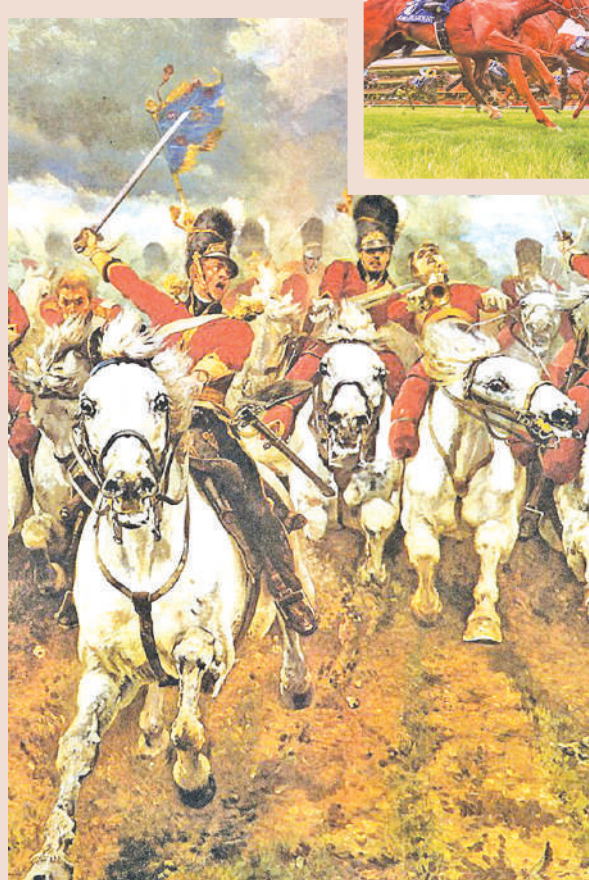# Facts about horses

The horse is a domesticated, one-toed, hoofed mammal. It belongs to the taxonomic family Equidae and is one of two extant subspecies of Equus ferus. The horse has evolved over the past 45 to 55 million years from a small multi-toed creature, close to *Eohippus*, into the large, single-toed animal of today.

Humans began domesticating horses around 4000 BCE, and their domestication is believed to have been widespread by 3000 BCE. Horses in the subspecies caballus are domesticated, although some domesticated populations live in the wild as feral horses. These feral populations are not true wild horses, as this term refers to horses that have never been domesticated. There is an extensive, specialised vocabulary used to describe equine-related concepts, covering everything from anatomy to life stages, size, colors, markings, breeds, locomotion, and behaviour.

Horses are adapted to run, allowing them to quickly escape predators and possess an excellent sense of balance and a strong fight-or-flight response. Related to this need to flee from predators in the wild is an unusual trait: horses are able to sleep both standing up and lying down, with younger horses tending to sleep significantly more than adults.

Female horses, called mares, carry their young for approximately 11 months and a young horse, called a foal, can stand and run shortly following birth. Most domesticated horses begin training under a saddle or in a harness between the ages of two and four. They reach full adult development by age five, and have an average lifespan of between 25 and 30 years.

Horse breeds are loosely divided into three categories based on general temperament: spirited 'hot bloods' with speed and endurance; 'cold bloods', such as draft horses and some ponies, suitable for slow, heavy work; and 'warmbloods', developed from crosses between hot bloods and cold bloods, often focusing on creating breeds for specific riding purposes, particularly in Europe. There are more than 300 breeds of horses in the world today, for many different uses.

Horses and humans interact in a wide variety of sports competitions and non-competitive recreational pursuits as well as in working activities such as police work, agriculture, entertainment, and therapy.

Many products are derived from horses, including meat, milk, hide, hair, bone and pharmaceuticals extracted from the urine of pregnant mares. Humans provide domesticated horses with food, water and shelter as well as attention from specialists such as veterinarians and farriers.

## Horses in warfare

Horses have been used in warfare for most of recorded history. The first archaeological evidence of horses used in warfare dates to between 4000 and 3000 BCE, and the use of horses in warfare was widespread by the end of the Bronze Age. Although mechanisation has largely replaced the horse as a weapon of war, horses are still seen today in limited military uses, mostly for ceremonial purposes, or for reconnaissance and transport activities in areas of rough terrain where motorised vehicles are ineffective. Horses have been used in the 21st Century by the *Janjaweed* militias in the War in Darfur.

## Sri Lanka Police Mounted Division

The Sri Lanka Police Mounted Division is the mounted division of the Sri Lanka Police. The responsibility of the division is to conduct safe policing of crowd control at large public order events and provide ceremonial escorts.

The unit was formed in 1921 at the former premises of Royal College Colombo in St. Sebastian Hill, Colombo. At its formation, the unit was limited to British personnel.

On the morning of March 22, 1952, Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake was riding the police mare '*Chitra*'. He suffered a stroke and fell at the Galle Face Green. He was accompanied by Inspector Eddie Grey, who would later become the first Ceylonese head of the Mounted Police. In 1956, the Police Mounted Division was formed with a Sub-Inspector, two Police Sergeants and 22 Police Constables with 23 thoroughbred horses imported from Australia.

## A cowboy

A cowboy is an animal herder who tends cattle on ranches in North America, traditionally on horseback, and often performs a multitude of other ranch-related tasks.

Sources: Wikipedia, Sri Lanka Police. Graphic: Mahil Wijesinghe