

# Promotion of Equestrian Culture

Japan has many festivals that feature horses. Horse racing organizations carefully preserve these forms of culture related to horses and undertake assistance in various forms to ensure that this heritage continues.

A few examples follow below.

## Yabusame Shinto Ceremony (Japanese Archery on Horseback)



This Shinto ceremony is a very gallant one with an 800-year tradition. Wearing samurai hunting uniforms of the Kamakura era, archers mount horses

and, galloping swiftly on horseback, release arrows from their bows to hit three targets in a row. When this is achieved, they receive loud applause from the many fans to acknowledge their success.

Yabusame is well-known in foreign countries, as many foreign tourists can be seen among the various audiences. This Shinto ceremony is held twice a year on the spring equinox and autumn equinox to appease the spirits of their ancestors.

## Soma Nomaoi (Soma Wild-Horse Roundup)



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Dating back over a millennium, the Soma wild-horse roundup originated as a form of military training in which horses were used as a new military force. They were released in a pasture and were rounded-up by soldiers. The horses were then presented at a shrine as part of the festival rites. Succeeding generations of Soma clan leaders continued this rite dating from 1323 to the Meiji Restoration.

Held every July, the Soma Nomaoi festival was designated an important national intangible folk culture treasure in 1978.

## Dakyu (Horseback Lacrosse)



Begun by the Mizuno lords of the ancient Yamagata fief, this richly traditional horseback lacrosse is part of the Horetsu Shrine's annual festival events in Yamagata Prefecture.

Groups of five or six riders are divided into red and white teams and try to put balls called agedama, which are marked with the Chinese character for ten, into the goal. This is a two-team, horseback contest in which the red team attempts to scoop up red balls using nets mounted on poles and put them through the goal's round opening while the white team does the same with white balls. A bell is rung to announce goals made by the white team. Inversely, a drum is beat when goals are made by the red team. The Imperial Household Agency; Yamagata Prefecture's Horetsu Shrine; and Hachinohe, Aomori Prefecture, carry on this tradition still today.

## Horohiki (Synchronized Equestrian Pennant Display)



It is said that Heian-era warriors used pennants on the battlefield as protection against arrows. The Imperial Household Agency's equestrian division carries

on this traditional cultural event.

Horohiki is performed by two riders mounted on Yamato era saddles, each with a 10-meter-long pennant secured to his/her back.

The horses' gait quickens from a walk to a trot and then to a gallop.

Their legs move in unison (i.e., the same legs moving at the same time). The two riders release the long pennants a little at a time, until they are fully deployed.

A green and white pennant symbolizes spring while a red and white pennant symbolizes fall.

## A TRUE REST HOME FOR RETIRED HORSES

A welfare program that enables champion horses to live out the final years of their lives in ease after completing stud/broodmare service following the completion of an active career was established by the Japan Bloodhorse Breeders' Association since 1973. The Bloodhorse Training Center also started a subsidized program from 1996 to place famous retired horses at privately owned farms for public viewing.