



*Waxworks has brought so much joy to Rob Plumb's life*

# Waxy gives former Policeman a new perspective

**A**mbling along the gumtree-lined streets of Kentlyn on the outskirts of southwestern Sydney, Rob Plumb and his mare Waxworks have the sun on their faces and the wind at their backs. They haven't a care in the world, but both are a world away from where they were just two years ago.

Waxworks was destined to be exported to Asia as a broodmare, but when the red tape became too much she was abandoned in a paddock at Yass with dozens of other horses. Rob was in the grips of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder after almost three decades in the Police Force.

"When I think of how differently things could have turned out for both of us, I shudder," Rob said.

Rob joined the Police Force in 1990 and completed his training at the academy in Goulburn before being posted to Revesby.

Over the next 28 years he rose to the rank of

**FORMER POLICE  
SERGEANT, ROB PLUMB  
HAS TURNED HIS LIFE  
AROUND THROUGH THE  
SPUR EQUINE THERAPY  
PROGRAM – AND  
WAXWORKS!**

WORDS & PICTURES:  
**JULIANNE HORSMAN**

Incremental Sergeant and was awarded citations for bravery, diligence and supporting victims of crime.

Rob was a model officer, but despite his own denials, the service he was so proud to be a part of was slowly squeezing the life out of him.

Rob's career in blue ended in a lather of sweat and flood of tears on the linoleum floor of Cabramatta Police Station in February 2018.

There was no farewell party, no speeches of praise. Rob couldn't deny his PTSD any longer and had no choice but to walk away from the force. He began counselling but it wasn't enough, and he slipped into a dark and dangerous place. Rob suffered insomnia and on the rare occasions he did manage to sleep, he would be woken by night terrors. He endured flashbacks, panic attacks and would avoid going to any public areas which could trigger him.

"There are some things you never forget," Rob said.





*The Spur trail ride through Kosciuszko National Park*

"The screams, the smells, the shattered loved ones, the brain matter splattered up the walls."

In early 2019 Police Legacy recommended Rob for the Spur Equine Therapy Program run jointly by Racing NSW and RSL Life Care. He had no prior experience with horses but was willing to give anything a shot to help him feel human again.

He was accepted into the program where veterans learned horse care, retraining and riding on retired racehorses as part of their treatment. Rob was paired with a then 6yo mare named Waxworks.

"I felt an instant connection to her which strengthened over time," Rob said.

Rob and nine other veterans from both emergency services and defence backgrounds spent eight months working with their retired racehorses. The course ran on Thursdays and Sundays but most participants spent extra days volunteering their time to care for the horses. They did months of groundwork before they were even allowed to mount their horses, but once they did, there was no holding them back.

"It was like bungee jumping," Rob said. "The adrenaline was pumping; I felt the nerves, but it was such a rush."

Spur gave Rob the routine he was missing since leaving the Police force but more importantly it gave him something to look forward to.

"The program helped me change my line of thinking and realise life is worth living," Rob said. "You can still get enjoyment from your life even after a major setback. It was great to spend time with other veterans going through the same thing as me, albeit at different stages, and the horses were the oil that helped us work together."

Spur culminated with a five-day trail ride through

Kosciuszko National Park. It was the ultimate test for the veterans and their Thoroughbreds.

They wound their way through the Snowy Mountains, splashing through streams, spotting wild brumbies and stopping off to explore the alpine huts along the way.

"It was more than I could have ever imagined," Rob said. "The iconic scenery, the extended riding sessions and the challenge of getting Waxy to do some things she was never bred to were highlights."

At the conclusion of the course, the veterans were given the opportunity to adopt their horses.

Three did immediately and Rob wanted to also but living in suburban Campbelltown and without funds to pay for agistment he had to get creative.

Rob spent months trying to find an appropriate place to keep Waxworks and finally, thanks to the kindness of a local, he was able to lease a lush green paddock in Kentlyn for free.

"When she stepped off the float I was overcome with emotion and the tears began to flow," Rob said. "I hadn't seen her for a few months, but nothing had changed."

"She came up and nuzzled me and she was officially mine. It was really happening."

"Keeping Waxy happy and healthy is my priority now and I relish the time I get to spend with her," Rob said. "I get a spring in my step just walking to her paddock."

"The team at Racing NSW has been great with advice and support. It's nice to know I can contact the vets if I have any worries."

Over the past few months Rob and Waxworks have become a familiar sight around Kentlyn with locals and visitors stopping to chat.

"People ask her name and how I got her, and they are pleased to hear our story, Rob said. "They get caught up in the joy of it and that makes my day." **RNSW**