

Mounted SAR: Effective Management (Part I of III)

By Jorene Downs

Mounted SAR (Search and Rescue) is often capable of performing various tasks not requested by management, in more challenging environments than management commonly sends them. Management often has no strong background with livestock and riding, and therefore has limited knowledge regarding effective use of the Mounted SAR resource. This article provides a high level overview of resource advantages, disadvantages and capabilities. Part II will discuss management considerations related to resource planning, operations and logistics, and Part III will address preplanning, mutual aid and disaster response. The fundamentals are common to the resource. Some of the capabilities mentioned require additional training and/or equipment.

Advantages and Disadvantages

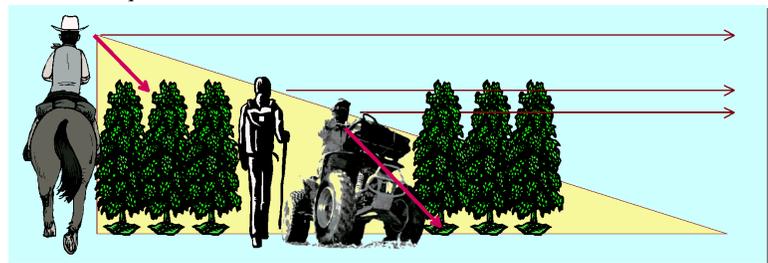
Key advantages for the mounted searcher are height, speed, endurance, and the equine search partner's potential to detect clues. Equine can travel safely in most terrain and weather conditions. Management should view the equine used in Mounted SAR as being the original 4WD method of transportation. Experienced mounted riders can safely work in many areas that a non-rider would commonly consider unsuitable for riding, so management and Mounted SAR need to communicate. In some more challenging environments the rider may dismount and lead the horse or mule. Riders can also usually travel safely through water that is belly high on the mount, where ground personnel or even vehicles may not have access, making the resource viable for incidents related to water.

A critical issue for the Mounted SAR resource is individual training and experience in various types of environments. The real key to becoming and remaining a reliable mount is the *equine's* perception of no apparent threat, which is gained through exposure, experience and trust in the rider. An apprehensive rider can trigger the prey animal flight instinct. Both rider and mount need to be comfortable working in that type of environment in order to focus on the mission. For example, less common terrain (mountains, deserts, swamps, etc.), extreme weather conditions, large crowds, substantial traffic, and night searching offer different riding challenges and normally require additional training and gear. Training exercises will determine where and how each horse and rider combination is best suited as a resource.

There are a few disadvantages and limitations for Mounted SAR as a resource. Access to respond to that vicinity by vehicle while transporting livestock may be difficult or impossible. Some incidents or response areas may not be safe for equine health, but perimeter missions would be appropriate. The height or width of a mounted rider can be a disadvantage when foliage or other obstructions reduce access or view, and some terrain does not offer safe footing or access for equine.

Capabilities

Generally, mounted searchers have been shown to be superior to foot searchers when searching from roads and trails, and off-road in wilderness, parks and agricultural areas with more open view terrain. Equine provide a higher search platform from which the rider can observe over the tops of fences, foliage and other obstructions. This view is also effective for tracking from the saddle if the rider looks ahead about 30 feet. The mounted searcher's eyes are about 8 feet from the ground, which is less effective seeing small clues, or under shrubs or other overhanging obstructions. Partnering Mounted SAR with searchers on quads, off-highway motorcycles or bicycles can provide eyes lower to the ground to effectively utilize the advantages of all resources and balance disadvantages of others.



Taller mounted searchers can be partnered advantageously with searchers at a lower eye level on quads, etc.

In areas of urban/rural interface or urban parks, equine can be used effectively during a SAR. They are rarely seen in urban areas, therefore when they are used they attract attention. This increases public awareness and the potential a citizen might step forward with information pertaining to the search.

The mounted searcher moves faster than the human searching on foot, yet is still at least as effective as a ground searcher for clue detection. Equine also have the endurance to travel notably farther than the ground searcher in a single day. This speed and endurance can be particularly useful in hasty search mode; transporting equipment, clues or evidence; or expediting to check a track trap or establish perimeter containment, for reconnaissance, etc.

As a prey animal, the equine is a natural clue detector using various senses actually better designed for search than the human's. This is a valuable tool for the searcher because the mount is a search partner naturally communicating information. Part of training should include reminding the rider to pay attention to the mount. A specialty available to the mounted searcher is training the equine to air scent and alert. This specialty is similar to riding a search dog, complete with various capabilities such as general air scenting, and scent discrimination for humans, human remains, narcotics, etc.

With appropriate training and extra livestock, Mounted SAR can also be effectively used for transportation of other personnel, equipment, clues and evidence. The transportation options include the rescue or evacuation of a subject using methods applied during World War I by medics using Army mules, and currently applied by many Mounted SAR teams around the country. Another option is packing using multiple pack animals. Packing is viable in most environments – not just wilderness - but this requires specialized training, equipment and additional livestock.

Part II will discuss management considerations related to resource planning, operations and logistics. Part III will address preplanning, mutual aid and disaster response.

Jorene Downs is the Chair the NASAR Mounted SAR SIG, and is a CERT Program Coordinator. She lives in Tulare County, California, where she is a Paint horse breeder. She teaches at conferences and clinics around the country and is active at the local, state and national level for SAR / Mounted SAR and CERT.

Mounted SAR: Effective Management (Part II of III)

By Jorene Downs

Management often has no strong background with livestock and riding, and therefore has limited knowledge regarding effective use of the Mounted SAR (Search and Rescue) resource. Mounted SAR is often capable of performing various tasks not requested by management, in more challenging environments than management commonly sends them. Part I of this 3-part series provided a high level overview of resource advantages, disadvantages and capabilities. This article discusses management considerations related to resource planning, operations and logistics. Part III will address preplanning, mutual aid and disaster response.

Effective use of Mounted SAR requires resource knowledge be applied to planning, operations and logistics. Finance can also be impacted. The fundamentals are common to the resource. Some of the Mounted SAR capabilities mentioned require additional training and/or equipment.

Management Considerations

Mounted SAR includes the use of equine. Horses and mules (a cross between a donkey and horse) commonly used by riders in Mounted SAR may weigh 800-1,800 pounds, and using animals of this size is obviously a potential safety issue. Common requirements are for mounts to be calm and reliable, have appropriate training, and remain under control at all times. They also require transportation (to, from, and potentially during the incident), feed, water, additional gear, and routine care and maintenance. Preparedness is also needed for equine basic medical care.

Management considerations related to the Mounted SAR resource include:



Mounted Packers can assist with logistics. Dunnage is normally about 20% of that mule's body weight.

- ❑ Incident-specific, identify minimum expectations (24-72 hours) for responding mounted resources to be prepared for self-sufficiency at camp with feed and water for livestock.
- ❑ Driving time hauling live cargo is slower on steep or winding roads. Vehicles with trailers may be limited to a slower speed or special traffic lane by law. An escort or authorized method to clear traffic can expedite response time of this valuable resource.
- ❑ Placing mounted searchers on standby allows time to prepare the searcher, livestock and transportation, creating faster response when activated. Also allow time for personnel to unload livestock and put on saddles, etc., in addition to personal gear.
- ❑ Rigs transporting the livestock need vehicle access to the site and adequate parking.
 - Designated staging areas and shared trailers to reduce space requirements can be useful.
 - Adequate space includes locations to secure livestock alongside, out the back, or nearby.
- ❑ Mounted SAR who have added extra capabilities - such as Mounted Rescue, Tracking, Air Scenting or Packing - may be mixed with others or assembled as a specialized team. Teams with specialized abilities may have mission considerations specific to that type of capability. (For example, consider the position of other teams, wind direction, etc., for the air scenting horses.)
- ❑ The team size for mounted should be incident-specific and mission-specific. What kind of terrain will the team be riding in, accessibility, how far from other teams, and considering any specialized skills are important factors.
 - In easy access environments with reliable communications it may be suitable to send out teams of two mounted searchers. If they need support they are readily accessible.
 - A team of three riders is fairly common as a minimum for fairly accessible off-road missions.
 - A team of four is often advantageous, particularly in less accessible environments.
 - A mounted team of four can be split temporarily into two teams of two in a preplan, or in the event of an emergency.
 - A team of four has adequate personnel to perform mounted evacuation requiring a two-person assist into the saddle.
 - Mounted resources can also be combined into a larger search line, etc.
- ❑ Mounted SAR can be combined effectively with other resources.
 - Common partnering is with smaller wheeled transportation for other searchers such as quads, off-highway motorcycles, or bicycles.
 - Mounted can be partnered with ground searchers. Some examples are to provide quiet mobile supervision of a line search, or perform reconnaissance for that ground team.
- ❑ The horse normally travels at 3-5 miles per hour, and can move substantially faster when needed. Different breeds tend to move faster or slower than others, and there can also be notable differences in movement and speed within the same breed. Partnering riders with animals that move at similar speeds reduces the potential for problems related to mounts moving at dissimilar speeds.
- ❑ Height clearance for mounted riders varies, but in general 9 feet of clearance is adequate.
- ❑ Width clearance for mounted riders varies, but normally 4 feet is minimum.
- ❑ Just like any searcher, the training and experience of the mounted searchers in various environments will impact their potential to focus on searching instead of personal safety in that environment. A liaison should be able to provide accurate information regarding the capabilities of the various mounted searchers. (It may be advantageous to categorize local terrain by degree of difficulty and qualify mounted searchers in those terrain categories.)
- ❑ Equine can drink as much as 10-20 gallons of water per day, regardless of weather, and water may need to be available or provided in the field.
- ❑ Qualified support personnel for mounted can provide valuable assistance.
 - Support personnel can transport supplementary water and feed or other supplies for Mounted SAR.
 - Provide transportation for deployed mounts and their riders. This eliminates the need for long term trailer parking space at the start or finish point, and allows for planned missions that don't need to return to the starting point.

- Use hauling vehicles or empty trailers for other logistics needs. Sometimes the hauling vehicles are 4WD.
- Support personnel can also manage any additional livestock not in the field. (Additional livestock can be very useful for field transportation.)

Incident planning, operations and logistics all benefit from better understanding and use of the Mounted SAR resource.

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Mounted SAR: Effective Management (Part III of III)

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Management often has no strong background with livestock and riding, and therefore has limited knowledge regarding effective use of the Mounted SAR (Search and Rescue) resource. Mounted SAR is often capable of performing various tasks not requested by management, in more challenging environments than management commonly sends them. Part I provided a high level overview of resource advantages, disadvantages and capabilities. Part II discussed management considerations related to resource planning, operations and logistics. This final article addresses preplanning, mutual aid and disaster response. The fundamentals are common to the resource. Some of the capabilities mentioned require additional training and/or equipment.

Effective use of Mounted SAR requires fundamental resource knowledge be applied to planning, operations and logistics. Finance can also be impacted. Preplanning specific to use of Mounted SAR positions management for more effective use of that resource type.

Preplanning

With the assistance of local mounted personnel, management should develop and maintain a preplan for equine-related issues and problems appropriate for their operational area. This may include:

- ❑ Identify base and staging areas with adequate space for horse trailers in vicinities where SAR response is fairly common. Note if livestock drinking water is available on site or nearby.
- ❑ Identify areas and incident types where response as riders isn't practical, but Mounted SAR responders might be effective as ground SAR personnel, assisting in logistics, communications, etc. (Trucks for transportation, empty trailers, and the ability to tow other trailers, can also be a very useful contribution.)
- ❑ Identify how organized Mounted SAR support personnel can be effective for more than providing support to Mounted SAR, and if any additional training is needed.
- ❑ Identify methods to provide bulk water to livestock as needed for camp or field.
- ❑ Identify a method to acquire and provide appropriate bulk feed for livestock on a longer and more remote SAR. The average 1,000 pound horse may eat 20 pounds of hay per day. Some equine are vulnerable to a sudden change in diet, or may have individual dietary needs. Consult with the mounted searchers and consider the potential of Mounted SAR support personnel in this role.
- ❑ Handlers should be equipped to address minor injuries to livestock, or provide first aid. Maintain a current contact list of local equine veterinarians to address more serious health problems. Many equine veterinarians are equipped to respond to the field with vehicle access, but may not be prepared for off-road. The authority having jurisdiction may consider establishing one or more vets as an official resource, as needed.
- ❑ Identify resources able to provide livestock extraction in various situations, including off-road.

Mutual Aid

Mounted SAR is a viable mutual aid resource, and many are willing to transport their horse or mule several hundred miles to respond. In addition to management considerations and preplanning previously mentioned, effective planning for mutual aid using Mounted SAR should include:

- ❑ Consider requesting mutual aid for someone qualified in both Mounted SAR and incident management to provide resource-specific input to incident management.
- ❑ Long distance driving transporting equine may be slower than other resource type mutual aid response, so activate as soon as possible.
- ❑ Be specific in the resource request for Mounted SAR responders experienced in your kind of environment, particularly if that environment isn't common. Indicate the minimum number for team size, remembering the potential to partner with quads, etc.
- ❑ Some in Mounted SAR have additional capabilities or are cross-trained as other resource types. This should be considered as a specific resource specialty request, and may be combined with a request for other capabilities.
 - Some in Mounted SAR are trained to provide mounted rescue / evacuation. Suggest bringing an extra mount.
 - If SAR dogs are useful to the incident, consider that some in Mounted SAR have equine trained to air scent and alert, very similar to a SAR Dog. Others may be trained for mounted cadaver search. Equine can cover ground more quickly than dogs and handlers on foot, and have the advantage of height to catch a higher scent cone on a warmer day.
 - If trackers are useful to the incident, some in Mounted SAR are trained mantrackers and can also track from the saddle. Tracking while mounted sometimes allows that searcher to move more quickly.
 - Some in Mounted SAR are cross-trained in CERT for basic disaster response.
- ❑ Nearby Mounted SAR can be an excellent resource for logistics.
 - A mutual aid request for Mounted SAR personnel responding only with trucks (no livestock) or hauling empty trailers can be useful for many incidents.
 - Potential to request trucks with empty pick-up beds, 4wd, and/or a certain size trailer hitch and hauling weight capability.
 - Potential to request certain types of empty horse trailers.



Mounted SAR resources with additional specialized training - air scenting, tracking, mounted rescue, packing, CERT, etc. - may be available through mutual aid. (Air scenting horse shown.)

- Mounted riders often have access where there are restrictions regarding wheeled vehicles or helicopters.
 - Mounted SAR with additional saddled riding animals can transport personnel, or carry supplies, gear, etc., in saddlebags and other common storage options. With appropriate training and experience, an “over the saddle” pack pannier can also be used advantageously.
 - Packers with multiple pack animals can haul supplies, gear, etc. Many pack animals are also trained to transport a passenger. Alternative sources for experienced packers include professional packers, Backcountry Horsemen and similar organizations, and some national parks and forests have pack strings and handlers.
- Some Mounted SAR teams have a mobile communications or command post, or riders can be positioned with equipment to provide communications relay.
- Be familiar with the additional capabilities and equipment available for mutual aid through Mounted SAR resources in your region.

Disaster Resource

Mounted SAR is a versatile and viable resource for most incidents. This includes disaster response. Like others in SAR, Mounted SAR personnel are already experienced working in the Incident Command System, are NIMS compliant, are familiar with radio communications, have an existing background check and photo ID, etc., and can deploy self-sufficient for up to 72 hours. Some riders are already cross-trained in CERT (Community Emergency Response Team), making them even more viable as a disaster resource. The same skill sets and capabilities useful in SAR are also applicable to most disasters. The same management considerations apply. The same trucks and trailers can also be useful for disaster logistics.

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