



## And She Rode for the Queen

By Debra Slabaugh (Photos courtesy of Becky Tubb)

It's a beautiful day in the city of London. Multitudes of loyal subjects line the red tarmac street in anticipation. Today will be one of the few each year that Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth II will ride in her gold coach down The Mall in a procession fit for...well, a queen. The one-of-a-kind gold leaf coach was presented to the monarchy in 1762 by the Corporation of London. Its price at the time was 7,661 pounds, equal to an American price tag of \$140,000...quite sizeable when you consider Long Island was purchased from the

Indians for a mere \$10. When not in use (about 350 days a year), the coach is displayed suspended over a pool of water, illuminated by special lighting at the Museum of London. Great care is taken to ensure that the wooden frame does not dry out.

Adding to the majesty and splendor of the Queen's procession are eight members of the mounted police, four directly in front of the gold coach, four behind. Each sits astride a traditionally gray horse. (Although various colored horses comprise the 190 used throughout

London and its surrounding areas, the "grays" have always been associated with the aristocracy.) The proud horses keep a cadence befitting their high-profile job of the day. All the pomp and circumstance of today's assignment belies what the mounted police and their equine partners have endured to bask in these few moments of prestige: Hours upon hours of intensive training have been invested in each horse and rider. Becky Tubb of The Glorious Twelfth in Fairfield, Virginia, knows...she was one of those eight officers.

Becky attended the two-year



Probationary Police College before being accepted into the National Police Training Center for “22 weeks of hell.” Once inside the gates, there are only two ways out. One is to quit. The other is to graduate 22 weeks later, prepared to join one of the mounted branches. Graduation as a mounted officer not only instills a sense of pride, accomplishment, and self discipline, but an equally impressive array of blisters! Upon graduation, and throughout their careers with the mounted division, horses and officers continue to hone their skills at Hounslow, a purpose-built center for



**Gold Coach with traditional footmen**

**Grey escort in Trafalgar Square**



**In Great Scotland Yard,  
home of the central stables**

mounted as well as foot-duty police officers. It resembles a small town, with streets, houses, and shops with balconies; there are even a few phone booths. In this little “pseudo-town” various scenarios can be practiced to prepare for any situation that may arise during a dangerous encounter with troublemakers. Getting to the coveted graduation day, however, is a grueling endeavor.

Every hour of every day is regimented between morning, afternoon and evening riding exercises. When the students aren’t working on their riding skills, they are attending lectures and wet labs, learning how to give the utmost care to their equine partners, from veterinary first aid, nutrition, and stable management, to proper care of tack and equipment. Oh yes, and in their “spare time,” the horses are bathed, groomed, and fed, and stalls

are mucked out. Mounted drills or exercises are designed as individual tests over a seemingly endless array of obstacles such as navigating a flight of steps—in both directions. Most horses accept the ascent just fine...but going down the other side is another matter. Most horses would prefer to just leap off.

Drill formations include training for both horse and rider in crowd control and even riot control. Chain reins are issued for these situations, so that they cannot be cut by an unruly Hooligan in the crowd. Full riot gear is provided for both the officers and their horses as well.

After graduation, the mounted officers and their horses will be transported via huge semi trucks (called horse boxes in the UK) to various areas in London and neighboring areas for “local tasking.” Anywhere a high visibility of



Leaving Buckingham Palace main gate

Cavalry escort on traditional black horses

police is needed, they will be called upon. Whether there is a neighborhood where burglaries have been occurring or a child is missing, they will be there. Often at football games the crowds can become unruly, out of control, even dangerous, and the mounted teams are there to set things right. The highly trained horses provide a powerful presence under the most adverse situations. They can carry the officer faster than a man on foot, and through far more obstacles than a squad car.

As if all the police schooling wasn't enough, Becky Tubb decided to become a member of the prestigious British Horse Society. She attained her level-three status in just three years while continuing her work with the mounted





A sale horse getting a welcome break at home in Lexington, Virginia

division. No small undertaking!

After ten years with the mounted branch, she and her husband, Andy, also with the police force in special services, decided to make a big move to the US. Andy had done some exchange work with the FBI and they had fallen in love with Virginia. The young couple packed up their belongings, sold their home, and told friends and family of the new adventure they were about to embark upon. They said goodbye as well to friends and colleagues on the police force. Becky gave Annabelle, her trusted gray mount, one final apple, and handed the reins to her new rider.

She would miss those special days with Annabelle, when she and a few fellow officers would ride their mounts to Hackney Marshes on the East end of London. As they would near the large grassy football fields, each rider would reach down and tighten their stirrup leathers up a couple of notches because the horses knew...THIS was fun time! After working on the hard streets of London, this was sheer horse heaven.

“When their hooves hit the grass, it was time to take a deep seat...and hold on for dear life. The first time around the park, there was no holding them back. They ran with such abandon, the wind would cause tears to stream down our faces. The second time around you could bring the horses into a more collected canter. By the third pass you could maybe talk them into a bit of walk and trot.”

To some, it would seem a shame that Becky gave it all up, after working so hard to achieve such high goals. I guess you could say it was a trade-off...and that's not necessarily a bad thing. Instead of riding with a gold coach, Becky watches the sun peek out in the morning as she makes her way down to her own stables with her two black Labs, Bonnie and Sky, at her heels. Instead of a day of learning to control crowds, she teaches her young horses how to control themselves! The only dangers she may encounter on one of her rides through the beautiful Virginia countryside might be an unruly raccoon or a discarded plastic bag tossed about by the brisk winds. At the time of this writing,

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her assault course is being erected. She will teach the young horses to be brave and nimble. They will acquire many skills of a proper British police horse, and when they are sold, they will keep their new owners safe because they were given their foundation by a lady who loves horses, who made working with them her career...and who rode for the Queen.

\*The Queen visited Jamestown and Williamsburg in early May and participated in the Jamestown 400th celebration.

For more information on Becky Tubb and the program at Glorious Twelfth Equine, call 540-570-1262 or 540-348-6214 (cell).

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Debra Slabaugh lives with her husband Scott, a retired equine vet, at their farm “All Gods Creatures” near Lexington, Virginia, breeding registered Angus Cattle.