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Бондаренко Т., курсант Національної академії внутрішніх справ
Консультант з мови: Марченко І.

MOUNTED POLICE IN GREAT BRITAIN

Mounted police are police who patrol on horseback. Their day-to-day function is typically picturesque or ceremonial, but they are also employed in crowd control because of their mobile mass and height advantage for crime prevention and high visibility policing roles. The added height and visibility that the horses give their riders allow officers to observe a wider area, but it also allows people to see and fine the officers when needed, which helps deter crime. Some mounted police units are trained in search and rescue due to the horse's ability to travel where vehicles cannot. If a horse could have a mission statement it would be 'Act first, think later.' For thousands of years, the horse's greatest protection has been his ability to move out of the way of danger – and quickly.

Mounted police are most often seen at football matches, although they are also a common sight on the streets of many towns and cities as a visible police presence and crime deterrent during the day and night.

The use of horses by the police force goes back to the eighteenth century – to the very roots of police work in London. Their history began in 1760 when Sir John Fielding, the Bow Street magistrate, developed a plan for mounted patrols to deal with the plague of highwaymen infesting the metropolitan area's turnpikes. The plan was so successful that the original Horse Patrol of eight men was strengthened to more than 50 in 1805. The Bow Street Horse Patrol could then provide protection on all main roads within 20 miles of Charing Cross. Their scarlet waistcoats, blue greatcoats and trousers and black leather hats and stocks, were the first uniform issued to any police force in the world [3].

With the coming of the railways, the need for Mounted Bow Street officers to protect travellers against the depredations of the highwayman on the roads ceased. Around this time rural unrest and poverty were leading to more and more livestock thefts in the countryside and the men and their horses were given this task. These patrols were looked on as so dangerous that the Officers carried a revolver and sword.

The modern day organisation of today's Mounted Branch began in 1919 when Lt Col Laurie, the ex-Commanding officer of the Royal Scots Grey Regiment, took up the appointment of Assistant Commissioner in the

Metropolitan Police. One of his responsibilities was to reorganise the Mounted Branch. It was here that the new Mounted Branch was to emerge, trained in riding and horse management with new crowd control tactics that still largely hold to this day. Police officers from all over the world have been trained here along with the regular intake of eager recruits. It was here in 1971 that WPCs Margaret Goodacre and Ann McPherson were to make history as the first women police officers to join the Mounted Branch.

Imber Court today has facilities for the training of both horses and officers. It also houses a small museum documenting the development of Mounted Police and is the administrative centre for the Mounted Branch.

For the most part, the life of a police horse is pretty good. However, a police horse must have a foundation that not only allows his human partner to enforce the law but is a true partner in that process. Whether the horse needs to hold an excited crowd or gallop down the street after a criminal. He must be responsive to his rider and desensitized against the environment around him. Police horses with their rider's permission, push against people, normally horses are trained to give way to us, but these horses must be able to push against people when that is their duty.

Most of the horses originate from Ireland and are chosen from a selection of sources that know the requirements of the Police force. A half or three-quarter bred animal has been found to be best suited to police work, combining the spirit of a Thoroughbred with the strength and stability of the Draught. The training at Imber Court is individualized for each horse, and usually lasts six months, although it can take up to two years to completely desensitise a young horse.

The tack used by mounted police is similar to standard riding tack, with adaptations for police use. Synthetic saddles are often favoured over those made of natural leather to reduce weight. This is important both because of long riding hours and because police officers must carry numerous articles of personal equipment. High-traction horseshoes made of speciality metals or fitted with rubber soles are typically used in urban areas in place of standard steel horseshoes, which are prone to slip on pavement. Rubber soled shoes also produce less noise than steel shoes and jar the hoof less. Horses working in riot control wear facial armour, made of Perspex so that the animals can still see. The officers themselves are often equipped with especially long wooden or polycarbonate batons for use on horseback, as standard patrol batons would have insufficient length to strike individuals at ground level.

Specific objectives of training include creating a generally user-friendly horse, free of any unsafe behaviours (barging, bolting, striking, kicking, and biting). He should be fully experienced and acclimated to specific environments and situations related to police work, and he should be bold and accepting of novel and/or aversive stimuli and situations, even those considered challenging for trained horses. These horses should be able to work alone with one rider or handler, and work with a team involving

other horses and handlers and/or colleagues with bicycles, motorcycles, emergency vehicles, or police dogs.

The horses will normally retire somewhere between 18 and 20yrs of age and arrangements are always made to find a final long term home for them. After the horses have honorably served their city, they are eligible for adoption. Due to unforeseen medical issues, horses can be retired due to additional factors. While they may not be eligible to be a Mounted horse, often they still have many good years left to enjoy as a pleasure horse or pasture pet [1].

The deployment of police horses has a positive effect on public reassurance and helps keep people safe. In the first year of Police Scotland the mounted branch undertook 268 deployments, attended 162 football matches, 31 public gatherings and 13 public order events right across - Scotland. This provides the police with new evidence suggesting that mounted units still have great utility in modern policing, particularly in neighbourhoods [4].

Mounted Police Officers work as part of the emergency services to provide police support where it may be more effective than police officers on foot. There are 13 Mounted Sections throughout the UK, thus opportunities both for police officers and police staff in this career are sought after.

A mounted officer's responsibilities include liaising with rural and urban communities and support a variety of initiatives including safeguarding, educating and building the public's trust and confidence with the help of the horses calming, impressive and engaging qualities. Mounted Police are also used to police situations which attract large crowds such as sporting, music and cultural events as well as policing demonstrations and situations of disorder due to their height, visual presence and unique maneuverability. Some forces use their Mounted Police for Ceremonial duties which range from escorting royalty to ceremonial military and traditional movements. A mounted officer would also be responsible for the care of tack and equipment, turn out to a high specification and general care and husbandry of their mounts [2].

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