out ready to show.

Just recently Kathleen decided that I would benefit from learning how to tie with a long grazing rope.... you know how it is nice to be able to eat without being held soooo, she purchased about 30' of 1" rope and wove an "eye" into one end and a big snap hook into the other. For the time being she has been attaching the "eye" end to a log that I can pull around but a cement block would also work. After I learn how to tie like that without getting tangled up then I can be tied to something stationary - like one of the truck tires. This is a nice little trick that I am learning and it will give her many more options when we are at a one day show. I find that being allowed to graze keeps me very happy under just about all circumstances.

Another thing that we have been doing this year to combat my boredom is NOT to pay for the stall at a 3 day show but to get permission to put up a portable paddock for me to live in. This is totally wonderful and why we didn't do it before now is anyone's guess. Besides saving a great deal of money [\$100-\$150 for 3 days] I get to walk around and not be confined in a 10' x 10' stall - UGH - for days on end. My person camps out of the trailer at a show and the paddock is put up right beside the trailer. I know that she has a portable battery operated fence charger but since I am always turned out in electric wire at home I heard her tell someone that she doesn't even bother to attach the battery charger when we are away. I have NEVER tested the fence...but now that I know...hmmmm.... the grass IS always greener....

I hope that this helps your person and keeps you more "charged up" and happy to go in the ring. All of the above has certainly helped me. I love it when my person keeps it interesting!

Hugs and Hee Haws to all,
Your Friend, John Henry