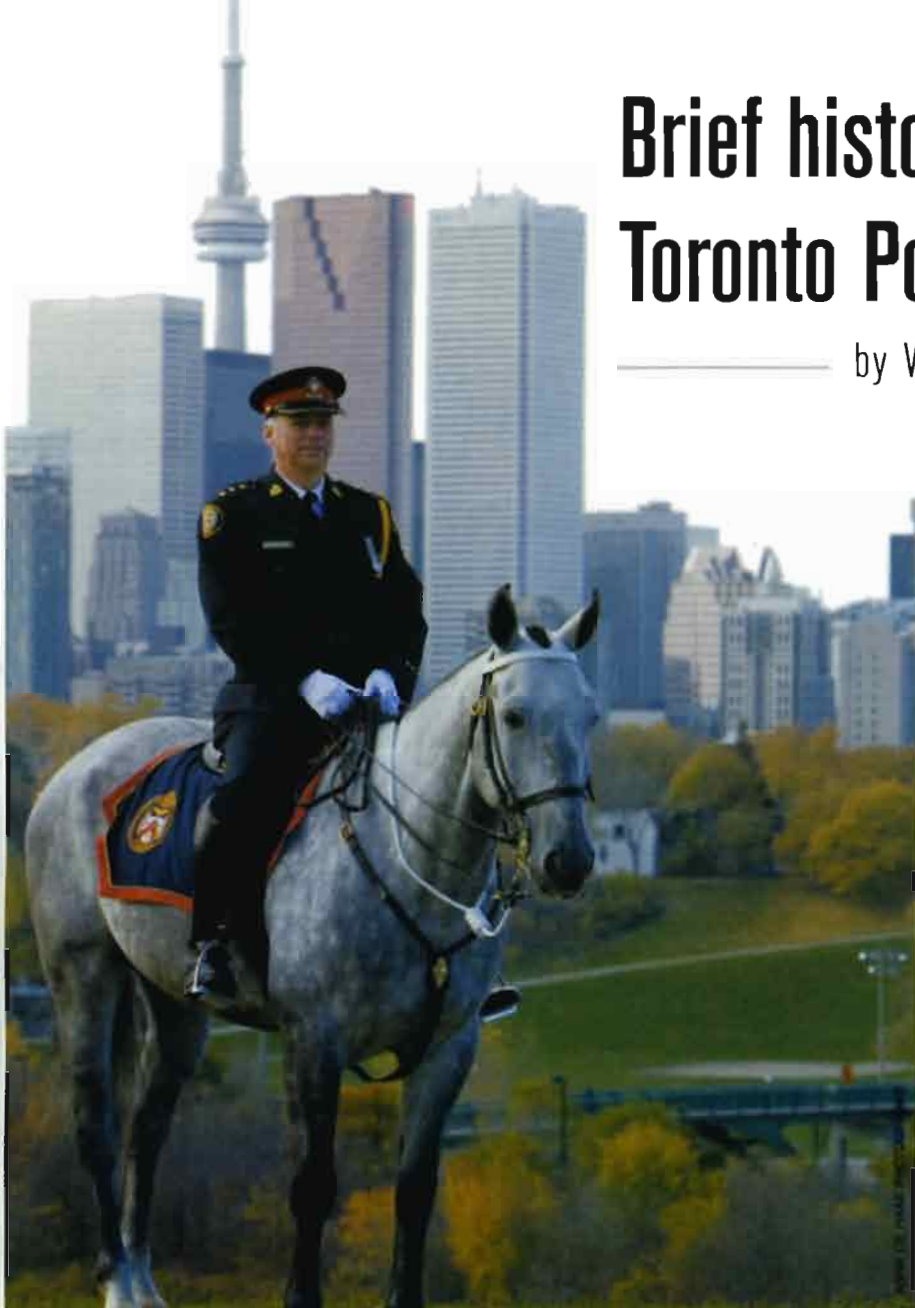


# Brief history of the Toronto Police Mounted Unit

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*The Toronto Police* established their full time Mounted Unit in 1886 when two officers were assigned to full time mounted duties. The officers provided a visible police presence in the outlying areas of the city, where prior to obtaining horses, police officers were seldom seen.

The duties of the officers included rounding up stray cattle, stopping runaway horses, escorting parades through the streets and crowd control. The value of the police horses was quickly recognized and the unit began to expand with the purchase of additional horses.

When automobiles began to appear on city streets at the turn of the century it was the Mounted Unit that was tasked with regulating traffic. Initially the horses were faster than cars. At the outbreak of World War One the Mounted Unit sent eighteen of its best horses overseas for service with the Canadian Field Artillery. Only one of the eighteen horses survived the four years of warfare.

The horses that remained in Canada were busy dealing with crowd management duties caused by the social disorder of wartime Toronto. In the post war years there were calls to disband the Mounted Unit due to the mechanization of society. However, the Mounted Unit actually grew in size during these years due to the increasing social discord that was caused by unemployment, labour unrest, political protest and the great depression. Following the Second World War and the stabilization of social issues the Mounted Unit was decreased in size with 28 horses left to patrol our city streets.

The 1960's saw an increase in protests and demonstrations. In order to deal with the new demands the Mounted Unit was increased in size reaching strength of sixty horses. The end of the Vietnam War led to a decrease in demonstrations and a gradual reduction in



the size of the Mounted Unit to thirty horses by 1993.

The primary function of today's mounted officer is crowd management. The crowd management role goes beyond the usual demonstrations and protests historically policed and in fact; the unit has never been busier. The development of Toronto's Entertainment District has led to increased demands for crowd management services. Police Horses are on patrol until 4:00 am or later every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night, helping to police the large crowds of revellers who frequent the bars and clubs in the district.

The secondary function of the police horses is providing a highly visible police presence in specific neighbourhoods. The Mount Unit helps to solve specific community problems and assists local police divisions with crime management initiatives. The Mounted Unit also provides a ceremonial function at important events. At parades and other community events the mounted officers continue to be a favourite with young and old alike.

The Toronto officers and horses are the envy of police services across North America. There are currently twenty nine horses assigned to the Mounted Unit. The horses, known as remounts, are purchased in Ontario from a number of brokers. The horses are between three and five years old when purchased, they must be black, bay or chestnut in colour and stand a minimum of 16 hands.

They are required to have some walk trot and canter abilities before they will be considered. The breed of choice is Commercial Grade which is a combination of a draft breed mixed with a smaller breed. The name Commercial comes from the fact that these were the horses used earlier in this century for the commercial purposes of hauling bread and milk wagons and other related services. In the United States they are called Canadian Crosses.

Once selected for police duties the horses enter an intensive six month training program before being turned out for general police duties. The training staff will begin to expose the horses to street patrol from day one. They will also develop the horses walk, trot canter and teach the horse to side pass, reverse and pivot. When they are deemed ready the horses begin sensory training to prepare them for crowd management.

When the horse completes its training period it is assigned to a senior rider

for further development. Training is an ongoing process and it is every officer's responsibility to continue to develop their horses. Every horse and rider attends two training days very five weeks. They also participate in a four day in service courses every spring and fall. This is all in addition to platoon level training and public order training which is conducted on a regular schedule. The horses and riders are continually evaluated by the training staff and supervisors to ensure any deficiencies can be quickly identified and corrected.

Officers are recruited from within the police service and no previous riding experience is required. Generally sixteen officers are selected to attend a two week introductory course where they are expected to demonstrate their potential for future mounted duties. At the conclusion of the course eight officers are invited to return to the Mounted Unit for an additional thirteen weeks of equestrian training. At the completion of this course the successful officers are placed on a waiting list and transferred to the unit when vacancies arise.

The Mounted Unit also provides training for police officers from other

jurisdictions. Trainers are sent to instruct American police officers in crowd management at the annual Mounted Police Colloquium the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington. Toronto officers compete annually at Police Equitation Training Competitions in the United States and consistently win or place well in their classes.

The history of the Mounted Unit has been documented in the book *The Mounted Squad*, an illustrated history of the Toronto Police Mounted Unit. If you are interested in learning more about the history, horses, officers or equipment of the Mounted Unit copies of the book are available through the Mounted Unit.

The Mounted Unit has a long and proud history of service in our city. The officers and horses of the Toronto Police continue to serve their community maintaining the finest traditions of the past while adapting to address the new challenges of today. The Toronto police Mounted Unit is proud of its past and confident of its future. 