

## **“BEAUTY IS ONLY SKIN DEEP”**

We have all heard the phrase, “Beauty is only skin deep” and in the case of hinnies, this is a very appropriate one. Hinnies are beautiful equines, exhibiting fuller tails, shorter and rounded ears, dished faces similar to an Arabian, and oftentimes, look more like the male horse than the female donkey. One could conclude that because of the dominant horse characteristics on the outside, that their behavior and personality would be similar to the horse on the inside. As we have learned from our experience in breeding hinnies as race mules, this is very often not the case. It is safe to say that when breeding for mules/hinnies, the most desired offspring would be one that has the conformation and athleticism of a horse and the sure footedness and strength of the donkey. With hinnies bearing such visually appealing qualities like the horse, and the strength and self preservation tendencies similar to the donkey... how come breeders aren't producing more of them, as opposed to the other cross, the mule?

There is a lot of information available on the web and 'Mules and More' magazine has published many articles in the past to answer the age old question “Why are mules more common than hinnies?” The purpose of this article is not to reinvent the education wheel, but to offer insight into why some prefer hinnies and others prefer mules for special areas of use, whether it be barrel racing, packing, flat track racing, or jumping.

Let's review for the genetic differences before we explore the different applications and desired qualities for each. Characteristics of a hinny that differ from a mule include some of the following:

- Ears are shorter, face is dished
- The neck is shorter
- Have small to no withers
- Bray half way between a horse and a mule
- Belly and back are round/barrel shaped
- Tail stump is thick
- Leg joints are structured more like a donkey
- Have a tendency to founder more like a horse
- Manes are sparse, even less than mules

These are not absolute genetics and are dramatically affected by gene splicing, cross over, allele actions and so many more occurrences within the genetic action and thus producing varying characteristics.

It is important before exploring this subject of the desired equine for various curriculums, that we address the fact that hinnies are more difficult to come by than mules for a number of reasons. From our experience in breeding hinnies, the horse stallion just does not like to breed a donkey unless it was raised with the donkey jennets. Jennets are more challenging to identify when they are in heat and are less fertile than mares. The gestation period of a jennet is one month longer than that of a mare. As a result, jennets don't foal every year, as a mare might and will occasionally skip a year. Breeding mules from mares is therefore more economical and reliable than breeding hinnies from jennets. Most importantly, the mortality rate at delivery time is very high for hinnies. Jennets are smaller in stature than the mare; therefore the birth canal/pelvis width in Jennies is so narrow that many times the offspring has to be pulled out. We lost a number of jennets this way as they were only able to exude the baby's head and front legs and we were not able to find the Jenny in foal soon enough to assist with pulling the entire body out. For these and other reasons specific to the mortality rate, hinnies are not as widespread as mules.

Let's put this aside for the purpose of this article and assume that hinnies are in fact readily available and explore the various uses of the mule/hinny and important considerations to ponder and evaluate when thinking about how you will be using your mule/hinny.

If one is looking for an equine hybrid to resemble a horse in its beauty, sleekness and eye appeal, with good bone structure in the legs, and a rounded hind end, then one should highly consider breeding for a hinny. The stallion produces a high percentage of the physical characteristics of the off spring. From my own experience however in showing mules in halter classes, if the desire is to excel and compete in conformation

classes locally, regionally and nationally, judges tend to prefer mules over hinnies most of the time because hinnies have very little withers and we all want withers. Additionally, judges like the equine to look like a good mix between the horse and the donkey, and this typically equates to the mule.

When the desire of the rider is to produce a jumping hybrid equine, one might think that because the stallion produces a high probability of the physical characteristics as noted above, that you might pick a hunter jumper, 17 hand stallion and get oneself a very good hunter equestrian hinny. However, typically the off-spring from the jennet is smaller regardless of this size of the stallion. The alternative cross would be to produce a mule from a hunter jumper mare and a mammoth jack or an athletic and spirited taller standard jack. When it comes to the question of whether a hinny or a mule makes a better jumper, there is little evidence that one is better than the other.

When breeding a mule for speed, or racing, my father, Don Jacklin, was theoretically convinced that a hinny from a good jennet would be the perfect race animal because they have features more like the horse and thus he embarked on a breeding program of producing hinnies for racing. Through his breeding efforts and subsequent racing trials...it turned out that the dam produces 60-70% of the personality characteristics of the off spring. Mules coming from a horse mare are not as defensive as hinnies. The donkey mother for hinnies produces that "defensive, self preservation, go slow and safe" characteristic that just does not allow hinnies to act quickly and fast 95% of the time. According to Don "hinnies are more phenotypically (outside appearance) similar to horses, but more genotypically (internal genetic structures of the animal) similar to donkeys." None of his hinnies ended up being good racing prospects but they sure have made nice trail riding animals.

As mules have come off the race track, we have turned many of them into exceptional gaming animals. Many names you are familiar with that ended up being top notch barrel racers, were mules that were bred for racing. In fact, in our North Idaho region....the quality of the mules and speed at our local saddle club events has increased significantly over the years since the introduction of retired race mules into this area. The same holds true for larger events, such as the Bishop Mule Days in which mules 'Becky Ann' and 'Rhoda Nelson' have held the top gaming spots over the years and retired racing mule, 'Czar' some 10 years ago was the California State Gaming Champion for 4D competition against horses. In conclusion, if you have the "need for speed" and your desire is to get into gaming, the mule should be your preferred choice of equine over the hinny and retired racing mules may be a good place to prospect.

When it comes to choosing a hybrid equine for trail riding; both mules and hinnies make exceptional animals for this curriculum. Genetics do play a significant role in making a good pleasure animal, but the larger part is a good foundation, dedicated time, repetition, and patience by the trainer/owner. This is not always true, as we found with our cloned mules, but in most cases, the above will provide you with an exceptional trail mule. Warren Mathews says it is "matching the right person to the right mule" and when dealing with the highly intelligent mule/hinny, this is especially true.

When it comes to choosing a hybrid equine for packing, packers tend to stay way from hinnies because they have very little wither and are barrel shaped, thus do not hold a pack saddle well (unless you can find one of the 20% that have wither and mule shaped bodies). Packers in northern wet areas shy away from hinnies due to their small hoof----thus hard for them to travel in boggy areas. Additionally, hinnies tend to have more foot problems vs. a mule. Mules are commonly the preferred choice by packers.

With any equine owner, beauty, inside and out, is in the eye of the beholder, when choosing the right fit of an animal for the individual. I would love to hear from hinny owners to share their experiences.

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