

# TAKING THE REINS

AMBASSADORS ON HORSEBACK WELCOME VISITORS TO KAMLOOPS

By Sheri Radford

The Kamloops Mounted Patrol has been offering warm welcomes to visitors since 1990. These friendly volunteers enjoy answering questions, giving directions, posing for photos, and chatting with guests from around the world. “Kamloops is virtually halfway between the mountains and the coast, so we get a lot of people passing through Kamloops on the way to Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton,” says Rick Wanless, who runs the patrol.

Horses have become a novelty in our modern world. “Many people come from populated areas where there are no horses, or if they’re seeing horses, it’s a policeman on a horse and they can’t really go up and chat with them,” Wanless explains. In contrast, visitors to Kamloops are encouraged to interact with the patrol’s animals. “The horses love the attention and get very used to it. They expect it almost. Kids hug the horses all the time.”

The patrol’s five mounts spend most of their time roaming free on Hacienda Caballo, Wanless’s 50-acre property just north of Kamloops, which is an equine paradise of riverside meadows and wooded areas. It’s Wanless’s task to train the new riders, though the experienced horses often do much of that work themselves. “When I bring in new members, in many cases, it’s a case of the horses training the riders. When the horses go up stairs or get up on a pedestal, the new riders can’t believe what they’re doing.”

Each summer, the patrol maintains a roster of around six to eight riders. Many of them join the patrol when they come to Canada as university students, then they like it here so much that they stay and become Canadian citizens. Often these riders



have zero experience with horses, and their biggest challenge is “understanding the nature of a horse,” Wanless says. “If they’re physically adept, they usually have no problem. It’s convincing them that they have to be the alpha and the horse is the doer.”

Wanless celebrates his 87th birthday in May, but leading the Kamloops Mounted Patrol keeps him feeling younger than his age. “One of the joys I have is working with these young people,” he says, his enthusiasm evident in his voice. “These young people are all looking forward. Their whole lives are ahead of them. I like to think that I’m giving them a bit of an experience that will last a lifetime. Because somebody rides with me for a year or two, they’ll never forget it.”



PHOTOS: KAMLOOPS MOUNTED PATROL