

CASPER

Couldn't Canter

(Can Safely Canter Now)



Casper in full flight (being ridden by a friend)

I purchased Casper as an unstarted 3yo. I had no intention of buying a young horse ever again after a nightmare experience that ended in tears and me nearly giving up horses as a mug's game. I saw Casper and just loved him. He was friendly and a pleasure to handle to begin with.

About 1 month after I got him he started biting at his shoulder and chest when I picked up his front feet, I thought this was a foal behaviour that had lingered. It was intermittent and I would tell him No firmly and he would stop.

So at age 4 he was started under saddle by a very good friend and this was done with natural methods so he certainly had never had any traumatic handling. All went well for the first 3 months then one day out of the blue he started biting at himself whilst being ridden. The first time he did it I thought he had been bitten by something as it was so 'violent' I got off to inspect gear and see if there were any insect bites. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary so I got back on and asked him forward, he did it again and this time it was so bad I thought he would rear if I asked him forward.

He did it the next ride so I called in the vet, chiropractor, teeth done etc etc, from then on it was an exhaustive and expensive investigation process. New saddle, different types of saddles, new bits, bridles, different riders, saddle cloths, riding bareback, girths, new farrier, etc etc, the list was endless, I did extensive searching on the internet but couldn't find out why he did this.

The biting would become intermittent it might be 5 minutes into the ride, he might do it 1 hour into a ride, he might not do it at all. There was no pattern to it.

Life intervened with a very sick father and I had to put my horses on hold for approx 1 year whilst we nursed and eventually farewelled my father from this earth. I couldn't summon the interest or the passion to ride so by this time Casper was going on for 7. I finally got back into it only to find he had started doing other 'bad' things such as spooking violently at things like the gate, the cavalettis that had been in the same position for months, he would spook at his paddock mate...there is Jimmy....shy. I had difficulty bridling him, he would throw his head up in the air, I tried all the techniques I knew to curtail this but nothing worked. I could lower his head to the ground with the tip of my finger but the minute the bridle came near him he would fling his head up. Putting a saddle on was a dance around the paddock, rugging him was just not worth the effort, he would freak out when the rug touched him.

When I did get to ride him and all was good in his world he was bloody brilliant, smooth, light, rhythmical but if he was not ok he was heavy, wouldn't listen just awful to ride, he would kick out at a walk if tapped with a crop. If I put my leg on he would kick out or turn around and try to bite at his himself.

Forget canter, that was just not an option, on the lunge I would get a full on rodeo display and there was no way I was going to ride that, I am not a glutton for punishment. Naturally all this crazy behaviour made riding less and less appealing. Some days I would have preferred to do the vacuuming than ride!!! So the final straw came in November 08. Casper was now 8 years old, have cantered probably 4 times under saddle. My instructor had got him to canter when I sent him there for training, her words were... 'yes got him to canter but he kicked up a beauty'. I had gone on a 2 month holiday to the USA and happily cantered and even galloped some horses over there out in the wilds of the mid west and was playing cowgirl. Not a care in the world. It gave me the confidence boost that I could canter a horse.

During this time away we had loads of rain and humidity, (perfect for mycotoxins). I came home all fired up and ready to get Casper cantering. Well the first ride back was a complete disaster. Mind you I had done all the usual preparation of a horse that hadn't been ridden for a while but he was just ballistic, he had also started head flicking now. I ended the ride in tears and now convinced this was the end of the road for Casper and me as a team. It briefly crossed my mind to have him put down like a lot of people had suggested but this wasn't fair to him even though he had become dangerous to ride, he was still a sweetheart and I truly believed that there was something happening that I just couldn't work out what he was trying to tell me.

I sent a desperate email to Casper's breeder, Michelle, who had moved from Sydney to New Zealand. I simply stated what I had done to date and that this was the final chance. Was there something in his history or genetic line that I needed to know about. Michelle's answer came back about mycotoxins and she mentioned the products that Jenny Paterson had.

After Michelle's email re toxins I got onto a company in Australia but trying to get anything out of them as a single horse person was like pulling hen's teeth, they didn't really want to deal with a one off horse person, they wanted to deal with 'the big guns'.

This led me to contact Jenny Paterson about Casper and I wanted to know if the toxin binder that doesn't bind nutrition was available in Australia, as luck would have it Lucy Prior from Gotcha Equine had recently gained approval to import the ProVide It range into Australia. The rest as they say is history. Since commencing Casper on the full ProVide It Plan he and I have gone ahead in leaps and bounds (the right ones). We have had a few setbacks but these were when I felt sorry for Casper and extended his area for a bit more grazing or fiddled with his diet.

The happiest part of this story is that he no longer bites at himself when being ridden....and WE CAN CANTER. We have cantered more in the past 4 months than we have in the 4 years since he was started. He just gets better with each ride, rugging him now is not an issue, even in a storm he doesn't bat an eyelid. **All his crazy behaviours have completely gone.**

I can't thank Jenny and Lucy enough for the support and hand holding through this and Casper says thank you.

*Thanks to Kerrie, my dear friend for her support, to Caryn and Jade for the 'finishing touches' to Casper's canter. Thanks to Ro, my instructor for her belief in me and Casper, my daughter Sharyn, for keeping me real and the tissues handy for my tears and last but not least, my long suffering husband David, for his ear to bash even though he didn't have a clue what I was talking about, for his unfailing support and love. Jenny is right....**even the husbands notice the change.***

Casper is the sweet, calm and responsive boy
I knew was in there somewhere.
It wasn't his fault,
he just couldn't think straight.

'I am so glad I didn't give up on him'

Leanne Aarts - Sydney - Australia



Casper (July 09) - 'We Can Canter'



We are very interested in any feedback and experiences you may have had. Please e-mail:

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