

# Missourians get 'kicks' from horses, mules

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Missouri mule and horse owners are having fun...and seeing dollar signs.

"There's good money in draft horses these days," said Melvin Bradley, University of Missouri-Columbia horse specialist.

"A good Belgian filly, weaned, might bring \$2,500 to \$3,000.

"But, a good brood mare will bring \$3,000 to \$10,000. So you can't just jump into this business.

You need good cash flow."

Mule owners don't talk in terms of that kind of money, but they're enjoying a "high," too.

For one thing, there's the miniature mule (50 inches or less) which, inch-for-inch, has to be the king among four-legged high jumpers. It can jump 18 to 20 inches above its own withers—and from a standing position.

"They just raise up in

the front end...almost in slow motion...and propel themselves with their back feet," Bradley said.

Mules for packing and racing are also seeing a surge of popularity.

"They're novel, strong and especially good for distance riding," Bradley said.

"One hundred-mile mule endurance 'races' are becoming quite popular."

Mule and horse enthusiasm was in full

bloom at the end of May when the first "Missouri Draft Horse and Mule Seminar" in the last 30 years was held at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

"About 170 people signed up for the event and 160 stayed from beginning to end," Bradley said.

"They showed remarkable interest in the whole seminar which included demonstrations of fitting for market or show, advice on keeping

animals sound and healthy, reports on feeding and nutrition, and demonstrations on foot care, shoeing, harnessing and hitching."

Bradley, who just last year published a 580-page book on "Horses: A Practical and Scientific Approach" and has written more than 35 other publications on horse management and nutrition, said there is a growing interest in

horses by ecologically-minded families.

"They see horses as a way to get back to self-efficiency...to save gas," Bradley said.

"Economically, of course, the horse can't compete on an energy basis with tractors. But there are a few farmers who manage to keep on farming with just horses and a little supplemental tractor hire. One of the fellows we heard from at the seminar (Howard


Johnson, Maple Hill, Kansas) farms 80 acres that way.

Bradley admitted that some people "just like horses" and justify their hobby by using the horses for a little useful work.

"Actually, horses can make good sense in areas with bad winters. Farmers can keep their feed roads open with horses and sleighs a lot easier than they can

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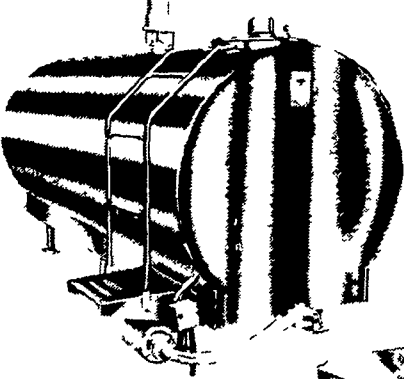
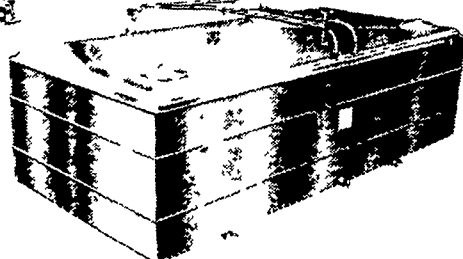
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This one-month-old mule foal stands contentedly by its Belgian mother during the Missouri Draft Horse and Mule Seminar. The pair is owned by Gene Chipman, Perry, Mo.

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