



No horsing around for SES Mounted Section

Angela Stokovic on Charlie takes the lead.

Reading a map while sitting on the back of a horse is not the easiest of tasks, but the members of FESA's State Emergency Service (SES) Mounted Section can manage this and many other challenges as well.

Sheena Ryan and Lizzie Isles both joined the section after spending their childhoods around horses.

Sheena has been a member of the Mounted Section for 15 years and says she was heavily involved in anything and everything horse related from her early days.

"When I was a kid I was around trotters and gallopers, and as I grew up plenty of my friends had race horses," Sheena said. She even worked as a strapper at the races but it was a newspaper advertisement that got her involved in the SES's Mounted Section.

"There was an ad for new recruits, I had a horse and wasn't doing competitions or any events, so I thought it sounded perfect for me."



Lizzie Isles and Sheena Ryan are both keen members of the SES Mounted Section.

Since responding to that advertisement Sheena has had some memorable experiences and recalls one of the first searches she was involved in.

"The Mounted Section was part of the response looking for an elderly woman who had wandered from her home near Gingin into surrounding bushland," she said.

"I work in aged care now and it makes me think more about that particular search."

Sheena helped with the search on two of the three days, but unfortunately the search operation failed to locate the missing woman.

"You do all the training, but you never want people to go missing," Sheena said.



Riders prepare to set off on a training search (l-r): Jean Jensen, Alex Stevens and Linda Leadbetter.



SES Mounted Section Manager Stuart Jones and Margaret Jones assist at a training exercise.

Sheena has been aided by two horses during her time with the Mounted Section, a chestnut stallion *O'Rego-Man* who she said is now in the big race track in the sky, and her current horse, a grey thoroughbred mare named *Zona*.

A highlight of her involvement with the SES has been building a lot of friendships.

"I enjoy the camaraderie of being part of the section and have fond memories of long weekend training courses," Sheena said.

"It's a lot of hard work and a lot of fun.

"After a long day everyone pitches in to help set up camp and then sits around the fire to enjoy the night and reflect on how it went."

After 15 years Sheena's favourite thing about being involved in the section is the ability to help and do her bit for the community.

This is something she has in common with Lizzie, who has been a member for just a year.

Lizzie spent many weekends as a youngster at Mounted Section training events.

She sat and watched as her grandmother, Helen Isles who was training manager of the section for much of the past 22 years, kept the members motivated and challenged.

Lizzie said she enjoyed being around the horses and riders.

"I spent a lot of time on the sidelines at training events and that got me interested in becoming part of it all," she said.

"I just wanted to help the community and search for people."

At age 15, she and her horse *Shadow* joined the section.

They are yet to be involved in any searches, but Lizzie has enjoyed picking up new skills.

She said being the youngest member means there is a wealth of knowledge from the other members that she can tap into and learn from.

Capability

- Horses are capable of travelling four times faster than a foot team, can cover difficult terrain, and search for longer than searchers on foot.
- Horses give the mounted searcher a higher line of vision.
- Riders learn the same skills as foot searchers but also have to make sure they check the area in front where the horse's neck and head block the line of sight.
- Horses have to be taught extra skills. They must be able to be led and lead other horses, cross water, load into floats in the dark, carry equipment, and deal with radio noise.
- Riders are always alert to the signals from the horses as each mount provides another set of eyes and ears to the search.
- Regular training is important, and the section maintains its skills by meeting twice a month, once during the week and again on a Saturday.
- The section also provides trained operations personnel during storms, with many members working through the night across the region.
- There are currently 26 members, consisting of 18 riders and eight ground support, and the section is managed by Stuart Jones.
- The horses, which range from 14.2 hands upwards, are all privately owned and maintained by section members at their own expense.
- FESA meets operational costs and provides personal protective equipment.