

“You’ve got to like the work you do”

Keith motorcycle mechanic focuses on getting back to work after breaking his femur and heel

Craig Rehn has ridden motorbikes since he was a boy. He loves it – so much so that he made a career out of it, as a motor-bike mechanic. So the last year’s been tough – ever since that day in the yard at work, when he was test-riding a bike and came off, breaking his femur and left heel. He’s been unable to ride since, and has only been able to perform light duties at work.

“I had mechanic brain,” says Craig, trying to explain how the accident happened. That means he was focussing on the fault in the bike, and not on what he was doing on the slippery surface in the yard at Caldecott Motors in Keith in June 2009.

His apprentice saw him come off, and called the ambulance. “It’s all blurry,” says Craig, who was raced to the hospital at Keith, and given x-rays, where they identified the broken femur – but not the the broken calcaneus (heel) in his left foot. Three hours later he was flown to Adelaide and taken to the Flinders Hospital.

At first, all treatment was focussed on his broken leg, and it was only later when he was put into traction that the pressure on his heel was so painful, medical staff identified the break there too.

Craig was in hospital for six days, following surgery on his leg, which involved having a nail inserted in his femur. Later, he went back and had a screw put in his foot.

Craig was given a ‘moon boot’, and after a few days in a wheel chair, went onto crutches. He was told to stay off it for two months.

Craig, who is married to Tracey, and has two young boys, Jordan (4) and Nate (10 months) had to stay home, away from the job he loves. But it wasn’t long before he was helping out any way he could. “They’d phone me, and ask me questions,” he says.

Caldecott’s is a small business. Owner Tracey is the wife of the late Andy Caldecott – who suffered a fatal neck injury after a crash in the Dakar Rally in Morocco in 2006. Tracey took over running the business, relying on the mechanical expertise of Craig. And when he was injured, she had to employ another mechanic to fill in.

“Every now and then they’d come and pick me up, and take me into work and show me a bike they’d want some advice on,” says Craig. “That helped, I think. It kept my mind in the game. If I didn’t, I’d go crazy, just sitting around and doing nothing. I’m not that kind of person – it drives me up the wall.

“Having said that, Jordan has worked out the Dad can’t run anymore, and uses it to his advantage!”

“That’s been the hardest thing – the stuff I can’t do anymore. I have my AMA [pro-racing] licence, and I used to race motorcycles. I’d do race set-ups and training for the young fellas. I used to love cricket, and going out with my family. All that’s changed now. But work has adapted easily to my situation.”

By the end of June 2009, four months after the accident, Craig was ready to start doing light duties – “answering phones, answering questions, generally bossing everyone around.”

But Craig’s surgeon and doctor were both concerned he was doing too much. They reduced his hours, and today he’s back to just an hour or two a day. The calcaneus injury is still troubling him. “I’ve had cortisone injections in it, and we’re still hoping that, because I’m still young [28] the foot will heal itself. The only other option is surgery to fuse the heel. But the doctor’s hoping that won’t be necessary.”

Craig sings the praises of all who’ve been involved in his recovery and (partial) return to work. Everything I’ve wanted has been taken care of – my case manager Yvonne has been awesome, all my wages, all my travel’s been taken care of. The only thing they can’t do is fix my foot!”

And for a mechanic, not being able to stand for long is a serious issue. The doctor will be deciding in May if surgery to fuse the heel will be necessary. Craig's aware that if the foot doesn't heal properly, he may have to look at other options for work.

"Mostly I don't think that way though – not yet. I'm just focussed on fixing my foot, and getting back to where I want to work. There's times when I'm not positive. But I'm lucky that I have such a good employer. You've gotta like the work you do – I love it!"

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