**TEENAGER, 18, TOLD SHE'D NEVER WALK AGAIN AFTER RIDING ACCIDENT MAKES MIRACLE RECOVERY**

BACK IN THE SADDLE

NEWS COPY - WITH PICTURES - By Oliver Pritchard

A teenage show-jumping champion who was told she might never walk again after being involved in a terrible riding accident is back in the saddle three months later.

Scarlet Coughlin, 18, took her first steps in May, just three months after her Thoroughbred Arab cross Bonnie completely crushed her right foot.

The accident happened on February 11 when a speeding van driver startled nine-year-old Bonnie as it overtook the pair on a blind bend down a narrow country lane.

Bonnie panicked and Scarlet was throw off her before she stepped on her foot breaking seven bones and tearing several ligaments.

Her injury was so severe that Scarlet could see bones sticking through her sock after taking her boot off.

Following a two-hour wait for an ambulance, she was rushed to Colchester General Hospital in Essex to undergo emergency surgery.

After the accident Scarlet needed skin grafts, and had bolts put through her shin, heel, and toes as part of a complete reconstruction of her foot.

But things then went from bad to worse when Scarlet's foot got infection in March and she had to spend a week in hospital and have another operation.

The second operation was a success and she is successfully fighting the infection, allowing her to get off crutches and begin walking again in May.

She said: "It feels great. I am really happy to be to walking again. I feel a lot more positive about being able get around and not having someone having to carry all my stuff for me.

"It was rubbish when I went into hospital for the second time with the infection about a month ago.

"I thought it was all going to go wrong. I spent a week there and they opened my foot up and re-operated but eventually it got better."

After the operation doctors told her to expect a minimum six-month battle to ever walk properly again.

But Scarlet, who is still taking antibiotics, defied the odds and took her first steps in May.

She bought Bonnie two years ago but was unable to look after her while she was out of action.

Now she hopes to have her back and is planning her first ride as soon as the pair are reunited.

The pair have won around 30 showjumping and eventing competitions and Scarlet hopes to be back in the fold in September.

The sixth form student said: "I have just been getting better and better every day, and within the last week I have finally been able to walk again.

"I know I've still got work to do, and I can't drive or anything like that at the moment, but it has been getting a lot better and it is good to just be able to go outside.

"Hopefully, from now on, things will keep improving. I've got a CT scan on June 13 and I'm hoping that will show that walking on my foot hasn't done any harm.

"If that's the case, then I can start to do more and build up to doing some physio."

Scarlet ,of Tolleshunt D'Arcy, Essex, spent 12 days in Royal London Hospital under the care of a foot and ankle specialist after the accident.

The driver who caused the accident while she was out with two other riders in Feering, Essex is yet to be caught.

Scarlet, who is hoping to start an international equine and agricultural business university course in September, said: "I think they have given up looking for him now to be honest.

"It is a bit annoying but it is just one of those things that happen. I'm trying to stay positive about the whole situation."

A keen sportswoman, Scarlet was told at the time that she will never be able to play netball, basketball, or hockey again. She still faces a wait to before she can get back on the sports field but is now able to ride her beloved Bonnie again.

She said: "The doctors told me that my foot won't actually let me run or jump again, and if I were to break it again, it would be really serious.

"It still feels quite stiff when I walk on it, but hopefully it will eventually stop hurting.

"Everyone is delighted that I'm back walking again, and now I actually look like I'm improving and getting better, whereas before I didn't."

And while Scarlet was forced to cancel summer plans to work at Camp America in California, she has got a job working on the harvest this summer.

She revealed the biggest bonus of her recovery has been the resurgence in her social life.

She said: "The best thing about walking again is being able to see my friends without someone having to come and carry all of my stuff.

"I have spent a lot of time in the past week just going out for dinner with my friends, and enjoying being active again."

Essex Police confirmed that no arrests have yet been made, but are re-appealing to the public for information on the driver involved.

He was driving a white van, and officers would also like to speak to anyone who was in the area at the time who saw what happened, particularly the driver of a silver Vauxhall Astra who stopped and helped at 2pm on Thursday, February 11.

Any information should be passed to Paul Barber in Essex Police's Casualty Reduction Section on 101.

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