

# Saddle Up

*To riders with and without badges, a retired member of Key West's Police Mounted Unit teaches a unique blend of horse-riding safety and self-defense.*

STORY BY RICHARD BANKS

PHOTOS BY JAMIE COLE

**WITH 20 YEARS** under his belt in law enforcement, Mark Newby saw a chance to chase a dream. He was up for retirement at the ripe young age of 42, so, he took life by the reins, bought 10 acres in one of Florida's lesser-known pockets of piney woods and pasturelands, and set up shop as a horse trainer.

Three years later, that dream is reality. He now pursues his passion for training horses and their riders at Suncoast Equine, his teaching facility near Webster, Fla., about halfway between Tampa and Orlando.

Newby's courses, however, go beyond basic riding skills, although that and trail-riding clinics are offered. Much of his focus at Suncoast involves self-defense and safety education for law-enforcement organizations as well as civilians. His curriculum also often involves what he calls "sensory training" for the horses.

"That's just a fancy term for desensitizing horses to certain stimuli that would otherwise naturally be of concern to them," says Newby, who exposes the four-legged creatures, as well as their two-legged riders, to such potential distractions as urban noises, wildlife, livestock and one of the most dangerous components of modern-day living, bad guys.

"Unfortunately, today, it's just as likely you'll be accosted riding on a trail as in a parking lot walking to your car. I just want my students to be safe and have a good time. A little awareness for all these stimuli makes that all the more possible." >>

*From left to right, Suncoast students John Pierce, Diane Robinson, Kathy Kinnecom and Ron Richardson*