



DONKEY SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC

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RIDING DONKEYS

By Jan Murray

A well trained donkey can be a great confidence booster for the beginner or nervous rider, as well as a pleasant mount for anyone who prefers to observe and enjoy their surroundings in the company of a gentle equine.

Donkeys love to see what is around the next corner, rail trails are great fun with a group or just you and your donkey, or try a show or festival, meander down a country road.....

Most donkeys have the same movements (paces or gaits) as horses, those being the walk, trot and canter, but some donkeys, sometimes referred to as Gaited, can have a very smooth fast running walk, a pace (a side to side rocking movement) and a lope (a smooth slow four beat canter) instead of, or as well as the more normal walk trot and canter.

Buying harness that fits your donkey well and that is comfortable for your donkey will require a little more effort, as well as some trial and error.

- The bridle: Generally a donkey bridle will need a brow-band and a throat-lash at least one size larger than the rest of the bridle, to accommodate their broader forehead and larger ear base. The bit: Most donkeys seem to go better with a straight or curved mouth piece. A 'Spanish Snaffle' or 'Kimblewick' is the most common seen on donkeys, as it has the advantage of a chain that does up under the donkeys chin, keeping the bit snugly in the proper place and stopping the bit from pulling through the mouth in the event of a turning difficulty. A drop nose band is another option, when correctly fitted it will comfortably keep the bit in the correct place, and stop the donkey from opening its mouth to avoid the riders directions. Bits with a single joint can hang too low in the mouth causing tongue-over-bit problems to develop, and bits with long side pieces (eg. the FM) can be too narrow on a donkeys more triangular shaped head, causing unacceptable pressure on their cheeks and teeth.
- The saddle: Must fit the donkey! There must be clearance above the spine, but not so much as to make the saddle unstable. A saddle that sits too high off the back will more readily slip sideways when the rider attempts to mount. A saddle that sits too low on the spine will cause permanent damage to the donkey, check the clearance before mounting and again when mounted. Stock, Western and Half-breed saddles are common, as are Wintec saddles.

Your donkey will change shape with age, condition and work, remember to check the fit of your harness often. If you are still having problems, there are now different shaped pads on the market to help correct fitting problems.

Accessories: A crupper or harness britching will be required to keep the saddle from slipping too far forward, because donkeys have a low flat wither there is nothing to stop the saddle from moving forward, not only is this uncomfortable for both donkey and rider, but it puts the girth in an uncomfortable position up against the donkeys foreleg and elbow, galls (sores) can very quickly develop. The use of a back or second girth on a Western saddle does help keep the saddle securely in place, but only when riding on flat terrain.