

TRT graduate earns his stripes

New South Wales Mounted Police Unit has a new recruit. Valinorean, an unraced seven-year-old previously trained under the Darley banner, has passed the rigorous selection process to become a fully-fledged trooper.

Kylie Riddell is Senior Sargent at the Redfern-based operation, which covers the entire state, and oversees all of the horse and rider training.

Valinorean, who is a full brother to enigmatic sprinter Chetwood, is now known as Isaac.

"He has a very calm nature. Even if he does become a little scared of something, he doesn't let it define what he is doing at the time," Riddell explained.

"I was there the first time he was exposed to the police band and you could tell he was a little wary but he didn't let that overcome him.

"He still listened to the rider and that's something that we look for in horses. It doesn't matter if they are scared, it matters if they are obedient and still listen.

"He is a very personable horse. It was quick for him to become one of the favourites in the stable."

Outside of the stringent physical checklist, candidates need to be bay, black or brown and must be at least 16 hands high, which in itself rules out many candidates. And that's just the start.

"From there we go to soundness, thorough vet checks and obviously their temperament. We always trial them under saddle before we even take them on trial," said Riddell.

It's little wonder that there's just 30 horses currently in rotation with 'Mounties'. However, once a horse earns their stripes they are in for the long haul.

"Usually we run on 18 to 24 depending on our commitments, and the rest are spelled. We rotate through them," Riddell said.

"They will stay with us for as long as they are physically sound and fit. Our oldest horses here at the moment are rising 22.

"They get more holidays than the others; it's a bit of a semi-retirement plan.

"I find it prolongs their lives when they have a purpose and a job to do. We look after them well here. We have to retire them eventually but we always find them a good reliable home for them.

"We have to be a little more selective with the racehorses only because they have raced so it takes more to do another discipline or retrain them.

VALINOREAN – A BROTHER TO TALENTED SPRINTER CHETWOOD – HAS PASSED SOME DEMANDING TESTS TO BECOME A NSW MOUNTED POLICE HORSE

WORDS: BRAD GRAY

"In terms of an advantage, they are very athletic and generally are more sound than heavier breeds.

"The thoroughbreds we have are also quite brave and don't mind being by themselves.

"We have got a couple of thoroughbreds here that are very good lead horses so they will lead a parade or a public order.

"A lot of them are used to being around crowds. They are usually good with traffic. It does tend to take a little while for them

to stand still at lights though, because they are used to being on the move."

Isaac is very much now a city slicker having swapped the tranquil digs of Agnes Banks, and Riddell offered a glimpse into a week in the life of the Exceed and Excel gelding.

"If it's a week day and he is not going out on patrol we might start with Centennial Park to exercise the horse. A walk, trot and canter to stretch their legs.

"Wednesday is shampoo day, then Thursday through to Sunday he might get exercised in the mornings – either ridden or on the walking machine – and then go out on patrol in the afternoon or evening. A patrol lasts for anywhere between one to three hours on the streets," Riddell said.

Isaac has adapted to his new career so quickly that Riddell is hopeful of him appearing in the Sydney Royal Easter Show come late March.

"His rider Pat loves him and they've formed a real bond. We're hoping that we'll compete with Pat in the troop horse event and we're also hoping to get him into the Police Musical Ride.

"We'll have to continue to monitor how he copes with the police band which is just one more of the challenges that our horses get thrown at them – riding along with the band," said Riddell, who leads the Ride.

Isaac, who went through what turned out to be a six-month trial period, had been marked down as a possible Mounties horse from the get-go by Karen Day, Racing NSW's Equine Welfare Manager and Scott Brodie who is



Valinorean (aka Isaac) is now a Mounted Police horse

the head trainer for Racing NSW's thoroughbred re-training program.

"When we start working with a horse the guys on the ground will flag for temperament pretty early on because a police horse isn't necessarily a performance horse. They need different things.

"A level head, to be calm under pressure and to put up with a pretty heavy workload," said Day.

"The process was long (for Isaac). He went in for a trial in June and he only graduated at the end of January so they put a lot of time and effort into making sure the horses are right before they can join.

"Scott Brodie was a Mountie so our association with them goes right back to the beginning.

"What Scott does is go in and coach the riders who are going to be on those horses because he already knows the horse so he sets the horse and rider up for success from the start."

Ideally, Day says, there'll always be two Thoroughbred Rehabilitation Trust (TRT) graduates in the Mounties trialling system at any one time.

The latest candidate to be flagged is That's a Good Idea who will be well known to punters being a Group-placed sprinter and at one stage, the Royal Randwick 1200m track record holder.

"That's a Good Idea has just gone to the Orchid Hills property and he looks like he will probably get a shot. He has the right temperament," Day said.

"As soon as he came in you can see it. He is already well balanced.

"We put a saddle on him soon after her arrived, rode him out in the open and he didn't put a foot wrong so he probably has got what it takes. That level-headed attitude."

Group One winner Delectation, who took the scalp of Chautauqua in the 2015 Darley Classic, is another that Day has high hopes for, but perhaps down the eventing path. Just another one of the ways the graduates can go.

"Delectation will be a superstar in whatever he decides to do. He came in with a tendon injury but nothing will stop him having a strong domestic life," Day said.

"What we're interested in is the horse's wellbeing after they finish racing, that's what we do." **RNSW**