A Horse Rescue Unit in action

A fascinating insight into the work of the West Sussex Fire and Rescue Horse Rescue Unit

West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service responds to a variety of emergencies, including fires, road traffic collisions, chemical spills and flooding. The service also has a Technical Rescue Unit (TRU), which was formed in 2006. This is a specialist crew that can be mobilised to incidents where the rescue method may be significantly more complex.

There are 12 members of staff in the team that provide a 24/7 response, 365 days a year, with a minimum of four personnel on duty at any time. The team is based at Horley Fire Station, but immediately responds to emergencies via a pager system at evenings and weekends. Each member of the TRU has an “on-call” vehicle to use when necessary.

They attend many incidents where horses need to be rescued. Over the years, the team has responded to call-outs where horses have been stuck in ditches, rivers, cesspits and swimming pools. During a rescue, the team works closely with the vets and the vast majority have a positive outcome, involving a safe rescue with minimal injuries.

Ed Lyall, who is a veterinary surgeon and Director of the Sussex Equine Hospital, has worked with the team several times. “They have always provided the most amazing response, and have a solution for dealing with the relevant problem encountered. My last incident with them was when a horse fell into a river. On arrival, there was a large number of officers, vehicles and animal lifting equipment. An inflatable raft worked in conjunction with their RIB [rigid inflatable boat] and in a short time the casualty was on dry land ready for me to examine. The owner was delighted and the horse fine.”

Each crew member has gained an Animal Rescue Level 3 qualification through Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, working closely and training with BEVA vets, the RSPCA and Brinsbury College Equine Campus – they regularly attend the campus for large animal handling training.

Vehicles and specialist equipment

Currently, the unit has nine operational vehicles and a powered boat in their fleet. Four of these make up their everyday “on-call” vehicles and they each contain a different selection of equipment.

There are two Ford Rangers with four-by-four capability...