

DONKEY FACTS

By Ed Jordan



Since being retired as a veterinarian, I find it hard to sit through days of continuing education still required for my license, but when they have sessions on draft horses, donkeys, mules and other equine subjects, I zero in on the information. Here are a few of the notes from a recent veterinary conference:

Donkeys, mules, and draft horses are not just smaller or longer-eared equines. They have different needs and react totally different to many drugs. Donkeys usually require more drugs (based on their weight) than a horse would and you have to repeat the drug more often. Mules are in-between a little more than horses but less than donkeys.

Donkeys are much more susceptible to lung disease, like the flu. When a donkey is depressed or off feed for 2 days, you should be worried. Donkeys also get lungworms more readily than other equines, but the lungworm is controlled easily with ivermectin, our most common

wormer, so we see little of the problem because regular worming stops the parasite before it causes disease.

Draft horse metabolism is about the same as a pony. Drafts should have about 1%-1 1/2% of their body weight in roughage per day. They also need a mineral salt mixture of calcium, phosphorus, selenium, trace minerals, and copper sulfate rather than the copper oxide. You'll have to read labels on those salt blocks to see which one would come closest to draft horse needs.

Donkeys get by on less feed and poorer feed so be careful to not overfeed. Donkeys can do this because their narrow lips and much more mobile lips are able to pick out the good stuff faster than a horse. The feed stays in the gut much longer than a horse so there is much more microbial digestion of the material. They are very efficient in how they use the dietary protein so when the by-product of the feed dropping from under your donkey's tail hits the ground, it has been stripped of everything useful by the donkey.

Popular opinion has it that mules and donkeys do not founder like a horse. WRONG!!!! While horses get it more easily, mules and donkeys are not exempt. One of my mules was foundered (some years ago) on lush spring grass. She had all the symptoms and was miserable but responded well to the medical treatment. The hard part was that she was so smart that she would be on the fight as soon as she saw the needle and syringe. I would have to catch her and never let her see the syringe or there was no hope of getting the drug into her. Mules are definitely smart animals. Even one of my miniature donkeys has foundered and has permanent hoof problems.

And lastly, we all know how nice a little neighing or whinny of your horse can be as you work with them, but it will never compare to the all out hee-hawing of a donkey. When all four of my donkeys greet me at once, it rattles the windows and is awesome!