

Rallying Back to the Slopes



Chris Lloyd, 44 from Pontypridd in Wales, was involved in a rally car accident in September 2011 when he broke his back, damaged his neck and crushed his spinal cord, leaving him paralysed from the neck down...

Chris was competing at the Caerwent Patriot Stages Rally, a round of the MSA Asphalt Championship, when the accident happened.

"I knew immediately how serious it was," Chris told Pacenotes. "Instantly I knew I was in trouble while lying in the car. The medics and rescue crews were on the scene so quickly and ensured my safe movement to hospital and were superb."

After being rushed to intensive care, he was left unable to walk. With no mobility in his hands, he was reliant on the hospital staff and his family to help with his most basic needs. Chris' medical consultant told him he would never be able to rally a car again or for that matter ski. He had just lost the two biggest passions in his life.

"The hardest part was having my two children, Morgan and Ella, visiting me as I was helpless in bed," he admitted. "I couldn't do anything for myself and thought I had let my family down."



CHRIS LLOYD RECOVERING



Looking at the MRI scans of the damage, Chris understood the challenge he faced, but was determined that his body had the capability to heal itself. It was then he saw a poster for the London 2012 Paralympics and told himself that one day he would be skiing in the Winter Paralympic Games.

After reinventing himself through adopting meditation, self-hypnosis and positive visualisation techniques, Chris was relentless in pushing his body to recover itself. Gradually the feeling in his hands recovered and he began to independently walk a short distance. Even today he still cannot feel hot and cold but he got his hands working to initially 40% of their original use.

Although his body has been able to recover itself, today Chris only has 40% power in his right leg and 50% power in his left, so it takes three or four times more energy and concentration to be able to ski a course.

He entered his first international race in December 2012 and was so poor he didn't even finish. This was a tough time and a reality check, where it seemed like an impossible dream to achieve a World Class standard. Finally, his resilience paid off and in August 2013, he was invited to become a member of the development squad with the British Disabled Ski Team.

He was then invited to Sochi with UK Paralympics as part of their inspiration programme for athletes on the fringes of the ParalympicsGB squad...with a goal to secure a place in the team to compete at the Winter Paralympic Games in PyeongChang in 2018.

Chris told Pacenotes, "Skiing and rallying are so very similar in nature. There is the same amount of adrenaline created by the speed and demands of both disciplines and in both sports, it is the ultimate test of oneself."

He added, "The G-forces are so similar at speed and when you master a stage or a ski run the feeling of satisfaction is immense."

In the past, Chris has rallied in Ireland and has driven cars run by Melvyn Evans too.

"I love rallying there," he said. "It's the atmosphere, the stages and events like Ravens Rock, the ALMC or the Cavan Stages. There is such a super welcome everywhere you go."



CHRIS LLOYD PARALYMPICS 2018

Looking back on the last few years, Chris said: "The journey back was a hard one. The psychological side of it was all very demanding and it took a lot of effort to keep battling and reaching my goal of skiing and rallying again."

With rallying now firmly back on his agenda, Chris received the call he had been waiting seven years for – with the news he had been selected to compete in South Korea at the Winter Paralympics.

In March, Chris raced on the World's biggest stage in the Men's Downhill and Super G events, finishing 20th and 25th respectively.

"Just being at the games was a dream come true," he said, "and I hope my journey will help to inspire others to achieve their own dreams. No matter how hard things may seem, if you have a goal and work hard to achieve it, you can accomplish anything you set your mind to."

With his goal achieved Chris is casting an eye on getting behind the wheel of a rally car again with a view to one day competing in one of the WRC events on snow saying, "It would be nice to mix snow with rallying in somewhere like Sweden."

"I have competed in rallies since the crash but skiing has been my main focus. My son is keen to get involved in rallying too so my immediate attention will be helping him get started in the sport. Then we'll see what the future brings."

