

You don't find it in tourist brochures and one would even struggle with a Google search, but the little-known village of Soo boasts a unique horse and donkey sanctuary to make even Dr Dolittle so-oooo proud.

Lifelong horse-lover Kristina Potter, who moved to Lanzarote in April, 2002, is passionate to cast out equine neglect on an island where organisations on the same level as the RSPCA don't operate – and is certainly living her dream as each day passes. Her big break came four years ago when she and husband Steven rented a disused riding school and in less than 18 months they'd transformed the rundown multi-acre site into an impressive half-way house for creatures of the four-legged kind.

Hard graft was certainly rewarded as they gave birth to *Palm Tree Ranch*, which boasts 14 stables, a 40x20m riding paddock, a 20m round pen and various put out paddocks for the horses during the day. A 30x30m sand paddock for western riding and a large play pen for the training of natural horsemanship are among the more recent features. They have numerous stables for livery and offer teaching in many aspects of riding, in both western (similar to dressage) and English style.

Yet reopening a school for both residents and holiday-makers was only a fraction of the vision as the real passion was to do something for the "more unfortunate" horses on the island. Kristina, 52, originally from Lytham St Annes, complained, "due to



PALM TREE RANCH

Soo sanctuary reins them in

□ By Ian White

lack of understanding and knowledge of horses on the island many are neglected or mistreated. Even in the 21st century, there is no official body in Lanzarote which recognises the welfare of animals to the same degree as other organisations such as the RSPCA, but at least we have the facilities to help care for these animals and find new homes for them if necessary. It's impossible to cater for all, but we certainly do what we can. There are

numerous neglected and mistreated horses throughout Lanzarote, some due to obvious neglect and others due to a lack of knowledge and understanding. Ideally it would be beneficial to educate the owners about the care and attention needed to look after a horse properly. However it is not always possible to get through to these people as they think care given is sufficient." And because Lanzarote appears without an animal

ownership governing body, provided a horse has basic food and water no-one can remove it from its owner.

The devoted couple testify to witnessing heartbreaking cases of neglect on an incredulous scale. They even found a horse living on dry bread and water from a container stained green with algae and slime floating on the surface. Case studies include two horses taken in from a neighbouring village – re-named *Chicky* and *Nicky*



– where owner ignorance improved the key. Four year old *Chicky* arrived extremely underweight, in a filthy condition with both mane and tail hair matted together and with apparent back leg wounds. Nine-year-old Pinto horse *Nicky* was also filthy on arrival and grossly underweight. Again, it took lots of work to restore hair on her matted tail, a job made harder because someone had cut the mane short. Kristina said: "These are a classic example of owner ignorance as incredibly he thought his horses were well cared for and looked great!"

A more recent arrival was *Ged*, powerless to move after being tied so close to a wall, his head collar firmly embedded into his head as a result of his helpless struggle. Hardly surprisingly, he has psychological behaviour

problems. The ex-pat community of Lanzarote rallied round and staged two special fund-raising events at the Tartan Teddy pub in old town Puerto del Carmen last year when more than €700 was collected enabling *Ged* to have a walk-out area. But the ex-pats do have vital hands-on help from their Canarian neighbours too and they now receive assistance from a volunteer Canarian vet.

On a lighter note, one of the more commented upon arrivals - *Rocky* - is not a horse at all but a black spot pig! He has grown considerably since being bought as a baby.

You can adopt a pony or donkey for €10 each by calling 618 727 646, or visit the website: www.palmtreeeranchlanzarote.com

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