

# A ride that changed his life and put him on the long road to recovery

Scott Harris doesn't even remember the day his life changed forever. But the accident he knows nothing about — except what he has been told — has come to define the man he is and the life he leads. The past 11 years have become a remarkable story of determination and frustration as he is still coming to terms with life as Scott Mark II.

LACHLAN DURLING reports

TWO mates, two dirtbikes, racing up one road to the crest of a hill — but coming sight unseen from opposite sides.

Scott Harris knows nothing about the moment they both hit the top of the rise and then hit each other.

It was a winding track on his family's Christmas Hills property he had ridden 100 times before but on this day it would change Scott's life.

Forever.

Scott took the full impact of the collision while his mate was thrown clear and would come out of it realtively unscathed.

And while Scott did not yet know it, his skull had been so badly fractured his face had become detached, his neck was broken and nerves in his right arm were severed.

While his spinal cord was still intact, it was days before doctors could even confirm he would survive his injuries. From collision to the flight to the Royal Melbourne Hospital to 16 days in a coma the whole life-and-death crisis is a blank for Scott.

In fact it would be two months before his battered brain was able to start putting just the routine into a sequence he could understand and follow.

He was 23 years old, a chunk of his life was wiped from the memory tapes and he was going to have to learn everything again, starting with walking and talking.

To suggest it was a terrifying blur would be a medical understatement.

When he woke from his coma it wasn't that much better; he had post-traumatic amnesia for more than a month — something he described as similar to how a computer would boot up in recovery mode.

Short-term memories just weren't sticking with him.

"Through that time I was talking gibberish and not really understanding what was going on. I couldn't really understand things that were five minutes apart," he said.

"That's just how the brain recovers and in that state you're not allowed visitors or TV and I was sleeping for 22 hours, just waking up for food."

In terms of his injuries, if a professional athlete has a severe concussion they

may be in that state for a day or two, Scott was in the 'twilight zone' for more than a month.

He was then moved to Epworth in Camberwell for rehab where he learnt to walk, talk and eat again — and after two years would be able to run.

In those first few years, his recovery was fast and he was able to reach defined goals set by doctors and his rehab support specialists.

But as time went on his recovery plateaued, something that grew increasingly frustrating.

"It's not like a broken bone that repairs in six weeks. Everything in my body is still repairing and we're almost 11 years on," he said.

"In those later days, the recovery is so slow and so tedious, you just have to concentrate on what's happening right now, what's happening today and what's happening tomorrow.

"There's no point thinking about what's going to happen in two years' time, it's about putting one foot in front of the other and that's what I've been doing the whole way through my recovery, to some extent.

"I have never imagined where I'm going to get to. Goals have been my thing, I've set and worked towards them but I never really saw 'an end'."

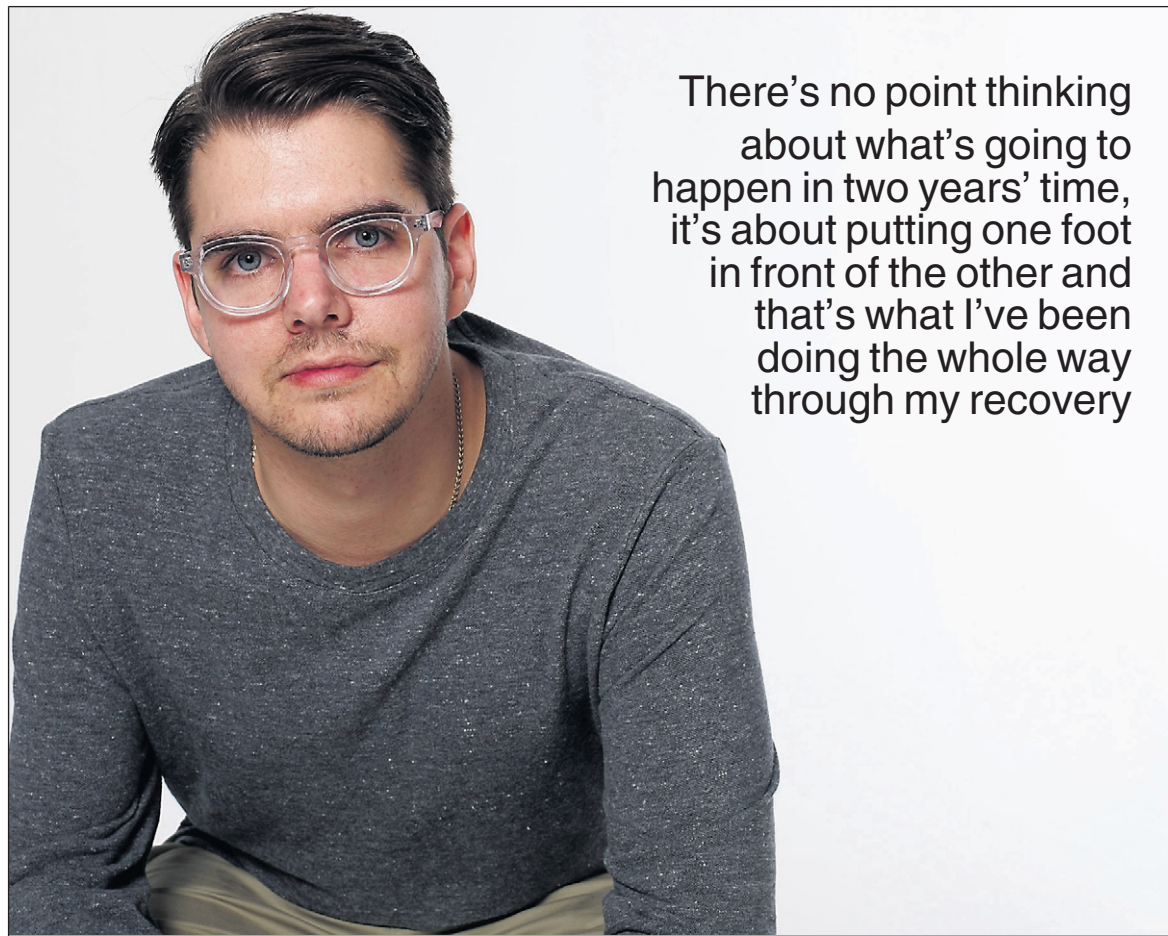
It was this recovery that took its toll on Scott as he came to terms with having to re-wire his brain.

His injuries also meant he thought he couldn't do what he used to — the likes of partying with his mates, dirtbike riding and snowboarding, among the other high-adrenaline sports he used to crave.

"I held onto a bit of resentment because the mindset I had was that I can't participate in life like I used to, I can't participate in any sport," he said.

"My mates and I used to play indoor soccer — I remember going to a party once, all the boys were out on the road kicking the footy and I couldn't do that with them.

"My mindset put a big wall between me and the rest of the world and I just started to resent the position I was in and the fact I couldn't do what I used to do.



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**DETERMINED:** Scott Harris shares his remarkable story of recovery with audiences around the state. He will speak at the Moama Bowling Club for the Murray Business Network dinner tonight.

"I was getting very lonely and that was all in my mind."

With the help of a psychologist and the support of his family, Scott said he was able to bring himself out of that after about two years — and soon after he realised there was a lot more to life than he thought.

"I went away on a snow trip with a group call Disabled Winter Sports Australia, and they showed me what was possible," he said.

"I enjoyed that weekend so much and got home and decided to set a goal to go around the world travelling.

"Prior to my accident I always imagined going overseas like my sister had done, then I had the accident and that stopped that dream.

"When I went on that snow trip I was still in rehab for another 18 months and I was still a bit in fairy land, but I did have that goal to travel."

He kept working toward that goal and set his mind on travelling overseas alone, something he achieved a couple of years after that first snowboarding trip.

Scott travelled to Canada before backpacking through Europe, and it was there he had another life-changing moment.

"One good story to come out of the trip

is that I met a girl in the south of Greece. I was there in a hostel for one day, met her and we went travelling for a few weeks before parting ways for another five months," he said.

"She was a French-Canadian girl and I was an Australian boy in Greece. On the one day I was there, I met up with her and then that blossomed."

Work then drew Scott back to Canada where he messaged Jasmine on Facebook to see if the pair could catch up, which they did.

Scott then invited Jasmine to his brother's wedding in Australia — and as they say, the rest is history.

The pair is now engaged and living in Australia while Scott tours the state, presenting his life story to captivated audiences.

"I haven't always been a completely motivated person. I didn't wake up from a coma and go 'let's start motivating people'," he said.

"As soon as I woke up out of my coma and talking to people who didn't know me prior to the accident I would always be talking about my accident. "It's been my life for 10 years. I haven't had a full-time job as such. I hadn't had much else to talk about.

"My speech therapist basically gave me the reins and said 'okay, come up

with your own presentation. We'll talk about it and then you can practise it'. "The first time I practised, it was in rehab in end of 2010, I practised it to one person, then two, then five, then three of four times later I had spoken to the whole hospital."

And over the past eight years the speech has become engrained in his memory, something Scott said was difficult to achieve with an injured brain.

"I've done this speech in my living room and walking around my bench. My memory is really bad, and one of my goals was to memorise my presentation so that I didn't have to stand up there reading out notes like a nervous 16-year-old," he said.

"I wanted to learn it off by heart. I did learn my whole presentation and basically, it's persistence. I did that in my living room for eight months before I showed it to anybody."

Another of his biggest feats includes writing his book *Crashing Into Potential: Living With My Injured Brain*, which details life after his accident, his overseas adventures and the blossoming of his and Jasmine's love.

Scott will present his story tonight at Moama Bowling Club for the Murray Business Network dinner.

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