

## A 2009 Bishop Mule Days Debriefing



VIC OTTEN and Jessie James competing in gambler's choice trail at Bishop Mule Days

It was easily 90 degrees and I was hanging out under the shade of a canopy with my new friend Mule Bob drinking a lemonade that cost me \$4.50. We were discussing the greatness of mules and talking story. Unbeknownst to me, in the main arena, a driving event was taking place that I was supposed to be a participant. I had been looking forward to it for months and felt honored when my friend Ray asked me

to be his swamper.

Despite the worst economic conditions in years, a series of earthquakes and fears of swine flu, thousands flocked to the High Sierras this Memorial Day weekend to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Bishop Mule Days. But that could be expected. They do it every year, and this was going to be a celebration to remember in one of the most beautiful settings in the world.



KRIS KEELER riding VIC OTTEN's mule, Ruby, in a jumping class

Bishop Mule Days is one of those rare events that is really difficult to explain to someone who has not been there. It is like a horse show on steroids with elements of a rodeo and circus neatly packaged into a week long festival dedicated to mules and donkeys. The best trainers and riders in the country come to Bishop to showcase their talent. Virtually all the English and Western disciplines, from dressage to roping, are represented.

There are also packing events, gymkhana, fun events like musical tires and the Dolly Parton race, chariot steer roping and mule races.

Bishop Mule Days is also a social event where an unusual cast of characters that probably would never normally socialize have a really good time together: there are rednecks, packers, hunters, yuppies, lawyers, vegans, construction workers, law enforcement, dental hygienists, judges...all brought together by their appreciation for the mule.

### Busted-up trainer wins big

While the only expectation that I had for Mule Days this year was to have fun, I admittedly wanted to win a couple ribbons. My youngest mule, Cheyenne Mountain Ruby, was in training with Kris Keeler and was just starting to jump. However, she has an issue with her power steering, or lack therefore, which led the people at her barn to nickname her "Ricochet". Nonetheless, Kris is an excellent trainer, and I felt we had a good shot at winning something. This was going to be Ruby's first event, and I felt that we

had something to prove.

After last year's Mule Days, I purchase another mule, Jessie James. Jessie is older than Ruby and came with lots of training. It was my mistaken belief that his good looks and training level would make up for my serious lack of practice and focus.

About six weeks before Mule Days, Kris had a serious accident during a jumping event at a horse contest. She broke two ribs, a collar bone and cracked her elbow. This was in the critical weeks before the event when Ruby needed some serious schooling. Accordingly, I set my sights for Mule Days 2010.

Despite her accident, Kris ended up winning lots of ribbons. On Ruby, she took first place in green English working hunter. She also

took two thirds, a sixth and seventh place. Kris also won a handful of awards, including at least one first place, on a green mule that she trained called Roxy.

As for me and Jessie James, we won a third and fourth place. Not bad I suppose for my second contest.

### Heart-stopping chariot wreck

Anyone who harnesses two 1,000-pound-plus mules to a homemade chariot is asking for trouble. But that is exactly why we love these guys. They put it all on the line for a ribbon and a few minutes of Mule Days glory. The chariot events are a real crowd pleaser.

Tragedy almost struck in the chariot barrel racing event (as could probably be expected). One of the contestants was whipping


around the first barrel when his chariot flipped over on its side. The driver exited the chariot and the mules were off to the races. For approximately three minutes various people attempted to stop the chariot - all kinds of techniques were attempted including the driver getting in front of his team and waving his arms up in the air.

What finally worked was amazing. This guy watched as the team was approaching and kind of waited until it was about to pass and grabbed one of the lines with one hand and grabbed a hold of the chariot with his other hand. A few seconds later, he grabbed the other line and let go of the chariot. He planted both feet on the ground and was mule skiing.

Shortly thereafter, he brought the

## 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Mule & Donkey Show

Sponsored By Holly Gray Park  
Holly Gray Park,  
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September 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### Mule and Donkey Show

Saturday, Sept. 12<sup>th</sup>, 4:00 p.m.  
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Sunday, Sept. 13<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 a.m.  
40+ Classes

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# KELSO Mule Sale

## CHRISTIAN COUNTY LIVESTOCK BARN HOPKINSVILLE, KENTUCKY

Friday, August 7, 2009  
10:00 a.m.

A great market for riding and driving mules!  
Not responsible for accidents.

**NOTE: Current Health Papers/  
Negative Coggins Required.**



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### KELSO MULES

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Johnny Kelso (270) 293-0538  
Justin Kelso (270) 293-0630  
Jody Kelso (270) 293-0691



**DEBBIE HUMPHREYS, VIC OTTEN and ANNA ARNOLD at Bishop Mule Days**

team to a halt. Luckily, no person or animal was injured.

#### **Anna does it again**

When I saw Anna Arnold's name in the program guide, I knew Jessie James' chances of winning the coon jumping event were slim to none. Anna has a knack for picking fine mules and her white mule had won this event before.

Sure enough, Anna's mule jumped over 5-feet and took first place. As for Jessie, he gave me a disgusted look when I knocked over the standard sending him into third place. Sorry, Jessie.

#### **Mule Bob ties the knot**

On the first night of Mule Days, Mule Bob proposed Monica, his girlfriend of 27 years. Mule Bob and Monica were married a few days later under a big tree by a Reverend who was attending the event. I cannot imagine a more appropriate way to take one's vows than at Mule Days. Good luck newlyweds.

#### **The return of Mulevis**

To the horror of many and the delight of hundreds, this year saw the return of Mulevis. While there is some debate on how Mulevis landed this gig (Mulevis claims he was asked to perform), there is no question that this year it was a fully sanctioned act.

Mulvis is a sometimes entertainer and former PR man in his early fifties that occasionally stuffs himself into an Elvis outfit that is at least three sizes too small. When Mulevis looks in the mirror, I imagine that he sees the clean cut musician in 1956 singing "Heartbreak Hotel."

Mulvis is like black licorice—you either love it or hate it. He has several songs in his repertoire but the one that I regretfully remember goes something like this: "Ever since my horse done left me, I had to go buy a mule." I have to admit it is pretty funny.

#### **Swamper**

As previously mentioned, I was

supposed to be a swamper on a wagon owned by a friend of mine. I had planned on doing this for about four months. Apparently, I got the date confused on when the event was and missed the class. Having considered reliability factors in his choice for a swamper, my friend wisely had a back up—they took a blue ribbon.

#### **Shocking display of mule prejudice**

The finals of the reining event were held Saturday evening. I was sitting in the stands watching one of the contestants who was engaged in a spin maneuver and his mule's back legs were slightly off the pivot point. A man behind me stated to his wife that it was too bad that the contestant had blown the maneuver. His wife responded by stating, "Oh honey be kind, they're mules!"

I bit my lip and refrained from pointing out this woman's ignorance. She obviously had never been to a reining event. Had she missed the stellar performance by Tim Phillips and Tuff Stuff? It does not get much better than that - near perfection.

#### **Thanks to the volunteers**

It is my understanding that Mule Days is basically run by volunteers. For those of you that have attended this event, you know what a remarkable accomplishment this is. Mule Days is a huge event that lasts six days and hosts thousands of spectators and contestants. These people really work hard to make the event run smooth and deserve some recognition.