

# The Colonial Williamsburg Animal News

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## MULE NATURE

You know Jake and Jock don't you? Our pair of grey mules who pull the stage wagon — the ones visitors call horses because they are "too big to be mules." You may not really know them after all.

Mules are more than a suffix to the phrase "stubborn as a..." A mule is a cross between a male donkey — a jack, and a female horse — a mare. A mule is a hybrid and cannot reproduce. He, or she, is a cross between different species. Every time you wish to produce a mule you must breed a jack to a mare.

Some folks believe mules are sexless. When someone asks, usually in a whisper, "is it true mules have no sex?" they are expressing the erroneous belief that mules are neither male or female. Male mules must be gelded, like horses are, in order to make them more tractable and take their minds off the girls. As some gelding horses will act more studdish than others, our Jock is quite a Don Juan and his exploits in the pasture have been recorded by a few astonished visitors on film.

The female mule, or molly, also comes fully equipped, but she is also sterile. Once in a great while a molly proves to be fertile. In these extremely rare cases she produces offspring as if she were a horse — mule foals when bred to a jack, horse foals when bred to a stallion. Visitors think Jake and Jock are "too big to be mules" and "are the wrong color to be mules." Actually you can breed for any size or color of mule you want. Breed a big draft mare like Topsy (boy, she'll spit on me for this) to a large breed of donkey, such as the Mammoth jack, and you'll get a large, heavy work mule. Breed a Shetland Pony mare to a tiny Siberian jack and you'll have a little pleasure mule suitable for pulling a child's cart or carrying a young rider. Breed a nice riding mare to a well-mannered long striding jack and you will have a saddle mule that's fun to ride. Use mares such as Paints or Appaloosas and/or one of the breeds of spotted jacks to get colorful mules.

"Aren't mules stubborn?" visitors often ask. Mules got their reputation for stubbornness because of the way they were bred. Not so long ago many people had a terrible theory of mule breeding. If a farmer had a bad tempered, nasty, shrewish mare, not good enough to produce a horse, they would take her to the local jack with the attitude, "well, at least I can get a mule out of her." That's rich. If this mare's horse foal would be undesirable, why would her mule foal be any better? So mules got a bad reputation.



Now there are some factors of mule personality which may be construed as stubbornness by the non-mule skimmers among us, but when looked at from the mule's point of view are just common sense self-preservation.

For instance, Jake and Jock do not step on manhole covers or anything else suspicious. They will jerk to a stop and waggle their ears, refusing to place their feet in possible "danger". Some Patriot Tour leaders have probably felt the mule-skinner of the day was trying to run the group down when in fact the 'skinner had no choice. Between a manhole cover, a grease spot, and a strategically spilled drink, a road with only one small P.T. on it can be thoroughly blocked. The safest place to drive (from the mules' perspective) may be straight toward a group of people. No, we aren't trying to make the morning news for murder by mules, we're just trying to avoid inflicting whiplash on our passengers.

A mule's self-centered ways extend to the feed trough and water bucket, too. You likely will never hear of a mule who has suffered colic or founder. These are two common disorders related to ill-timed eating and drinking which can at worst kill a horse or render him useless. It would be the extremely rare mule who would accept food when he is too hot, eat poor quality food, overeat, over drink when hot or drink dirty, brackish water. Our Jake and Jock will only drink out of the automatic waterers which operate by float and shun the ones with the nose lever. When they come in from work in the afternoon they don't shove their noses in their grain and gobble like the horses will. They wait a little while and perhaps munch a little hay as an appetizer.

Some other special advantages to mules center on their suitability to hard work. Mule hooves are small, boxy and stronger than horse hooves. They

don't get sore footed as easily and their shoes do not loosen as quickly. This, plus the mule's ability to endure hardships, such as little food and water, made them a favorite for the westward trek over the Oregon trail.

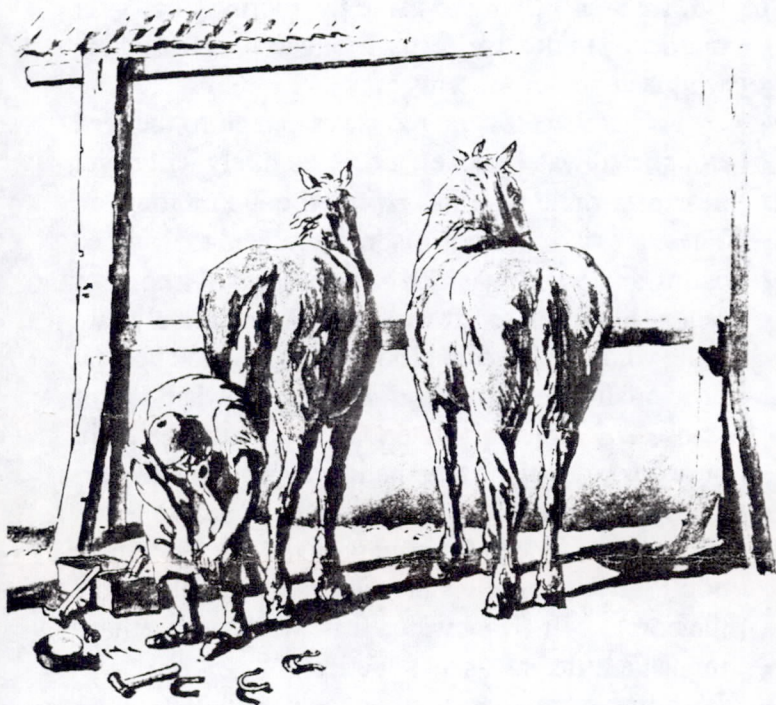
Mules were a favorite with George Washington, too. He envisioned having mules pull his carriages. But breeding mules he did not find to be an easy task. Obtaining a good, large Spanish jack, finding the right mares, and abortion-producing disease were a few of the problems he encountered. Mules have been popular since ancient times. Emperor Nero's mules were reported to be "shod with gold" and his wife's mules "shod with silver." Maybe the farrier can make up some of these classy topsiders for Jake and Jock?

### MULES DEFINED

"Mule, a mongrel kind of quadruped, usually generated between an ass and a mare, and sometimes between a horse and a she ass. The mule is a sort of monster of a middle nature between its parents, and therefore incapable of propagating its species, so careful is nature to avoid filling the world with monsters.

"...The mules are sometimes 15 or 16 hands high, and the best of them are worth 40 or 50 (pounds) a piece. No creatures are so proper for large burdens, and none so sure footed. They are much stronger for draught than our horses, and are often as thick set as our dray horses, and will travel several months together, with six or eight hundred weight upon their backs. It is a wonder that these creatures are not more propagated in England, as they are so much hardier and stronger than horses, and are less subject to diseases, and will live and work to twice the age of a horse."

From The Farrier's and Horseman's Complete Dictionary by Thomas Wallis, London, 1764.



### GOOSE NAMES, ETCETERA

By Deni Fulp

A rose by any other name wouldst smell as sweet...but what about a goose? I can't say they have much "smell" to them, but ours do have names, finally. Our gaggle of six Embden geese bear names which are distinctive and appropriate.

Alexander was named after Alexander the Great due to his regal bearing, his exploring and warrior—like nature.

Aloysius simply suits this gander. He responded to this name the first time he heard it.

Cyrano — with a neb like his, who could pass up a name such as Cyrano? Unlike Cyrano DeBergerac, this is one fellow not likely to fight a thousand duels.

Roxanne is a natural match to Cyrano.

Gwendolyn is a saintly name, and this little girl is nicely behaved. Besides Gwendolyn Goose has a nice ring to it for the character of the creature.

Leda, Queen of Sparta, was seduced by Zeus after he had taken the form of a swan. She became the mother of Helen of Troy. In spite of our subject matter being geese, as opposed to swans, this classic Greek mythological tale is the basis for our Leda's name.

To clear up any misconceptions, it is important to state that geese, swans and ducks are different. Biologically speaking they are of the same family, that of water fowl. When you consider the genus, phylum and species the similarities end.

Proper terms for geese are as follows: Gander — a male; goose — a female; geese — males and females collectively; gaggle — the group. Geese are territorial and protective. Our geese are no exception to this law of nature. Throughout history, in addition to making a lovely main course for dinner, geese have proved valuable as watch-geese in place of watch-dogs and alarm systems. They will sound off a loud clear alarm honk should an intruder approach and they will go to an offensive defense should they be surprised or threatened. Geese have actually been known to fight to the death using their razor sharp toe nails, to protect someone or something which they consider "theirs". If a perturbed goose or gander hisses at you, consider yourself well—warned.

Geese can be trained to a certain extent, but they are not like dogs who can be brought under complete submission. Our geese are in the process of being taught their manners, and are learning the meaning of "no!" Hopefully they will be able to someday join the ranks of those who travel down the Duke of Gloucester street.

**QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? Please write to: Animal Editor, MHW. Colonial Williamsburg Animal News is published by Coach and Livestock Operations, Historic Trades Department. Kay Williams, Editor; Richard Nicoll, Manager.**