



Photograph © Vicki Jayne Maris

RIDING THE STORM

When is a dangerous horse not a dangerous horse? **Vicki Jayne Maris** helps Sorrel listen to Storm

to stand or move correctly as he was physically uncomfortable, so I suggested an appointment with a physiotherapist. Mentally and emotionally Storm wasn't in great shape either. When he was troubled he would disappear inwards. This level of shutting down was extreme. I had witnessed how he allowed things he hated, like saddling up, to be done, but it didn't diminish his anguish, anxiety and fear. It was simmering away inside and he became a primed, unexploded bomb.

Sorrel and I blended the physiotherapy with groundwork to build Storm up physically, mentally and emotionally. His trust and bond with Sorrel grew. She learned to read Storm and see the very early warning signs of what troubled him. The key was to not let him disappear inwards, to encourage him to take leadership from Sorrel and learn that things would be OK, there is nothing to fear and it would be fun. We used positive reinforcement to help Storm with all the things that troubled him, rewarding even the smallest try. In the early days a huge try from Storm was not disappearing inwards, for

this was his mental place of safety. Asking a horse to face what emotionally troubles him is a huge ask. It was clear from the start that Storm had a big heart and was willing to try. Rewarding this was essential in moving him forward and helping him gain the courage to face his fears.

Storm is an amazing animal. Through this work he gained confidence and started enjoying his work. Sorrel says, "I hadn't known that he was freezing up like a zombie through anxiety and fear. With help I learned to read his signals and we helped Storm overcome his anxiety. Storm now is like another horse. He is relaxed at the mounting block and I listen to his signals when riding, whether he wants to stop or walk. I get emotional every time. I feel privileged when I consider how much he trusts me."

Storm's dangerous behaviour was purely a symptom of his inner anxiety and discomfort. He wasn't being listened to, what else could he do?



Storm is a stunning 17.2hh 11 year old grey gelding. Sorrel purchased him knowing he had a troubled past. He was advertised as a 'sold as seen' project from the field. The seller said he was sold to her as a happy hack, but he had bolted and scared her. Although she sent Storm for retraining, the problem still persisted and the owner decided she wasn't the person for him.

Sorrel did an unadvised thing, purchasing him from a field on the first viewing, but her aim was to help Storm. She got a vet to check him over and started him just like a youngster. Storm was perfect in hand, however he would shake when tack was put on. The instructor told

Sorrel if Storm didn't want it on, he wouldn't stand still so she persevered. Under saddle he was extremely tense and one day he exploded. He bolted, threw himself at the arena walls and bronc'd until Sorrel was on the floor with a cracked coccyx. The instructor carried on the work. Her methods were harsh, including using a gum line. Storm threw the instructor off, it was another nasty fall, and the instructor blamed Sorrel for her dangerous horse.

Storm and Sorrel were unhappy, a new approach and a fresh start was needed. She considered parting with him but couldn't let him go.

My first session with Storm and Sorrel was an assessment. He wasn't able