



## Keys to the Curriculum

Mark Newby knows a little about how to keep a horse calm in the midst of commotion and unforeseen distractions. For 10 years beginning in 1999, he was part of the Police Mounted Unit in Key West, where festivities can get more than a little animated. He's ridden his horse into bars, corralled revelers and chased down perps, all while perched atop a horse.

That experience informs his Suncoast curriculum, which was culled from a program affiliated with the University of Louisville, where he received his initial training. Now, living and working in an area of Florida where ranches are still plentiful, Newby has further adapted the program for riders in rural, as well as urban areas.

No matter the client, stimuli or surroundings, this type of training involves one underlying principle, says Newby. "It's trust. You have to reinforce the relationship between the horse and the rider."

## Obstacles and Bandits

To strengthen that bond, Newby puts them both through the paces at Suncoast. There, he uses an obstacle course he made himself that includes a darkened walk-through tunnel, tires, mini-bridge and a sort of blocking dummy. He blows whistles, fires his gun and honks horns.

He's also cut trails on the property, where students ride and learn how to handle encounters with darting wildlife and even the occasional bandit lurking in the woods. Livestock can also be introduced in the clinics and classes.

"We talk to the people to learn about the environment they're going to have

their horse in the most," Newby explains. "If a person says, 'Well, nothing but trails,' then we won't spend the time or the money trying to desensitize them to gunfire, police sirens, smoke, flashing lights and things of that nature. Conversely, if the horse is going to be used for urban work alone and never out ... in the country, we won't spend much time with the horse desensitizing them to, let's say, a wild boar or deer."

## Petting a Police Car?

In addition to the ability to see over tall obstacles and give chase in areas where cars, even bikes, can't operate well, horse patrols also offer unique crowd-control benefits. "Crowds move aside for a 12-foot-tall, 1,200-pound horse," says Newby. They also appeal to many people's natural love of animals, whether on the farm or in the city.

That attraction is a huge plus in community policing, Newby says. "Police departments hold meetings all the time [with community members], and they're very rarely well attended. However, when you ride through a neighborhood on a police horse, you don't have to invite anybody to come to talk to you. If they see the horse ... they want to pet it.

"I've never had anybody come up and ask to pet my police car before. But that petting of the horse starts a dialogue, and the mounted officer can learn what's going on in the community," he explains.

## Doing What He Loves

Newby's clientele is growing, and is currently about half civilian and half law enforcement. He's trained numerous