

BUGS BUNNY

By Elinore Tonsor

Bugs Bunny was a Palomino, mare mule. She was the first mule to be compaigned as a distance mount in the Upper Midwest, and in 1983, became the first mule to earn **UMECRA's 1000 Mile Award**. She was owned and ridden by Romona Radtke, Madison, Wisconsin. There is little doubt that Bugs would be on the trail today, except that fate had other things in mind for Bugs. On July 4, 1985, Bugs Bunny was struck and killed by lightning.

Bugsy was purchased as a four-year-old in 1981, for the sole purpose of distance riding. She completed 200 miles that season, and showed everyone just how smart she was. She had a reputation for following the marked trail better than most people which came down to the fact that she understood that the surveyor's tape marked the way. She had her rider's total faith when it came to negotiating any trail obstacle, be it on the ground or a low hanging branch. As a matter of fact, Bugs could find the most solid footing in any bog in the Midwest!

By the end of her first season, Bugsy had learned to love the sport of distance riding, but boy, did she hate conditioning. Monna took her to the first ride of the 1982 season convinced she would never make it through the ride because of the terrible time she'd had conditioning her. Just being at camp brought a world or change and she came through the ride with flying colors. It slowly became obvious that Bugsy had a very definate list of likes and dislikes. She loved trails through the deep woods, she hated sand or gravel roads. She saw no point in trails with switch-backs and it usually took all of Monna's strength to keep her from cutting across the brush to the next section of trail. She also had very definate likes and dislikes in horses. There was one horse she disliked so much, she would refuse to eat or drink if she was tied next to him at the trailer. She loved to roll and made a point of doing so as soon as the saddle was off. She loved bran mash and insisted on her fair share whenever it was being made. She hated being hauled alone and would either pace the trailer or sit down in it if you tried to haul her without a companion. However, once the first horses were in the four-horse trailer, she wouldn't wait to be untied, but loaded herself while the first horses were being secured. She loved kids and was a reliable mount for the most inexperienced rider, regardless of age. She loved people, often breying a welcome to passers by. She hated bug spray or fly wipe, getting it on her was always a chore. She loved ponies and young horses, but she wasn't always trilled with the other mules she would meet along the way. She strongly believed that all horses should be tied to the trailer and if one would get loose and wander away in the middle of the night, she would let out an alarm that awakened most of camp.

Bugs Bunny earned her UMECRA 1000 Mile Award in 1983, the same year she earned a position in UMECRA's Heavyweight Competitive Top Ten. Bugs Bunny was the American Donkey and Mule Society's High Point Competitive Mule in 1981, 1982 and 1983. She helped represent UMECRA at the Midwest Horse Fair in 1982, 1983 and 1985. She started 40 rides and completed all but two of them. Although her Pulse and Respiration scores were seldom anything to brag about, she never lost more than 5 points on her final trot out, usually losing none.

Romona says God's mule must have gotten old, and he needed the best one on Earth to replace it. Well, He got the best one, and just so long as there are no switch-back trails in Heaven, they'll get along just fine.