

Rehab

By Ashley Wright

A SERIOUS RIDING INJURY CAN MEAN TIME AWAY FROM YOUR BIKE, SOMETIMES INDEFINITELY. BUT THE LOVE OF BIKES KEEPS US PUSHING THROUGH THE RISKS AND SUBSEQUENT UPS AND DOWNS OF RIDING. THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT TIME SPENT ON THE BIKE WILL BE WITHOUT INJURY, BUT REACHING OUT TO FELLOW RIDERS WHO'VE ALSO DONE THEIR TIME HOLDING DOWN THE COUCH WILL ALWAYS HELP GET YOU THROUGH YOUR LOWS. DOCTORS AND PHYSICAL THERAPY ARE IMPORTANT BUT NOTHING HEALS LIKE POSITIVE VIBES. AND THE BEST WAY TO RALLY UP SUPPORT AND HEALING VIBES IS THROUGH COMMUNICATION.

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Troy D'Elia gave everyone quite a scare crashing over a cliff and into the rocks at the Fontana Winter Series #2 race this year. Once he got back up on his feet he managed to shake off one of the scariest wrecks of the day without major injury. Photo: Davis

Dark Timbers – a web-based media community – has been gathering stories from the field of riders who have worked their way through traumatic rehabilitation to lend support to others who are also working through an injury. By rallying together, they intend to boost morale and inspire fellow riders so that the healing can begin.

Wei Wen Tang (CANADA)

"My injury happened in the Bone Yard of the Whistler Bike Park. It was the last run of the night [Isn't it always the last run?] and something told me to just roll down to the GLC drop and call it a night, but for some reason I decided to hit the step up to the big box for the seventh time that day. I rolled in, popped up and right before dropping off, my chain skipped. In desperation I tried to eject but ended up landing full force awkwardly with my knee behind my right wrist. I immediately knew something was not right. Soon, instead of enjoying a brew at the GLC, I was in the emergency room and the doctors were talking about surgery to put my wrist back together.

"A meeting with the surgeon a few days later revealed I had one of the worst hand injuries he had ever seen. I had dislocated my wrist and tore all the ligaments in my hand, which equated to about six months recovery. He then asked me what I did for a living and I told him that I was a car mechanic. He then said that I might never return to my job. He also said that riding was pretty much out of the question. My heart sank. Wrenching was my career, and riding was my passion. The two things I loved so much were suddenly out of the picture. I have been mountain biking for 15 years and if it has taught me anything it's to get to the top of the hill you've got to put in the effort and have the determination to do it; if you do, you reap the rewards of coming back down. The surgeon said the wrist is the hardest to put back together and he couldn't guarantee a return to either of my passions. Hearing this dismal news only made me more determined to heal quickly.

"Though the physical challenge induced by two surgeries to put my hand back together was tough, it didn't begin to match the mental challenge. If only I had listened to my conscience before that seventh gap, I would never have been in this mess. I just didn't know what I was going to do if I couldn't do the things I loved.

"After being in a cast for six months all I could think about was getting back to work. The day I got it off the first thing I did was fix my car. From simple tasks to more complicated repairs I did it all. My wrist was so stiff and unable to bend it actually worked in my favor sometimes for certain movements. I put my mind to make myself adapt to having this condition and wrenching on cars became my rehabilitation. I am glad to be back doing my job, without it I would be a different person.

"I didn't touch a bike for an entire year. I felt like something was missing in my life. Mountain biking has shaped me into the person I am today so I finally bought a new bike and got back into it. Right away I felt a sense of being complete and it's been a great ride ever since."

-Wei

Olly Jelley (UK)

"It was a little bit overcast and had rained a couple of days in August of 2008, but the old quarry we were headed to ride was mainly grit drops, hips and booters hidden amongst the shrubs and broken buildings, so providing it wasn't too windy it'd be a good ride. I'd organized to meet a couple of mates there and we thought we'd check the shore trails in the woods. There were some nice kickers to a grit landing we knew we could do, so we reckoned we'd fancy a pop at. Having not had any sketchy moments yet that day I decided to bomb it first go. The landing on the table between

Wei's story is a common one – crashing while hitting something "just one more time..." has become so commonplace, many riders are superstitious about using the phrase. Luckily for Wei, he'll be able to ride at least "one more time."



two trees was a bit damp so we made a half arsed attempt at drying it off with a hoody and then I went for it. For some reason, I thought it'd be great if I tried to whip it. That was a less than ideal decision, it turns out!

"Wet wooden landings combined with a whipped out back are not a good combination. I went down on my side while a pedal slipped between two slats flipping me, and the bike, over sideways, my foot got caught in the frame, I stopped and the bike didn't. That was the quietest part of the stack; then all three of us heard my ankle snap, literally, no noise but the sound of a large dry stick being cracked!

"It took three hours to get me out of the quarry. The call center for the ambulance service had zero local knowledge and my mates had a massive struggle trying to get our location across to them, eventually the paramedics showed up. The next fun bit was finding out that morphine has little or no affect on me at all, so they just kept me going on NOS (laughing gas) whilst they tried to arrange a helicopter. Then they realized there were no clearings big enough for the heli to land in, so they had to call in the Coastguard to winch me out. At the time, I was high off the NOS and I felt awesome! I even remember laughing when I spun and they hit my leg on the bottom of the helicopter winching me in.

"The early stages of my recovery are quite vague to me. It was my first broken bone, and I was

just going with it and not paying much attention. What I do remember is that the bone was so badly misplaced/shattered that an operation was needed. And I had fracture blisters – essentially giant blood blisters – that meant they couldn't operate, as cutting through them would mean leaving an open wound after surgery. I had an external frame attached to stabilize the joint and help reduce swelling, which lay me on my back for a week. As they waited for the blisters to go down, I was referred to a specialist knee surgeon, then an ankle surgeon, then a shoulder surgeon, then another knee surgeon, who was the one to eventually perform the operation. He cut through the blisters, fixed the joint up with a six-screw plate, and four larger screws. Unfortunately, the operation left me with an infected open wound and joint from the start. After much hassle and a second opinion my leg basically became a benchmark example of 'how not to fix a badly broken ankle'. The next two years were spent trying to recover – the joint had naturally fused together because it had been left too long and fused in a bad position. I've had at least nine operations that I can remember in attempts to heal it.

"I still can't move my ankle joint at all. I'm finding ways of getting around it and still ride, and frankly, I do a lot more than most of my mates. I got a new trail bike, which has helped me keep fit and motivated in periods between operations, and my family have been behind me the whole way.

That moment in time, when despite all of your best attempts, everything has still gone terribly wrong. You find yourself floating through the air, bracing for impact and the crowd goes quiet as everyone holds their breath. Here, Stan Guerrero hopes that at least he looks graceful for all the cameras pointing at him.

Photo: Davis

Jonathon Simonetti is incredibly lucky that he can walk, let alone ride and race his bike again.



My mates think I'm mental, though a lot of them don't know about my leg, I tend not to bother people with it because they look at me like I'm a cripple since I can't bend my ankle. I've just started relearning to skateboard, and my time out gave me a real chance to work on my photography and video skills, which I am now pursuing as a career. Yes, there's been a lot of bad, but I just try and look at the good stuff, and make the best out of what I've got."

-Olly

Jonathon Simonetti (USA)

"My story seems pretty normal to me now because it's something I was forced to deal with, but when I look back on it now it's pretty crazy to think about. The way this all started was I got the opportunity to take a trip up to Whistler, BC and race during the Crankworx festival. After getting in some riding the first two days of the trip on some of the best trails in the world, the day I'd been waiting for finally arrived which was the Canadian Open

Downhill race. I had been doing runs on it the two days prior to the race and I was feeling good, so bright and early I was on my way to the chairlift ready to get in some good last minute practice. This was the first time I got to ride the track with everything fully opened and I was immediately eyeing up this big step down under the chairlift which appeared to be about 30ft out and 20ft down. After checking it out and hitting it twice I was feeling good on it so I chilled for a bit at the bottom after two runs and figured I should get in one last run before the race to make sure I had everything right.

"After riding the first quarter of the track I stopped before the section I knew had the big step down. I rolled in and was hitting my lines perfect up until I got to a long section of exposed, muddy, granite rock slab which was just before the lip, and then something went wrong. Right as my front wheel was about to hit the dirt lip, it washed to my right and next thing I knew I was looking straight at the ground nearly upside down. I hit the landing

directly on the top of my head and my feet flew up from behind over my head, jamming my helmet into my neck brace super hard which gave me an incredibly sharp pain in my mid-upper back. Next thing I knew I was being taken down the hill on a backboard to the ambulance.

"After a few hours in a hospital bed we discovered I had shattered my T-6 vertebrae and compressed my T-7. I was later taken to a hospital two hours away in North Vancouver to see a specialist. I was told I would have to wear a back brace for three months, which meant doing absolutely nothing and being unable to lift anything over ten pounds. I couldn't believe what I would have to deal with and didn't know how I was going to manage without going insane. Luckily I was able to make it to a couple races as a spectator during that time and still got to see all my friends, which really helped keep me positive.

"This all seems like it was an eternity ago because I've been able to ride now for about ten weeks and it almost feels like nothing happened

at all other than the occasional back pain. Aside from that I couldn't be happier to be back riding and racing again with all my friends I missed over summer. I won't ever forget that day nor will I ever wish for anyone to have to go through what I went through, but what this has all taught me is to truly appreciate every day I get on my bike and never take it for granted. I can't thank my friends or family who were up there enough for all their help and support. Thank you and I'll see you all at the races!"

-Jonathon

For all of those who are injured, you aren't alone. ☐

DarkTimbers is a media community that brings style to the mountain through quality visuals and gear. Based out of Rancho Santa Fe, California, DT also sponsors an elite roster of MTB riders and skiers. For more info visit darktimbers.com.