

Search & Rescue

A hiker is lost in the woods. A mounted search-and-rescue team is called on to aid the search. As you watch events unfold, you think, *that could be me and my horse.*

If you're an adventurous, skilled trail rider, you might be right. Here, we'll first explain what makes horses ideal search partners. Then we'll tell you what skills you and your horse need to become an effective search-and-rescue team. (For search-horse selection tips, click on the sidebar.)

Horses as Searchers

Some believe the detection capabilities of prey animals are superior to that of a predator's. In the wild, horses can detect threats that may

An alert, intelligent horse makes an ideal search partner when you learn to tune into his body language.

be *downwind*, using their eyes and ears, and even by sensing ground vibration. On a search, the horse listens, sees, and feels. He

expresses himself to his rider and the world.

The horse also has as good or better olfactory equipment as most dogs. He can vary his sensing level from the ground to seven feet high or more. He can also aim his nose over a greater angle than a dog can without moving his body.

Plus, a horse can learn which scents are what, and will ignore scents identified as not of interest. Thus, a horse will ignore other horses known to him and their riders if so instructed.

And — unlike a dog that often appears as a threatening, barking monster that chases after the search subject — horses, while huge, usually aren't seen as threatening.



BOB LANGRISH MBE PHOTO

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Experienced mounted searcher Irvin Lichtenstein explains how you and your horse can become an effective search-and-rescue team, plus gives you valuable search-horse selection tips. *Click & learn!*

Develop Your Skills

If you'd like to be part of a mounted search-and-rescue team, you'll first need to do your homework. Here are the skills you'll need to develop.

- **Horse camping.**

Gain experience in trailering, and camping with and caring for your horse in the field.

- **Trail-riding safety.**

If you or your horse is injured on the job, you become a detriment. Your duty is to keep yourself and your horse out of trouble so you remain an active resource for the search team.

- **In-saddle conditioning.** You don't need to be a perfect rider, but you do need to be able to endure long work hours while remaining alert and effective. Also, learn how to select safe, comfortable, protective clothing and gear.

- **First-aid.** Take classes in first-aid for both humans and horses.

- **Organization.** Gather like-minded riders to form an effective organization. A broad range of resources increases the chances for success.

- **Communications.** Familiarize yourself



CLAUDIA LACHANCE PHOTO

Southeastern Pennsylvania Search and Rescue volunteers head out on a training mission. Their horses are acutely aware of their environment and provide important clues that can lead to the recovery of a lost person.

with the latest communications and incident-command systems.

- **Navigational skills.** Develop navigational expertise, including how to use a global positioning system, a compass, and a map in the field.

- **Tracking.** Take courses in tracking and clue identification, and practice these skills in the field.

Cultivate Your Horse

Search horses are cultivated, not trained. Here are five ways you can help your horse become a good search partner.

- **Select the right tack.** Avoid using a tie-

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CLAUDIA LACHANCE PHOTO

Irv Lichtenstein (center) has developed a program to help train searchers. Here, he's providing information to Southeastern Pennsylvania Search and Rescue volunteers.

down or heavy bridle that restricts movement. If you ride bitless, continue to do so. Your horse needs to be comfortable and allowed to move freely. Any type of saddle is fine, but a saddle is essential. You need to maintain a relaxed-but-secure seat, so if your horse reacts to something on the trail, you'll be able to stay with him.

- **Pack up.** Whether you're on a training mission or a real search, pack all your gear, so your horse knows this isn't simply a recreational outing. Your serious approach will cue your horse that this is

Volunteer Claudia LaChance communicating with team members via radio. Her Spotted Saddle Horse gelding isn't bothered by the squawk box. The breastcollar is rigged to keep the radio within arm's reach.



IRV LICHTENSTEIN PHOTO

serious business.

- **Ride for miles.** Ride trails, ride fields, ride miles at the walk. Let your horse pick his footing. Teach him that you'll trust him to



Search quickly, search thoroughly, the perceiving