

# ACCIDENTAL HERO

**Getting run over by a car usually results in a lost lust for life. Not for Talan - meet an inspiration to us all**

**C**rashing hurts at the best of times. Most of us have done so and suffered the aftermath of injuries and their associated repercussions, either at a circuit or, more likely, on the roads. That fear is subconsciously a mechanism for us to push harder, brake later, and get on the gas earlier for that extra tenth of thrills, yet does it affect our rides? Jog on. But how about paraplegia? It's barely entered my mind.

Talan Skeels-Piggins was a PE teacher, sports enthusiast, and mad about bikes and his 'Blade. At approximately 11:35am on Saturday 8th March 2003, Talan was involved in an accident, getting shunted off his bike and into oncoming traffic - namely a car. The outlook obviously wasn't too pukka. He was transferred to the Royal United Hospital in Bath where he received immediate and expert medical care. Further X-rays and CT scans over the next few days revealed that Talan had sustained a break to the C7 vertebrae in his neck and a very severe T4/T5 vertebrae break in the upper spine, basically smashing it. The

T4/T5 break caused irreversible, permanent damage to his spinal cord, which has resulted in paralysis from the nipple line downwards.

Time to hang up the leathers then, Talan? No chance, but the odds of surviving this type of accident is estimated at just one per cent, with only a 30 per cent chance of recovering from the trauma suffered. He was told he'd be in hospital for two years, but within months of the accident, Talan was planning to do the Bath half marathon and his new racing wheelchair was due in January 2004. He was also driving, fighting pissed-up able-bodied twats, trying to wheelie his wheelchair, and planning on conjuring ways to ride bikes again. He also set himself a personal goal of representing Great Britain in the 2010 Winter Paralympics. But it was still a long road to full acceptance.

"I wouldn't recommend getting run over by a car," says Talan, "It'll ruin your afternoon. I never really thought I'd be able to get back on a bike as I don't have any balance. I'm paralysed from the nipples ▶







Disabled? Not a bit of it, here's a man who is very much able

►down, so there are no stomach or back muscles to hold me upright, so I always have to lean against something, or I just fall over. However, whilst skiing in 2008, I went on a snowmobile and it felt really stable. The thrills and acceleration got me thinking I could get back on a bike again."

After much research, positivity and contact with other paralysed riders, he set about developing a suitable track bike. "If they can do it, I can do it" he reckoned. Limited to just a few bikes (because he was hell-bent on a 1000cc), Talan went around to a few dealers to

engineers and technicians to do the work – stabiliser design, configuring rear brake requirements, automatic gear shifting controls and the like were all considerations. And then there was the matter of keeping Talan on the bike. Velcro patches on the tank, straps on the legs and adapted old-school cycle clips also using Velcro were all used to make sure there are no dangling legs.

We went to Castle Combe to one of their trackdays, and met up with Talan who regularly lets rip on one of the gnarliest and fastest circuits in the UK. He had recently been

Those of you familiar with Combe will know it's bumpy, and I was more spaced out than Neil Armstrong following Talan for a session. Staying on a bike is tricky enough when you've got complete control of your whole body, and Combe brutally punishes with bumps born from the devil. Talan's balance and upper-body strength is incredible to behold.

With no knee-down as a reference point, the only gauge for lean are the stabiliser wheels touching down. This also hinders lean angle, and is the only real limiting factor to Talan's already impressive lap times.

And Talan hasn't stopped at trackdays. He was one week away from his first race and was in the process of being granted an ACU licence, only to have it revoked after a meeting because of safety fears. He's appealed, with another meeting due in April 2011. Mass starts were the issue, despite offering to start at the back

## IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE HE WAS LAPPING FASTER THAN OTHER RIDERS

check for pressure on his wrists and his ability to balance. The GSX-R1000 K6 was the daddy, and he'd heard it was ballistic. Soon he'd sparked an obsession to get ready for racing – much to the unpopularity of his family and friends...

An SV650 to cane in the Minitwins championships was an obvious choice; light, cheap and with proven track ability. Next up was the inevitable adaptation and sourcing

allocated the lunch hour to ride with an instructor, but his rapid progress meant the circuit was happy for him to terrorise the able-bodied riders. Following persistence and sheer will and determination, Talan has attended all levels of California Superbike School and Focused Events recognise he's just as capable as able-bodied riders. It wasn't long before he was lapping faster than most other riders on track.



Talan explains what happened before he designed his stabilizer system



### TALAN'S SV650

It's all about hand controls. Kliktronic supplied the hydraulic button-shifter situated on the left bar, and a thumb-operated rear brake sits above the front lever. It all looks very complicated.

Tired of having friends catch him when he came back into the paddock, it was time to get technical. Talan, along with a student from Bath University, designed and built hydraulic stabilisers to work in conjunction with the clutch. The stabilisers have a button that drops them down, but to get them up uses an automatic system. You pull the clutch in, arm the stabiliser unit, and as you release the clutch (while accelerating) a circuit is made and the stabilisers rise underneath the swingarm. The mechanism weighs about 10kg in total, which is dramatically less than Talan's first attempt at 40kg. Now the bike is sanctioned for racing.

The amount of work and modifications you can do to the SV is limited by the rules and regulations of the Minitwins race series. No matter how much money you spend, you can only have 72bhp at the back wheel, so it stops the budgets going sky high.



Talan has a nice sit down to read his favourite mag

Once you reach your goal you can tell everyone who said you wouldn't make it to fuck off





*We could all do with a set of these every now and again*

► of the grid every time. Hill climbs and sprints are OK for now, but he's not surrendering just yet.

The ACU wasn't concerned about his riding skills. As the UK becomes more like the US with law and fear of liable, they were more anxious about safety should Talan crash and the race would have to be red flagged. No paraplegic has ever held an ACU licence before, but Talan's fully focused on entering the No Budget Cup in 2011.

Life isn't pain-free in a wheelchair. Talan still suffers with severe muscular and nerve pains and has to take a cocktail of drugs to



*You can follow Talan's unbelievable rehabilitation on his blog - <http://talant4trust.blogspot.com/> and [http://web.me.com/tskeelspiggins/Disabled\\_Motorcycling/Welcome.html](http://web.me.com/tskeelspiggins/Disabled_Motorcycling/Welcome.html)*

## ↑↑ I'VE REALLY DONE NOTHING THAT YOU COULDN'T DO YOURSELF ↓↓

combat the agony – and it's not just the obvious disadvantages of paraplegia that's affected him. On one occasion during the development of the bike, Talan's leg slipped off the Velcro pad causing brutal burns to his foot as the Tarmac wore through his boot.



Typically, Talan was more saddened by the fact he'd have to get another boot...

Talan's relentless charge for thrill-seeking and living life to the max has seen him with a motocross bike in his garage, too. The next motorcycle chapter in his new life is learning how to jump. Nutter. And as we go to press, Talan has just taken Gold for Team GB's ski-team in the European Cup in Austria. He also reached his goal of competing in the Paralympics eight years after the accident.

In between chucking himself down a mountain and showing up riders with two functional legs and a working schlong, Talan has set up Bike Experience with his company T4 Racing – the idea is to get similarly paralysed riders back on a bike by passing-on his experience and knowledge. His track-prepped GSX-R600 SRAD is ready and waiting, and with the help of Castle Combe, he hopes to transform others.

Talan's mental attitude is hugely positive. He has an immense strength of character, and an unreal sense of humour. We didn't know Talan before the accident, but you can bet it's



*He wants to get a set of Rennsports on that...*

made him a stronger person. It's almost as if he's been paralysed for his entire life, the way he's so natural with the situation.

We'll leave you with this little nugget from the man. Meeting him will no doubt alter your outlook on a few things; "I've done nothing that you couldn't do yourself. No matter how impossible you think something might be, if you want it enough, you will get there. Your achievement might not happen overnight, there may well be loads of setbacks and difficulties, but you will get there. And once you get to your goal, you can tell everyone who said you wouldn't make it to fuck off!"

Getting run over by a car does ruin your afternoon, but Talan has proved that with the right attitude, your biking life needn't stop. ☐