

LUCKY THREE RANCH

By Meredith Hodges

MULE CROSSING - Special Report "1988 New Year's Day Rose Parade"

When we were invited in May of 1987 to represent the American Donkey and Mule Society in the 1988 New Year's Day Rose Parade. We were thrilled, but I don't think those of us from Colorado realized just how difficult it might be to get to Pasadena in December!

Since we had to be at the L.A. Equestrian Center on December 26th for practice for an exhibition on the 27th, we planned to leave Colorado on December 23rd, but our plans were hurried by a devastating snowstorm that eventually dumped four feet of snow, or more, all over the state and surrounding areas. Fortunately, we heeded the weatherman's warnings and hurried out of Colorado just ahead of the storm on the evening of the 22nd. All the way across New Mexico, and as far as south of Flagstaff, Arizona, we drove relentlessly with the storm raising its ugly head at every gas stop, threatening to stop us dead in our tracks! Finally, in Phoenix, after 24 hours of driving, we were safe in the warmer southern climate.

Our dedication to our mules prevailed and we arrived safely in Los Angeles the next day, Christmas Eve. We spent Christmas Day enjoying our freedom from the gruesome trip and explored the impressive L.A. Equestrian Center aboard our mules. The mules were quite happy to be finally out of the trailer and allowed to exercise, but they were not as impressed as we were about being stabled next to Zsa Zsa Gabor's "Silver Fox;" after all, he was only a horse! Practices for our exhibition went smoothly and the following day many visitors toured the stable area in order to meet with the stars of the afternoon's exhibition. The mules, as always, were among their favorites.

We were bombarded with interested folks asking questions and offering complimentary remarks about our Longears. "Blue Zebulon," our fearless leader, handsome jack that he is, even managed to line up a photo session with a local photographer. The exhibition itself went quite smoothly. "Zebulon", ridden by Fran Howe, led an entourage of mules into the arena cheered on by enthusiastic spectators. After our introduction, we lined up and watched while three demonstrations were performed. First, Gayle Gardner-Mahler gave a jumping exhibition on Diane Hunter's "Tea Party." This was followed by "Pas de Deux" Dressage exhibition with Gayle again on "Tea Party" and Meredith Hodges on "Lucky Three Sundowner." Vince Silverman finished the exhibition with a reining pattern on "Millie" and we all exited behind "Blue Zebulon" to the sound of cheering and applause for our beloved Longears. We were all so very proud!

On Dec. 28th, we all dressed "to the max" for a reception of all the Rose Parade equestrians held at the Tournament House in Pasadena. Celebrity guests included Iron Eyes Cody, Monty Montana, and Richard Farnsworth. Good food, drink, and good company made for a memorable time, lifting our spirits with the promise of an exciting parade and a better new year for mules and donkeys!

On December 30th, Diane Hunter treated us to a once-in-a-lifetime dinner experience at the Medieval Times restaurant in Buena Park. As we passed through the gates of the castle, we were crowned and invited by the King to take a step back in time when chivalry ruled and the Knights of the Realm fought for glory and the hands of fair maidens. We supped with the King and fellow Lords and Ladies of the Realm while watching the knights perform outstanding feats of horsemanship and combat. We departed the castle with dreams of Camelot, whilst we made our way safely back to L.A.

January 1st, 1988, 2:30.A.M. came early as we made preparations to make our way to the parade route. When we arrived at 3:30 A.M., the freeway was buzzing with excitement. Finally at 7:00 A.M., we were escorted to our final waiting area where we were eventually fed into the parade. The mules and "Zebulon" were just great and they seemed to know that they were representing Longears everywhere. They marched proudly in line: Fran Howe on "Zebulon," Reggie Register on "Tea Party," Diane Hunter on "Lucky Three Ciji," Meredith Hodges on "Lucky Three Sundowner," Gary Hodges on "Lucky Three Mae Bea C.T.," Joan Triolo on "Rambling Rose," Vince Silverman on "Millie," Bill Wolever on "Big Red Loretta," Gayle Gardner-Mahler on "Frances Bess Scott," Susan Lowery on "Joker B's Jitterbug," and Janet Luke on "Joker B's Jigsaw." Despite noise- makers, cheering, bands playing, helicopters, and the like, the Longears made their way proudly down the parade route while we all smiled and waved to the millions of people who decorated the street. Five miles we covered and for five miles spectators complimented our Longears and bid us a "Happy New Year" which we joyously returned. After the parade, we raised a glass of champagne to celebrate our Longears and ourselves for a successful New Years. Then we bade each other farewell and those of us from Colorado hopped into the truck again, and again between storms, hoofed it back to Colorado with dreams of next year's New Year's Day Rose Parade!