



DONKEY SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC

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RESPECT FOR JACKS

By Barbara Taylor

If we were asked to describe the characteristics of our donkeys which make them so appealing we would probably come up with a number of things – personality, gentleness, affinity with humans, their willingness to please and many more. Jacks, of course, also have these traits. But they have an added factor which sets them apart from jennies and geldings – male hormones. And what a powerful influence these are! They have an effect on all aspects of a jack's behaviour, and must be taken into account by everyone who comes in contact with them. We need to realise the strength of the jack's instinct to mate and protect his herd. We must also understand that a jack thinks like a donkey, not like a human, and therefore his actions at times seem unpredictable to us. This means that jack owners and organisers of activities have an added responsibility to ensure the safety of other donkeys and people when jacks are around.

As a Society, we strongly discourage the owning of a jack purely for a pet. They should be purchased only by experienced owners who wish to use them for breeding purposes. They must be kept in a secure paddock, where their access to other donkeys can be strictly governed. Owners must also ensure that they do not bring the jack out to any activity until both themselves and the donkey are adequately trained to cope with the situation, and can be reasonably confident of having their animal under control at all times.

Special restrictions apply to jacks when they attend Society functions. Handlers must be at least 14 years of age, and the jacks are required to wear an appropriate bit or chain to give maximum control. Owners should be well aware of the necessity of keeping an adequate distance from other donkeys, especially another jack.

The braying and challenging which occurs in the show ring is ample reminder of this. Jacks are prohibited at many Society activities, particularly where there are inexperienced owners who are just learning to handle their donkeys, or children participating in fun events. The chance of a donkey being "on the loose" and thus in danger from a jack, is just too great. The same applies to overnight camps, where the security of corrals is inadequate to accommodate jacks.

Spectators and owners of jennies and geldings must also take some responsibility, and exercise common sense at functions where jacks are present, such as the Championship Show. Keep your donkey well clear of the jacks. Don't lead him/her close to where a jack is tied up. You may see your donkey as a gentle companion or pet. The jack probably considers it as a potential rival or desirable addition to his harem, and may act accordingly. Take care that you do not inadvertently provoke him, for example by handling a jenny in season and then coming up and giving him a pat. You may not be able to smell anything, but he knows where you've been and he wants a piece of the action. Literally!

I certainly do not want to paint too negative a picture of jacks. They can, of course, be trained for harness and riding, and perform as well as jennies and geldings. Indeed, we have had a jack win our Champion Performance Donkey. But safety must be the first priority. This can only be achieved if we all respect the jacks for the strong, proud and handsome animals that they are, and understand the instincts which drive so much of their behaviour.