



DONKEY SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

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DON'T BUY A DONKEYUNLESS

DON'T buy a donkey unless you could keep a pony. This should be the rule of thumb for all would-be donkey owners.

Unfortunately, due probably to the wrong sort of publicity, there seems to be an idea prevalent that a donkey can live on less grazing than a goat. Or, as I once heard it put - 'Marvellous things, can live off the smell of an oil-rag!' While I heartily endorse the first part of this statement the second is far from true!

A donkey can survive in conditions that would kill horses, but surviving and thriving are not quite the same! If you haven't sufficient acreage to keep a pony fit, then you certainly haven't enough to keep a donkey.

Unfortunately for the donkey, it seems to be seen today as some sort of mixture of poor man's horse and rich man's status symbol! Both ideas are totally erroneous, and when combined, disastrous for the future well being of the donkey.

DON'T buy a donkey if this is how you see it; you will certainly be disappointed. In the first place, once purchased, a donkey is going to cost you just as much to keep as a pony. The only advantage is that it actually prefers rougher grazing than a pony, but probably needs a greater area to keep really fit. Donkeys are like goats in that they like to browse, in the bush, on trees, shrubs, gates or garden plants! They do not like lush clover pastures and may be said to be more economical to keep in that they do well on cheaper pasture hay. But donkeys are fastidious and will certainly not eat poor or mouldy hay.

DON'T buy a donkey if all you want is a great big cuddly toy. Much better to get an outsize teddy bear that will not require a paddock, will not need feeding in all weathers and above all has not got a mind and a will of its own, plus four hooves and a good set of teeth!

We are often told, glibly, by those with little or no experience of donkeys, 'They never kick!' This of course, as anyone who has any real experience of donkeys knows full well, is utter nonsense. The frightened or cornered donkey may well kick, just as any horse or pony would in such circumstances. This is not vice, merely the instinct for self-preservation.

DON'T buy a donkey if you want an adoring slave. Donkeys don't adore people; they are much wiser, they sit back and let people adore them! In fact most donkeys look upon people as equals, or even slightly inferior. This of course is part of their charm to those of us who really love them. It is also the unique quality in a donkey that can make it so utterly maddening at times. The horse usually understands what you require and does it, because you are the master animal. Or it does not understand and does not do it! The donkey on the other hand frequently understands what you want it to do, but because it can see no possible sensible reason for your request, does not comply.

However he is basically a very good-natured fellow and if a good relationship based on mutual trust and friendship has been built up between you, the donkey will often do things for you that to him appear quite absurd, because you have asked him to.

He will even do some things which his instinct tells him are dangerous, and the donkey probably has a better sense of self-preservation than most animals, which is one of the reasons he is such a safe and reliable mount for children. This willingness to comply against her better judgement was brought home to me one day by Sally, my own particular mount. I was leading her through a rather rickety gate that she had been kicked by many times before, but on this particular occasion I had not bothered to open it very wide and it leaned in slightly at the top; quite reasonable for me to pass through but to Sally's eyes obviously not a safe opening. She did not dig in her toes and refuse to budge but to my amazement, went down on her knees and crawled through after me!

Over the years I have built up what I feel is a good relationship with Sally and we are good friends, meeting on terms of equality; at least I hope we are! The fact that I have been kicked by her, each time with deliberation, I feel proves, not disproves this! The first occasion was on a foot-trimming morning. Sally just hates having her feet trimmed although she usually submits with a good grace. As I walked past her carrying the trimming tools she quite deliberately kicked me. The second time I had been riding her in the bush with my two boys on their donkeys. Owing to my eldest son's lamentable sense of direction we had got lost and as a result it was nearly dusk when we finally reached the home paddock. The donkeys were full of impatience to be home. The last stretch meant riding across a 60-acre paddock and the gate into this had to be fastened top and bottom with wire. I was bending down closing this after us when I felt a firm, carefully calculated to be felt but not to injure, kick in the back. It obviously meant 'Let's get home, don't bother with that damn thing!'

So DON'T buy a donkey as a cuddly toy; it may look cuddly, it may well even enjoy being cuddled, but that keen intelligence and strong character will let you know, sooner or later, that it is much more than a toy!

Lastly DON'T buy a donkey as a status symbol! It will not be a good investment; the whims of fashion have a way of changing with remarkable rapidity; in fact I have already heard a rumour that for real prestige a Camel or a Clydesdale is the thing to have grazing in the paddock! They are bigger, they eat more, they cost more - so obviously the prestige is greater!

But DO buy a donkey if you love and understand horses and would like an equine that is just a little bit different.

DO buy a donkey if you want a safe and reliable first mount for children or a surefooted one for yourself to wander those rough bush trails round home.

DO buy a donkey if you would like a harness animal that is a little bit different.

DO buy a donkey if you are prepared to spend as much on it as a pony in both money and time. An untrained donkey is of no more use than an untrained horse.

And lastly, DO buy a donkey if you admire cats for their independent spirit, you will find much the same sort of spirit in your donkey. And if you have a sense of humour, for things don't always go according to plan where donkeys are concerned, perhaps because they are reputed to be the only animal that possesses a real sense of humour!

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