

The Colonial Williamsburg Animal News

Volume I, No. 7

October 1988



HORSE NEWS

Romeo, the big bay Gelderlander who has been spending the last year or so mowing the pasture at Carter's Grove with his teeth, has a new position with the College of William and Mary as Professor of Bouncing Beginners. This involves teaching college students to ride. He's getting along in years and, with no prospective partner to pull carriages with, will be ideal for the job. Those college kids will love him and vice versa.

You've probably seen Susie (big fat red mare) being driven to a cart around town lately. She is learning Star's job to give the old girl a hand. Star is on TLO at Carter's Grove while her hooves grow a little. Dampness and bacteria can cause the hoof wall to separate and break off, which is Star's problem. Her shoes were pulled off and her hooves treated with a special medication.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

After reading our story on mules in the September issue, Mr. P. Van Tol wrote: "...now that we've read all the good things about mules, how about some info on their detracting features. There must be some or else everyone would have mules and horses would exist solely to produce mules—which obviously isn't the case."

For several reasons man has preferred horses over mules throughout the centuries. Mules are more difficult to breed. Not all mares will accept the attentions of a jack. Not all jacks will cover mares. A mule breeding jack is often kept completely isolated from other donkeys so he will reserve his affections for the mule breeding mares.

While a mule has many highly desirable physical qualities, he lacks just a little in this department that would broaden the scope of his usefulness. The mule's back is not as suited for the saddle as the horse's. In many cases a mule's back is so flat he must wear a crupper (narrow strap around the tail) or britching (wide strap around the hindquarters) to keep a saddle from sliding too far forward when travelling down hill and a breast collar to keep it from sliding backward when going up hill. This would be

animal to steady the load. To a person travelling mule back it would be cumbersome extra equipment he'd have to deal with.

The mule doesn't have the ability to move as beautifully or as fast as the horse. Mule chariot races tried in the Olympics of about 500 B.C. were not as fast, as spectacular, or as crowd pleasing as the horses, and so were dropped shortly thereafter. A mule's donkey—like neck, shoulders and hindquarters don't allow the range of motion and gracefulness found in many breeds of horses.

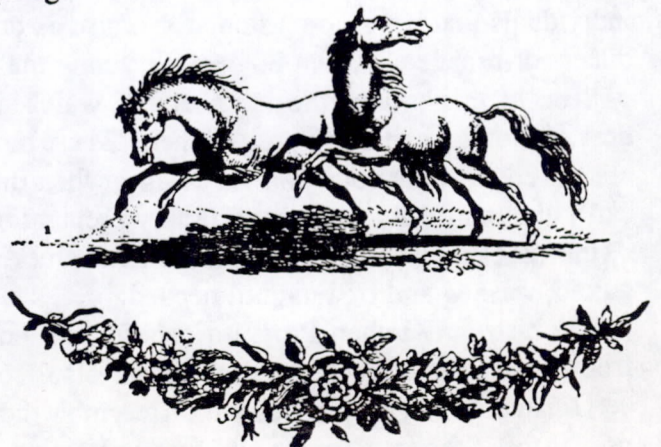
When man needed an animal to ride into war he choose the most nimble, the fastest and the one that could be trained to respond to commands without question. The ability to respond to commands without question is one of the horse's most valuable traits. It is what makes him more useful to man than the mule. A horse can be trained to obey so completely he will become of one mind with his rider and charge into battle possessed of the exact same passion and foolishness as the human on his back. A mule is not going to do that. His sense of self preservation gets in the way. Mules have served their time in the military, but as pack animals and movers of supplies.

While the mule is perhaps the most suitable for packing and other types of hard work, the horse is easier to breed, more elegant, faster and more suited to many of the past times engaged in by mankind.

Thanks for writing, Mr. Van Tol.

PRIDE AND MULE PREJUDICE

Xenophon, a great Greek horseman of the 4th century B.C. wrote about the care of a horse's mane and tail advising never top cut them. These ornaments were symbols of the creature's pride bestowed by the gods. "Because this is so, mares running free in pasture will not let themselves be approached by an ass to be mounted so long as their hair is left full, which is why mule trainers clip [mare's tails] in the spring."



DECISIONS IN POULTRY MANAGEMENT

By Richard Powell

Managing poultry for the combined goals of efficient meat and egg production, the physical vigor of the mature flock, and the maintenance of specific physical characteristics which are considered historically essential to a given variety, requires ongoing critical assessment of each bird's value to the flock as a whole. Individual birds that do not meet standards established toward these ends must be selectively removed to prevent the perpetuation of their defects.

Elimination of individuals begins at hatching, when that small percentage of birds which emerge from the egg weak, malformed, or incompletely developed are promptly destroyed. Any severe genetic defect that appears during the chick's growth is cause for its swift removal, but head and leg deformities are especially critical.

Three primary factors affect the fate of a normal young bird: its physical vigor; its growth rate; and its general conformation to characteristics desired by the poulterer. When evaluating a complete flock, the manager may also decide to favor certain unremarkable individuals, when they represent distinct blood line, the retention of which may add to the genetic diversity and, consequently, to the long-term health of the flock. Injuries that affect a bird's ability to function as an equal member of the flock will require his removal.

Selection tends to favor young females because of their anticipated egg production. Females are more docile and compatible than males, which often must be separated at an early age to prevent fighting. As a single rooster can cover (or breed) up to twelve hens effectively, a relatively small number of males are needed in each flock.

Undesirable birds are disposed of in several ways. Malformed or severely injured birds are killed to end their agony. Birds that are vigorous and exemplify other advantageous qualities, yet are not the very best available for breeding stock, may be transferred to interested individuals who wish to start new flocks and are willing to gradually upgrade their stock through selection into further generations. At Colonial Williamsburg such birds are reserved for other museums, or for persons who are likely to favorably publicize the Foundation's livestock program through their poultry related activities.

The majority of culled (removed) birds are healthy individuals that have no particular promise as producers or breeders. About 80% of all young males will be in this group, the members of which are destined for use in historic area kitchens. These birds are raised to about four months of age, when they carry enough flesh to warrant culinary preparation. At that time they are slaughtered, scalded and plucked, gutted, washed and frozen until needed.

The historic Kitchen Program benefits not only from the inexpensive meat supply, but also from certain qualities of the carcass, which resemble those used in the 18th century more closely than do modern

store bought birds. For example, chickens raised at the Foundation have the white skin and flesh that were preferred by consumers before the recent marketing thrusts by modern producers of yellow skinned birds. The Williamsburg product can be finished with the head and feet remaining, an 18th and 19th century practice that allows visitors to connect meat consumption with the lives and deaths of other creatures.

A poulterer must approach his flock with the affection necessary to insure proper, humane care of the animals, balanced against the detachment required of one who will eventually kill more than half of the poultry he hatches. In a well maintained flock only 30% of the females and 5% of the males will be kept to sexual maturity, while perhaps less than 5% of the total will ultimately be used in the breeding pens of subsequent years. Diligent selection produces a healthier, more efficient flock that is self-perpetuating and economically tenable.

ANIMAL SURVEY RESULTS

All employees have participated in an employee survey so we thought we'd ask a few of our animals their opinion on the subject of work. Some answered the question, some pretended they didn't hear the question. Here are some of the choice replies.

Topsy (Percheron mare, authoress): I like work. Some of these other horses around here think I'm a privileged character because I get to go to parades and things like that, and am always picked to pull the carriage with the most important fancy people in it. But I get to do this stuff because I'm not scared of anything. I have a job to do and I do it come helicopters, fifes, drums, hell or high water.

Prince (Topsy's partner): Cookie?

Star (cart horse): What work? TLO stinks. But I know I'm not completely forgotten. My feet just need to grow.

Toby (chair horse): Do I have to? Really? OK, I guess.

Jake (lazy mule): Work? They just don't feed you enough around here.

Jock (good mule): If Jake didn't have such a beer belly he might be able to help me work. Sometimes I get so mad at him for being such a goldbrick I bite him. But I don't really care what he does, I love to work. I just wish they'd get rid of those icky manhole covers.

Bill (Percheron): Work? Oh, I like it. I just luuuuv people.

Bruce (Bill's partner): Please scratch my tummy.

The illustrations used in this month's Animal News are from the Ladies Amusement or, Whole Art of Japanning Made Easy, London, c. 1758-62.

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.