

Horsing around has a serious side

01: Federal Agent Hilary Fletcher with one of the AFP horses **02:** Federal Agent Fletcher checks the horses in the paddock.

Lush green pastures, shady eucalypts and a meandering creek are all part of daily life for the AFP's troop of horses, and an appropriate reward for the majesty they bring to police ceremonial occasions.

A Mounted Cadre is not usually the first thing people think of when discussing ways to build relations between police and the community, but the AFP horses have shown they are adept at breaking down barriers of all kinds.

Members of the mounted troop say people seem to find it easier to approach them than a police officer walking the beat or on point-duty during events. Even Governor-General Quentin Bryce has been known to chat to the riders and pat the AFP horses at national ceremonial events.

Unlike most other police forces, the function of the AFP horse

troop is purely ceremonial. The horses participate in a range of duties including National Police Remembrance Day, but they are not currently used for operational activities such as crowd control.

The horses are also AFP ambassadors in the community and can often be seen at events such as Government House Open Day, Australia Day celebrations or at school open days.

The positive response they engender during these functions highlights how important their role is within

the AFP. However the troop does more than provide positive public relations for the organisation. It is also required during formal events, providing an honour guard for official visits, police investitures and at AFP funeral services.

The horses also contribute to upholding the traditions and customs of mounted police throughout Australia's history, with the ceremonial uniform worn by the riders representing the uniforms worn by officers who formed part of the nation's first police patrols in the early 1900s.





One of the most important aspects of the work done by the AFP horses is to attend schools in and around the Canberra region, usually with representatives from ACT Policing's Crime Prevention teams. The riders speak openly with students about their experiences and are keen to discuss a wide variety of topics from horses and policing to career opportunities in the AFP.

Federal Agent Hilary Fletcher, team leader of the AFP Ceremonial Mounted Cadre, said parents have expressed their appreciation for the sound

advice the team have given to teenagers wishing to become mounted police.

Looking after the AFP's seven horses is a big task. Federal Agent Fletcher and team member Protective Service Officer (PSO) Kylie Woodyatt, with the help of five volunteers, spend around 20 hours every week training the horses.

"The horses must be well-trained and able to cope with sudden or loud noises, bagpipes, marching bands, vehicles and being approached and touched by the public," Federal Agent Fletcher said.

"They cannot react by kicking, rearing or bolting. Every horse is different, and they each have their own personality. Our job is to make sure that all the AFP horses are well-mannered, trustworthy and in the best possible condition, both mentally and physically.

"Horses are extremely intelligent, so we are always thinking of new ways to provide them with stimulating and interesting tasks to make sure they don't get bored."





01: Federal Agent Fletcher and PSO Kylie Woodyatt put the horses through their paces **02:** Governor-General Quentin Bryce and Commissioner Negus chat to the mounted cadre at National Police Remembrance Day **03:** Federal Agent Fletcher and PSO Ross Daniel training the horses.

This means the horses are trained in ways that entertain them, as well as improving their skills. The training is often in traditional equine skills such as dressage, and also in areas like cross-country eventing which teaches them to be brave and to trust the rider regardless of what they are asked to do. Riders are also required to be fearless and to trust their mounts. Areas such as show-jumping help to meet this requirement, and both horse and rider benefit

from training in troop drills for ceremonial occasions.

The riders, including the volunteers, must also pass rigorous testing on their horsemanship and aptitude for working with horses before they are allowed to join the AFP Mounted Cadre.

“We have a mixture of sworn police, Protective Service Officers and unsworn AFP members in the team,” Federal Agent Fletcher said.

“They are all highly skilled riders and enjoy participating in the events we attend.”

The AFP equestrian facility has a large covered arena, a fully equipped show-jumping ring and dressage area. Each stable is light and airy, with both indoor and outdoor areas for each horse.

All the AFP horses are geldings. They are bay, brown or black in colour, and are all over 16 hands high. Horses are



measured at the highest point of the withers, which is where the neck joins the back. One hand is four inches, so a horse that is 16 hands high is around 163 centimetres, or five feet four inches, tall.

The AFP horses are kept in peak physical condition, and get the very best of care and attention. The farrier is a regular visitor

as the horses need new shoes every six weeks or so. Regular veterinary checks, vaccinations and worming help to ensure they are healthy and protected from disease.

Once a year, the AFP horses are taken to NSW Police barracks in Sydney, where they train with the NSW Mounted Police, which is a much bigger unit

with around 30 horses. The trip enables the troop to broaden its skills, and to share ideas and information with interstate colleagues. It also gives the AFP horses a change in routine.

Recently, two members of the AFP Ceremonial Mounted Cadre attended the AFP Open Day in Canberra as part of the organisation's 30th anniversary



01: Federal Agent Fletcher and PSO Kylie Woodyatt in ceremonial uniform.

02: Federal Agent Fletcher interacts with students during a visit to a Canberra school

celebrations. They took part in the opening ceremony, along with the AFP Pipes and Drums, and were extremely popular with the crowd, spending several hours mingling with the estimated 15,000 visitors.

“We are often congratulated for doing a great job and I see this as a compliment to all AFP members,” Federal Agent Fletcher said.

“The community has always demonstrated a fascination with horses working in the public domain and it is a privilege to interact with the community as part of the AFP Ceremonial Mounted Cadre.”



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