



and trained some top-performing mules such as Lucky Three Sundowner, Third Level Dressage champion; Mae Bea C. T., who took a first place at the Abbe Ranch Horse Trials against 56 horses in the Novice division; and Lucky Three Ciji, who was crowned International Side Saddle Organization Champion, National Reserve Champion and '92 Bishop Mule Days champion in sidesaddle.

By 1983, Hodges had an extensive list of folks waiting for her to train their mules. She knew she couldn't get to all those animals in a reasonable time and other qualified donkey and mule trainers were in short supply, so she wrote a book, "Training Mules and Donkeys: A Logical Approach to Longears." That volume was followed by three more books, a series of 10 videotapes and 27, half-hour TV programs, co-produced with MediaTech Productions, based in Fort Collins, Colorado.

The videos in particular were a way to get useful information into the hands of the owners and get them involved in the training process, Hodges says. "I considered doing clinics like so many trainers do, but I figured I could reach more people through a video and book training program," she says. "It's so critical that the person who will be working with the donkey or mule be involved in the training. Mules and

donkeys bond to those who train them, and without that bond, you won't have an animal you can rely on. I suppose you could say I have established the first correspondence equine training program!"

Hodges' training methodology is based on the simple principle that she's not just training the animal, she's building a relationship with him. "You have to consider the psychology of a mule," she says. "Behavior modification techniques work best with these smart, sensitive animals; plenty of positive reinforcement and only appropriate punishment is key."

Hodges likes to equate training longears with raising children. "In both instances, it's a matter of socializing the individual," she says. "We begin with nurturing, guidance, affection and play. Then we set boundaries and introduce activities that build confidence and help that animal reach its full potential. Some days will be for learning and some for just plain fun." Along the way, she says, we're bound to learn plenty about ourselves because animals, especially mules, have an uncanny way of showing us our character flaws.

Hodges' award-winning video series covers her training philosophy and technique in exhaustive detail. However, if a customer does have a question, she's just a phone call away. "That's one service that will always be free. I figure if I'm asking people to take an interest in these animals, I should take an interest in those who are making an effort to train their animals right." The books, the videos, the TV series, have all made Hodges something of a celebrity among mule and donkey enthusiasts. Her videos, rated among the best in the industry, have won five Telly Awards and five Vision Awards. Her book titled "Donkey Training" earned the silver medal from the Colorado Independent Publishers Association.

*For more information, go to*  
[www.LuckyThreeRanch.com](http://www.LuckyThreeRanch.com).

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