

TRACK VETERANS MOUNT NEW CAREERS

By Tom Hilston, Media and Public Affairs Branch

Punters at Brisbane's Eagle Farm Racecourse had their eyes glued to the track throughout this year's Winter Racing Carnival but few of them realised that another team of thoroughbreds was watching them just as closely - trackside.

The Queensland Police Mounted Unit was out in strength managing the crowds, keeping an eye on property and maintaining good order throughout the month-long event.

It is a familiar venue for the police but more so for their mounts, all track thoroughbreds and many veterans of Eagle Farm.

Racing fans still remember them - names such as Private Label, Linden Roc and Queensland's double Doomben 10,000 winner Chief De Beers are part of local racing history.

The Police Mounted Unit can also claim a time-honoured tradition dating back to 1848 when the only way to bring law and order to a vast state was on horseback.

But today's unit is just as effective as a modern policing tool. The 12 full-time staff say they are police first and horsemen and women second. But they are police who stand, or rather, sit head and shoulders above their colleagues and that first obvious difference is also one of their main strengths.



"In crowd situations and on the beat we have a much better view of what's going on around us and better mobility than an officer on foot, and of course, we're a highly visible deterrent," Senior Sergeant Mark Paroz, Officer in Charge, Police Mounted Unit said.

The advantage becomes more obvious in inaccessible country where the horses can negotiate rough bush terrain and endure long hours in a harsh climate with barely a complaint.

The unit recently completed a successful operation on Bribie Island cracking down on crime in remote parts of the area.

Constable Nicky Linton, Mounted Police Unit said they were always looking for new four-legged recruits.

"They must be geldings, have a solid colour - preferably brown or black, be over 16

hands and with good disposition," Constable Linton, a part-time mounted officer with three years' service in the unit, said.

Once they are selected the horses undergo intensive training lasting up to six months.

Meanwhile at the unit's Moggill equine facility on Brisbane's inner-west, horses and riders continue a routine of weekly competency training.

Six part-time mounted police manage to include monthly training alongside their regular police work.

But all officers have been riding since childhood and continue to do so in their own time.

Their love of horses is shared by the majority of the public they encounter at work.

"We're always being approached by people, especially children," Constable Linton said.

"Adults want to know what races they ran - the kids just want to pat them.

"The popularity of the horses helps us to interact as police officers and we're a role model to our biggest fans, the children."

The Police Mounted Unit is a visible feature of major events from vice-regal escorts and Anzac Day through to football matches, Brisbane's Ekka and the Gold Coast Indy grand prix.

But do not be deceived by the pageantry - astride every thoroughbred is a fully operational police officer. ■



Constable Belinda Nolan, Police Mounted Unit and former double Doomben 10,000 winner Chief De Beers, now a member of the mounted unit.