

Mules – What I won't sing

"Swinging on a Star" is an Oscar-winning 1944 song written by Jimmy Van Heusen (music) and Johnny Burke (lyrics) and famously recorded by Bing Crosby for the film *Going My Way*, where Bing Crosby plays a priest who teaches children. It is a great song by Van Heusen with inventive harmony and bass line.

A song I will not sing for our annual Tribute to Jimmy Van Heusen

I had planned to sing the lyrics of "Swinging on a Star" for our annual tribute to composer Jimmy Van Heusen, **but found the lyrics offensive and could not**. Instead, I have focused on arranging this musically rich tune for piano, bass, and drums. **I am averse to singing** songs that belittle animals that have served humans well for thousands of years and whose whole existence has been relegated to serving humans.

Bing Crosby disparaged **mules** (in "Going My Way"), but they have served humans faithfully and effectively for millennia. Crosby also disparaged pigs and fish singing lyrics by Johnny Burke that are ridiculous and mocking.

Mules are one of the most-used working animals in the world, highly prized for their hardiness and **docile nature**. In countries from North Africa to Southeast Asia, mules pull carts to market, carry people across rough terrain, and help their owners to till the soil.

If you're not sure what a mule is, read on to learn more about these hardworking creatures and the contributions that they make to people's lives all over the world...

1. **Mules are the offspring of a male donkey (a jack) and a female horse.** (The horse and the donkey are different species, with different numbers of chromosomes.)

Mules combine characteristics of both horse and donkey parents to create a tougher, more resilient working animal. A hinny, the offspring of a male horse and female donkey is much rarer and more closely resembles its mother with the long ears of a donkey.

2. **Mules are born 99.9% sterile.** This is due to an **uneven** chromosome count. A mule has 63 chromosomes, intermediate between the chromosome counts of its parents: 64

of the horse and 62 of the donkey. In rare cases, female mules have been known to give birth to foals.

3. Mules are hardier, eat less, and live longer than horses of an equivalent size. Mules require less food and have more stamina than horses of the same weight and height, making them resilient working animals in some of the harshest environments.

4. Mules are less stubborn and more intelligent than donkeys. Don't let the old saying "as stubborn as a mule" fool you: mules are thought to be more docile than their donkey fathers. But a mule's intelligence also means that they are more cautious and aware of danger, making them safer to ride when crossing dangerous terrain.

5. Mules generally weigh between 800 and 1,000 lbs. but "mini mules" can weigh under 50 lbs. Mules can inherit a range of features from their parents, and there's no promise of what a mule foal might grow in to. Over the centuries, owners have experimented with crossbreeding different sizes and breeds of horses – from miniature horses to draft horses – to create different sizes and strengths of mule.

6. The skin of a mule is less sensitive than that of a horse and more resistant to sun and rain. This makes mules a dependable option for owners who work outside in harsh weather and strong sunlight.

7. Mules can live up to 50 years. Although the average lifespan for mules is between 35 and 40 years, some mules have been known to live until 50, especially if well looked after.

8. Mules have harder hooves than horses which makes them great for rocky terrain. Mules' hooves are less likely to split or crack and can withstand mountainous trails and rocky farm soil. For many owners around the world who may not be able to regularly replace horseshoes, this means that mules are cheaper to keep.

9. Some mules have been known to make whimpering noises. In addition to whinnying like a horse and braying like a donkey, mules make sounds that combine both calls and have even been known to whimper when excited or worried.

10. Militaries have depended on mules for millennia. Mules have been used throughout history as reliable pack animals in combat, able to take on the tough terrain that other forms of transport can't reach. For example, in the 1980s the US military used more than 10,000 mules to carry weapons and supplies through Afghanistan's rugged hills to Afghan mujahedeen camps.

11. China breeds the largest numbers of mules in the world, followed by Mexico. China breeds more than seven million mules each year where they are commonly used on small farms and for transport.

12. Mules can kick sideways. Although mules are usually docile, an angry mule can kick both backwards and to the side. Avoid a mule's hind legs as these animals can pack quite a punch!

Source: SPANA.

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Jazz & Popular Pianist
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Note: This document is posted in the Music section at
<https://jackmanstatistics.com/commentary.html>

Mules

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For other uses, see [Mule \(disambiguation\)](#) and [Mules \(disambiguation\)](#).

Mule



Conservation status

Domesticated

Scientific classification

Domain: [Eukaryota](#)

Kingdom: [Animalia](#)

Phylum: [Chordata](#)

Class: [Mammalia](#)

Order: [Perissodactyla](#)

Family: [Equidae](#)

Subtribe: [Equina](#)

Genus: [Equus](#)

Species: [E. africanus asinus](#)♂
× [E. ferus caballus](#)♀

The **mule** is a [domestic](#) equine [hybrid](#) between a [donkey](#) and a [horse](#). It is the [offspring](#) of a male donkey (a jack) and a female horse (a [mare](#)).^{[1][2]} The horse and

the donkey are different species, with different numbers of [chromosomes](#); of the two possible [first-generation hybrids](#) between them, the mule is easier to obtain and more common than the [hinny](#), which is the offspring of a male horse (a [stallion](#)) and a female donkey (a [jenny](#)).

Mules vary widely in size, and may be of any color seen in horses or donkeys. They are more patient, hardier and longer-lived than horses, and are perceived as less obstinate and more intelligent than donkeys. ^{[3]:5}

Terminology

A female mule that has [oestrus](#) cycles, and so could, in theory, carry a fetus, is called a "molly" or "Molly mule", although the term is sometimes used to refer to female mules in general. A male mule is properly called a "horse mule", although it is often called a "john mule", which is the correct term for a [gelded](#) mule. A young male mule is called a "mule colt", and a young female is called a "mule filly". ^[4]

History



Painting in the [Tomb of Nebamun](#) at [Thebes](#), showing a



pair of animals which could be mules or [onagers](#) [Ancient Greek rhyton](#) in the shape of the head of a mule, made by [Brygos](#), early fifth century BC, [Jérôme Carcopino Museum](#), [Aleria](#), Corsica

Breeding of mules became possible only when the range of the domestic horse, which originated in [Central Asia](#) in about 3500 BC, extended into that of the domestic ass, which originated in north-eastern Africa. This overlap probably occurred in [Anatolia](#) and [Mesopotamia](#) in Western Asia, and mules were bred there before 1000 BC. ^{[5]:37}

A painting in the [Tomb of Nebamun](#) at [Thebes](#), dating from approximately 1350 BC, shows a chariot drawn by a pair of animals which have been variously identified as [onagers](#),^[6] as mules^{[5]:37} or as hinnies.^{[7]:96} Mules were present in [Israel and Judah](#) in the time of [King David](#).^{[5]:37} There are many representations of them in [Mesopotamian](#) works of art dating from the first millennium BC. Among the [bas-reliefs](#) depicting the [Lion Hunt of Ashurbanipal](#) from the North Palace of [Nineveh](#) is a clear and detailed image of two mules loaded with nets for hunting.^{[7]:96}^[8]

[Homer](#) noted their arrival in Asia Minor in the [Iliad](#) in 800 BC.^[9]

Christopher Columbus allegedly brought mules to the New World.^[10]^[better source needed]



Mule and Ass by [Hendrik Goltzius](#) or [Hieronymus Wierix](#), 1578

[George Washington](#) bred mules at his [Mount Vernon](#) home. At the time, they were not common in the United States, but Washington understood their value, as they were "more docile than donkeys and cheap to maintain."^[11] In the nineteenth century, they were used in various capacities as draught animals – on farms, especially where clay made the soil slippery and sticky; pulling canal boats; and famously for pulling, often in teams of 20 or more animals, wagonloads of [borax](#) out of [Death Valley](#), California from 1883 to 1889. The wagons were among the largest ever pulled by draught animals, designed to carry 10 [short tons](#) (9 metric tons) of borax ore at a time.^[12]

Mules were used by armies to transport supplies, occasionally as mobile firing platforms for smaller cannons, and to pull heavier field guns with wheels over mountainous trails such as in Afghanistan during the [Second Anglo-Afghan War](#).^[13]

In the second half of the twentieth century, widespread use of mules declined in industrialised countries. The use of mules for farming and for transportation of agricultural products largely gave way to steam-, then diesel-powered, [tractors](#) and lorries.^[citation needed] On 5 May 2003, [Idaho Gem](#), a mule foal [cloned](#) by [nuclear transfer](#) of cells from [foetal](#) material, was born at the [University of Idaho](#) in [Moscow, Idaho](#).^{[14]:2924}^[15] Neither an equid nor a hybrid animal had been cloned before.^{[14]:2924}^[15]

Characteristics



Loading mules, from [*Eleven Years in the Rocky Mountains and a Life on the Frontier*](#) by [Frances Fuller Victor](#), 1887

In general terms, in both the mule and the hinny, the foreparts and head of the animal are similar to those of the father [sire](#), while the hindparts and tail tend to resemble those of the [dam](#).^{[5]:36} A mule is generally larger than a hinny, with longer ears and a heavier head; the tail is usually covered with long hair like that of its mare mother.^{[5]:37} A mule has the thin limbs, small narrow hooves and short [mane](#) of the donkey, while its height, the shape of the neck and body, and the uniformity of its coat and teeth are more similar to those of the horse.^[16]

Mules vary widely in size, from small miniature mules under 125 cm (50 in) to large and powerful draught mules standing up to 180 cm (70 in) at the [withers](#).^{[17]:86} The median weight range is between about 370 and 460 kg (820 and 1000 lb).^[18]

The coat may be of any color seen in the horse or in the donkey. Mules usually display the light points commonly seen in donkeys: pale or mealy areas on the belly and the insides of the thighs, on the muzzle, and around the eyes. They often have [primitive markings](#) such as dorsal stripe, shoulder stripe or zebra stripes on the legs.^{[5]:37}

The mule exhibits [hybrid vigor](#).^[19] [Charles Darwin](#) wrote: "The mule always appears to me a most surprising animal. That a hybrid should possess more reason, memory, obstinacy, social affection, powers of muscular endurance, and length of life, than either of its parents, seems to indicate that art has here outdone nature".^[20]

The mule inherits from the donkey the traits of intelligence, sure-footedness, toughness, endurance, disposition, and natural cautiousness. From the horse it inherits speed, conformation, and agility.^{[21]:5–6,8} Mules are reputed to exhibit a higher cognitive intelligence than their parent species, but robust scientific evidence to back up these claims is lacking. Preliminary data exist from at least two evidence-based studies, but they rely on [a limited set of specialized cognitive tests and a small number of subjects](#).^{[22][23]} Mules are generally taller at the shoulder than donkeys and have better endurance than horses, although a lower top speed.^[22]

In the early twentieth century the mule was preferred to the horse as a [pack animal](#) – its skin is harder and less sensitive than that of a horse, and it is better able to bear heavy weights.^[16]

Fertility

A mule has 63 [chromosomes](#), intermediate between the 64 of the horse and the 62 of the donkey.^[24] Mules are usually [infertile](#) for this reason.^[25]

Pregnancy is rare, but can occasionally occur naturally, as well as through [embryo transfer](#). A few mare mules have produced offspring when mated with a horse or donkey stallion.^{[26][27]} [Herodotus](#) gives an account of such an event as an ill omen of [Xerxes' invasion of Greece](#) in 480 BC: "There happened also a portent of another kind while he was still at Sardis—a mule brought forth young and gave birth to a mule" (Herodotus [The Histories](#) 7:57), and a mule's giving birth was a frequently recorded portent in antiquity, although scientific writers also doubted whether it was really possible (see e.g. [Aristotle](#), *Historia animalium*, 6.24; [Varro](#), *De re rustica*, 2.1.28). Between 1527 and 2002, approximately sixty such births were reported.^[27] In [Morocco](#) in early 2002 and [Colorado](#) in 2007, mare mules produced colts.^{[27][28][29]} Blood and hair samples from the Colorado birth verified that the mother was indeed a mule and the foal was indeed her offspring.^[29]

A 1939 article in the *Journal of Heredity* describes two offspring of a fertile mare mule named "Old Bec," which was owned at the time by [Texas A&M University](#) in the late 1920s. One of the foals was a female, sired by a jack. Unlike her mother, she was sterile. The other, sired by a five-gaited [Saddlebred](#) stallion, exhibited no characteristics of any donkey. That horse, a stallion, was bred to several mares, which gave birth to live foals that showed no characteristics of the donkey.^[30] In 1995, a group from the [Federal University of Minas Gerais](#) described a female mule that was pregnant for a seventh time, having previously produced two donkey sires, two foals with the typical 63 chromosomes of mules, and several horse stallions that had produced four foals. The three of the latter available for testing each bore 64 horse-like chromosomes. These foals phenotypically resembled horses, though they bore markings absent from the sire's known lineages, and one had ears noticeably longer than those typical of her sire's breed. The elder two horse-like foals had proved fertile at the time of publication, with their progeny being typical of horses.^[31]

Use



A 20-mule team in [Death Valley, California](#)

While a few mules can carry live weight up to 160 kg (353 lb), the superiority of the mule becomes apparent in their additional endurance.^[32] In general, a mule can be packed with dead weight up to 20% of its body weight, or around 90 kg (198 lb).^[32] Although it depends on the individual animal, mules trained by the [Army of Pakistan](#) are reported to be able to carry up to 72 kg (159 lb) and walk 26 km (16.2 mi) without resting.^[33] The average equine in general can carry up to roughly 30% of its body weight in live weight, such as a rider.^[34]

About 3.5 million donkeys and mules are slaughtered each year for meat worldwide.^[35]

Mule trains have been part of working portions of transportation links as recently as 2005 by the [World Food Programme](#),^[36] and are still used extensively to transport cargo in rugged, roadless regions.^[citation needed]

The [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations](#) reports that China was the top market for mules in 2003, closely followed by Mexico and many Central and South American nations.