

Meredith Hodges Marks Calendar for Bishop Mule Days' 40th
by Helen T. Hertz

This year Bishop Mule Days will celebrate its 40th anniversary. And while the folks who organize and sponsor this amazingly complex, week-long event deserve as much credit as we can heap on them, perhaps the ones who've done the most to promote, sustain and improve Bishop's hallmark event are the mules and donkeys themselves. After all, if the thousands of long-eared participants who've performed in the Bishop arena over the years hadn't challenged their owners and amazed their audiences the way they did, no amount of marketing or organization could have kept this show alive.

Every year the 700 or so mules and donkeys who enter that arena give it everything they've got and continue to raise the bar for performance, versatility and plain old spunk. It's a testament to their ability and also to that of their owners, who've taken a modest packers rendezvous and turned it into a state-of-the-art mule and donkey show.

At Lucky Three Ranch in Loveland, Colorado, Bishop Mule Days has been a calendar staple for nearly 30 of the event's 40 years. Meredith Hodges has made her mark at Bishop as a top competitor and avid supporter. In the years since her mules turned in championship performances in jumping, sidesaddle, dressage, driving and other events, she's returned to Bishop to see old friends and make new ones. Jasper the Mule, the star of her children's series, has accompanied her for the last several years, serving as Grand Marshal of the Bishop Mule Days Parade, entertaining the kids, and filming footage for the upcoming video production, "Jasper Goes to Bishop."

This year, Meredith and Jasper will return to their favorite equine event where they'll undoubtedly spend some quality time with Meredith's good friend Tennessee Mule Artist Bonnie Shields. Bonnie illustrated the Jasper series and recently completed a bronze sculpture of Jasper and his friends Kylie and Moxie, now installed at Lucky Three Ranch. She'll have a booth, as always, where shoppers will find a selection of her art and many of Meredith's books and videos as well.

New this year for Meredith will be the "Jasper Goes to Bishop" coloring book, with drawings by Bonnie of course, and a four-part training series titled "Equus Revisited: A Complete Approach to Athletic Conditioning." In a nutshell, this 2-DVD set and full-color manual cover all the "whys" behind Meredith's correspondence training series, *Training Mules and Donkeys*—why these training techniques work; why responsible training takes as much time as it does; why it takes a team of equine professionals to properly care for a mule, horse or donkey, etc. The series includes the same techniques Meredith has used to physically and mentally prepare her mules for championship-level performance.

If you're fortunate enough to make it to Bishop this year, be sure to stop by Bonnie's booth and say "hi" to her and to Meredith. And as you appreciate the athletic feats and exhibitions of skill taking place in the arena, consider everything it takes to make Bishop Mules Days the truly exceptional event that it is.

Bishop Mule Days takes place in Bishop, California, May 19-24, 2009. For more information, visit www.muledays.org. For more information about Meredith Hodges and Lucky Three Ranch, please visit www.luckythreeranch.com or call 800-816-7566.