

# KICKING MULES

*A mule that kicks is dangerous. Tim Doud explains how to fix this risky problem*

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With your mule standing in the center of the round pen, run the rope from the halter, along the right or left side of the mule, around the hindquarters and around the other side of the mule

**A** mule that kicks puts you, other people and animals at risk. A mule kicks for two main reasons. The first reason is that he either is scared or afraid. A mule such as this is kicking as a defense mechanism. The second reason is that the mule kicks to get you; a mule that is on the offensive. With this mule you must first work on the herd leadership between you and your mule. You must teach him that you are

higher on the pecking order than him.

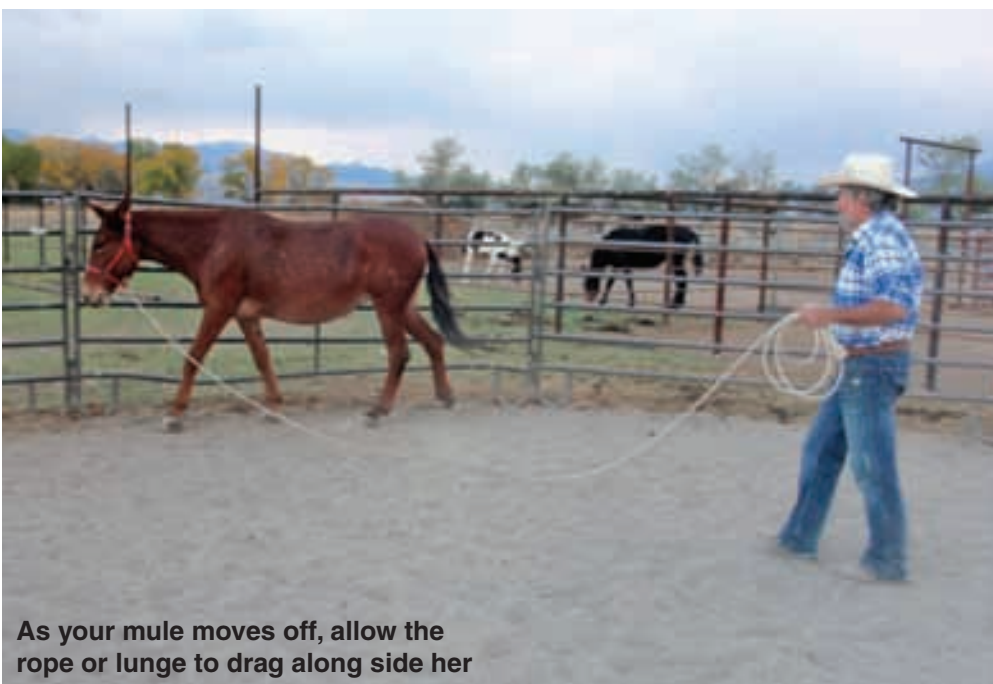
With an offensive kicker you will need to teach him basic ground manners before you proceed to teach him not to kick.

Our job, when teaching a mule not to kick, is to have the mule not kick during the lesson. We want to teach the mule to not kick, not teach the mule to kick. We must also keep ourselves safe at all times. When working the mule in the round pen, stay at least 15 feet away, if not more.

When we move in to work close to the mule, stay at the mule's shoulder. Here he cannot strike you or kick you. Be sure to maintain control of the mule's nose at all times with a bridle or halter. Remember, it is also our job to keep the mule calm and safe.

The three rules to remember and use when training or evaluating any training program is (1) We can not get hurt, (2) The mule can not get hurt and (3) the mule must be calmer at the end of the lesson than he was at the beginning of the lesson.

For this lesson, take your mule into the round pen or other safe enclosure. Attach a lariat, lunge line



As your mule moves off, allow the rope or lunge to drag along side her

or long 30-foot soft cotton rope to the mules halter.

Ask the mule to move forward while you hold the rope, like lunging. As your mule moves off, allow the rope or lunge line to drag along side your mule while he is moving forward. This will put an object behind and to the side of him while he is moving forward. This is your first tool in teaching him to not kick.

When the mule is comfortable with the rope dragging along side him, start to flick the rope towards the mule. Start flicking slowly and add more life into the rope as the mule accepts the rope in motion.

After flicking the rope towards your mule several times, you may see him kick at the rope. This is expected because our mule is known to be a kicker. If he kicks at the rope you are moving too fast. Flick the rope less until he is comfortable.

After several flicks of the rope, ask the mule for an inside turn, a turn towards you. If the mule panics or speeds up use light pressure to disengage your mule's hindquarters. To do this, pull the rope in your hand lightly towards your body, which will turn your mule towards you. If the mule continues to panic, you will need to back up and review basic round pen lessons with the mule. The mule is telling you he has not learned the basic round pen lessons.

After the mule makes an inside turn, begin flicking the rope towards him in the other direction. As you progress, begin asking for more inside turns and flick the rope closer and closer to the mule's hind legs.

When the mule is comfortable with the rope, flick the rope so it touches his hind leg for a split second. If the mule speeds up, apply pressure to the rope and turn the mule inside towards you. By disengaging your mule when he kicks, you are telling him that kicking is unacceptable.

Next you will ask the mule for an outside turn. Make sure the mule does not react to you flicking the rope all over his hind quarters before you ask for an outside turn.

As the mule makes an outside turn the rope will run from his halter, along the outside of his body, around the back of his hindquarters and to you. You want to position yourself behind the mule so the rope does not touch the mule's hindquarters; you will almost be behind your mule. Gradually flick the rope towards the mule's hindquarters until the mule accepts the rope touching his hindquarters. Remember to work both sides of the mule's body.

When the mule accepts the rope around his hindquarters, you can then move your position to the center of the round pen so your rope is continuously touching your mule's hindquarters. Now, start applying pressure to the rope as if you are cuing him to do an outside turn.

As you apply pressure, the mule will probably stop due to the pressure on his halter. Ask the mule to continue moving forward until he turns towards the fence. Continue this until



**As you apply pressure to the rope, your mule should follow the pressure of the rope and turn away**

your mule is responding off light pressure.

Once the mule is willing to turn outside with light pressure it is time to move on.

Ask your mule to stand in the center of the round pen. With a halter on, run your rope from the halter, along the right or left side of the mule, around the hindquarters and around the other side of the mule. Apply pressure to the rope; your mule should follow the pressure of the rope by turning away, then back towards you in a small circle.

Once your mule is desensitized to the rope being behind him and around his hindquarters without kicking, you have taught him to be OK with things or people being behind him. You can then progress to other objects such as plastic bags. However, when working with a plastic bag or other objects, be sure to attach that to a separate rope than the one that is attached to your mule's halter or bridle. Do not attach other objects to your mule, your lunge line, lariat, or his halter.

If you do not have access to other objects and when your mule will follow the light pressure of the rope, your next step is to teach the mule to pick up his feet on cue. See the October 2009 issue of *Mules and More* magazine for my article on "Picking Up A Mule's Feet." You can also find this or any of my past articles on the training page of my web site [www.diamondcreekmules.com](http://www.diamondcreekmules.com).

Teaching your mule to pick up his hind feet will solidify his training and deter him from wanting to kick because (1) you have taught him to not be afraid of things behind him enough that he trusts you to pick up his feet and (2) a mule that kicks just to kick has learned that when you cue to pick up his feet, he has to follow the directive of the "herd leader" and pick up his feet.

Either way, these exercises require patience and time. However, in the end, you will have a mule that is both less afraid and more willing to cooperate with you his partner and herd leader.

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