

What Can a Donkey Do?

Donkeys fall into several size groups, which we refer to as breeds or types. Miniatures up to 36" in height at the withers: Standard up to 48" in height: Large Standard 48" up to 54" for jennets or 56" for jacks: and Mammoth 54" and up for jennets and 56" and up for jacks. If these animals are spotted, they may be registered by The American Council of Spotted Asses. Any donkey may be registered by the American Donkey and Mule Society if it passes inspection. The term's donkey, burrow, ass, and jack stock are properly used for these animals. The males are jacks; the females are jennets (or jennies).

Many people like to own these fine animals for their wonderful personalities and their fine pet qualities. There is probably no more adorable baby in the animal world than the little donkey with its long ears and long legs and sweet face and fuzzy coat. However, there are many uses for donkeys. Here are some of them for your information.

1. **SHEEP PROTECTION** - A single donkey, usually a jennet, sometimes a gelding (jacks rarely work because they can be too aggressive with lambs) is introduced to the herd and undergoes a bonding stage. After it has bonded with the sheep, it will protect them against canine predators (fox, coyote, and dogs) as it would one of its own. This is extremely beneficial in areas where the sheep have many acres to graze. The advantage of the donkey over the guard dog is that they can eat the same food as the sheep so they don't have to be fed separately. The donkey will also bed down with the sheep at night. Given a strange sound it will voice a warning to the flock, which alerts them to danger. Then the donkey will chase and often trample the predator. Miniature donkeys are not usually large enough to handle the coyotes and mammoth donkeys are usually too slow.
2. **HALTER BREAKING** - The standard size donkey is also very adept at halter breaking young calves (polled or dehorned) and yearling horses. The donkey wears a collar that is connected to the halter of the animal that is being taught to lead. The animals are then turned loose in an enclosure, always under supervision. Where the donkey wants to go, it will go. The colt or calf has no option but to follow. By allowing the donkey to perform the unpleasant task of lead training, the "trainee" doesn't associate people with this particular stressful situation. In fact, when you release the colt or calf from the donkey, they are usually very willing to follow you. Articles are available on this particular form of halter training from the American Donkey and Mule Society. While the standard size donkey is ideally suited to sheep protection and halter breaking, all donkeys share in the following:
3. **FOAL COMPANIONSHIP** - The donkey is a wonderful companion to foals at weaning time. The donkey is allowed to run with the mare and foal prior to weaning, then kept with the foal when weaning takes place. The foal has a calm, steadying influence from the donkey and looks to it for support. This calmness is transferred to the foal and the trauma of separation from the dam is reduced. As most donkeys readily come up to people, this

behavior is duplicated by the foal. Not only have you reduced foal stress, but you have instilled in the foal a friendly attitude toward people.

4. **STABLE COMPANION** - This is very similar to the foal companion, only in this case the donkey takes on the responsibility of another animal's well being. Nervous horses have been known to calm down with a donkey companion as a stall or pasture mate. With horses recovering from surgery or injury or with nervous horses such as race or show horses, the donkey seems to have a calming effect. Almost as if the donkey is saying "It's o.k., we'll get through this together". The miniature is often used for this purpose since it does not take up much room in the stall of a racehorse or injured horse.
5. **HANDICAPPED RIDING PROGRAMS** - The donkey has shown time and time again how wonderful it is with children and handicapped people. In many areas, especially England, the donkey is used extensively in riding and animal companion programs for the physically and mentally handicapped. Their small stature, slow and thoughtful nature and affectionate disposition make them ideal for this purpose when properly selected and trained. Both the person and the donkey know they are special together and the bond that develops between the two is quite explainable.
6. **BABY SITTER** - The donkey naturally loves children. While there are a few exceptions the donkey is not usually a biter or kicker. They have the patience of Job and therefore are ideally suited to being around children. For use around children, the handicapped and for most uses (except jacks kept for breeding) a jennet or gelding is the preferred animal.
7. **WORKING DONKEY** - The donkey is used all over the world for an infinite variety of jobs. Here in this country some common uses are recreational riding; recreational driving both single and in teams; packing, many backpackers use a donkey (which they often call a burrow) to carry the heavy load since the animals walk at about a human's foot pace and are such enjoyable companions on the trail; skidding or pulling things on the homestead such as firewood, trash etc.; pulling a sledge, travois or wheeled cart to carry things for the small farm such as barb wire for fencing, trash, or anything that needs to be moved; the donkey can also carry such items on his back in panniers if that is more convenient than pulling it; showing, many adults and children enjoy showing their animals in the donkey and mule shows around the country; the different kinds of work your animal can do to help you are limited only by your imagination.
8. **MULE BREEDING** - All sizes of donkeys are used to breed mules. Large mammoth jacks up to 16 hands in height are used to breed draft mules. Medium sized mammoth and large standard jacks are used to breed saddle and pack mules. Standard jacks are often used to breed miniature mules in the larger size ranges which are used in teams for pulling wagons and for children to ride and use. Miniature jacks are mated with miniature horse mares or Shetland ponies to produce very tiny mules for pets, single driving and just for fun.