

WE'RE INSPIRED BY...

PETE GORE

ROAD TO RECOVERY

A ROAD ACCIDENT PUT PETE GORE IN A WHEELCHAIR. ONE YEAR LATER, HE'S TRAINING FOR HIS FIRST IRONMAN

Words Alison Hamlett Photos James Lampard



Backstronger
Pete, pictured
here at the scene
of his crash, has
overcome his
initial fears to
train hard again



Going under the knife

A TEAM of three orthopaedic surgeons spent seven hours putting Pete back together. He'd suffered six breaks, including both hands. A titanium bar was inserted in his left hand and a dynamic hip screw was used to repair his left hip. His right collarbone was plated and pinned too. He can expect to set off metal detectors for the rest of his life: all the metal work will stay in forever.

"I've set my sights on the Ironman and while it's important to have a goal, I'm going to enjoy the journey too"



Following his accident, Pete had to rebuild strength in his shoulders to swim again

"I remember shouting, 'no, no, no!' then the car hit me. The impact broke my right collarbone, shoulder blade and hand. My helmet saved my life but I still got a nasty gash on my forehead. I caved in the car door before bouncing off it and landing on my left side."

Four miles in, he was hit by a car. "I was going at 25mph and the driver was going even faster, so I couldn't avoid him," he recalls.

Pete had discovered triathlon 12 months previously, when he decided to lose a few pounds and get in shape after his weight tipped 15 stone. He bought a bike, started cycling the six miles to work and lost a stone in five weeks. Spurred on by this success, he took up running and finished his local 10K in 40 minutes.

He'd been a good swimmer as a child so triathlon was the logical next step and in August 2010 Pete finished his first race. With the end of the season fast approaching, he packed in as many races as possible and when the 2011 season started, he couldn't wait to race. "My times were improving and my weight had dropped to 11-and-a-half stone. It was a real transformation."

Just a year after taking up triathlon, Pete entered his first open-water race;

the Emergency Services Triathlon at Holme Pierrepont in Nottingham. "I loved it! I borrowed a wetsuit from a friend and really enjoyed the swim. It was also the first time I'd raced on my new Trek Speed Concept bike so I was thrilled to finish 23rd out of more than 200 competitors."

Four days later, Pete was lying in the middle of a busy road, blinded by the blood trickling into his eyes from a gash on his forehead. His police training helped him to remain calm but he knew his injuries were serious. His left hip, left leg and pelvis were severely damaged. "They gave me three bottles of entonox gas [the anaesthetic gas and air] and pumped me full of morphine but the pain was still excruciating," he recalls.

A CT scan revealed the full extent of his injuries. As well as suffering six breaks, the damage to Pete's left hip threatened to affect the blood supply to his leg. "They told me that in the worst

case scenario, my leg would be taken off." Three surgeons spent seven hours putting Pete back together the following morning. The plating and pinning went well – his leg was saved – and Pete moved onto a ward, where he spent 10 days recovering. Friends and family dropped in to show their support, but his son, five-year-old Harrison, didn't visit dad until day three. "Harrison looked so worried, standing at the end of my bed, but then he spotted the catheter, and asked if that was my wee, and that lightened the mood."

His stay in hospital gave Pete plenty of time to think about the future, and wonder whether triathlon would continue to be a part of his life. "The first few days after the crash were tough. I was extremely angry, in a lot of pain and really depressed. It felt like all the progress I'd made, all the fitness I'd worked so hard to gain, had been snatched away from me. My wife Kelly asked the surgeons if I'd walk again, and they said we'd have to wait and see. I wasn't sure I'd ever swim again either; as well as a break in my right collarbone, there was a big hole in my shoulder blade."

Pete went from training every day to



Pete's first few days in hospital were tough the so support from friends and family was invaluable

doing nothing. "I couldn't move. I couldn't do anything for myself. I lost all my dignity." His colleagues at Derbyshire Police visited often and tried to keep him positive but he still spent many hours feeling helpless.

The accident was tough on Pete's family too. "My wife saw me at a lower point than I've ever been before. I was at a crossroads: I could either be the victim of the crash for the rest of my life or I could make the best recovery possible. Kelly knew that I needed triathlon to get back to my old self and completely supported my decision.

The breakthrough in Pete's recovery came two months after the crash when he visited physiotherapist Sara Jeffs for the first time. "I'd never had physiotherapy before, so I wasn't sure it would work. But after one session with Sara, I quickly realised that I would be able to get fit again, and that really lifted me out of my depression."

Pete visited Sara's clinic twice a week and after just four weeks of treatment was back in the pool. "I remember swimming eight lengths of breaststroke. It took me half an hour. When I got out, I sat in a changing cubicle and cried. I thought: 'I can't do this,' but Sara kept working on my shoulder and eventually made a breakthrough."

Pete joined his local gym and started to run on the treadmill, while continuing his twice-weekly physio sessions. Nine months after the crash, he ran nine miles. The final hurdle, getting back on his bike, proved to be a greater mental barrier than a physical challenge.

"After the crash, I felt really anxious about riding on the road again so I borrowed a friend's bike and started with a short trail at Sherwood Pines

Forest Park. I was enjoying it until I came to a descent. I had to stop when I began to pick up speed. My heart was in my mouth. I visualised the car hitting me, which really shook me up, but I kept going and did about seven miles. It was a big step.

"My first road ride was with friends from Bolsover and District Cycling Club. Riding in a group gave me confidence but the accident still affects me. I'm very cautious now: I put lights on my bike, even in daylight, and I always wear a high-vis gilet."

Just 13 months after the crash, Pete completed the inaugural Hucknall Sprint Triathlon with his friends and family supporting him every step of the way. "I was a bit embarrassed when I came into the transition area because everyone gave me such an enormous cheer. I felt tired but that support gave me a big boost for the run." His stunning sixth place finish gave him confidence to target the Challenge Henley Half Distance this September. "It appealed because the bike section is on closed roads," he laughs.

During his first season as a triathlete Pete concentrated on his speed, but since the collision that focus has changed. "The crash has definitely slowed me down and made me realise that life is a marathon not a sprint. I don't want to rush my recovery. I've set my sights on an Ironman and while it's important to have a goal, I'm going to enjoy the journey too." With his special brand of dignified determination, Pete's sure to succeed.

The driver who hit Pete claims not to have seen him. He pleaded guilty to driving without due care and attention and has been prosecuted. PLUS



SHARE YOUR STORY

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The physio's view Sara Jeffs



Physiotherapist Sara Jeffs (phoenixphysioandlaser.com) worked with Pete for six months. "I will never forget the first time Pete walked into the clinic. It was three months

after the crash but he was still on crutches. His list of injuries had shocked me as I read his case notes. My heart went out to him.

He thought he'd never do another triathlon or get back the fitness that he'd worked so hard to achieve before the crash.

His weight-loss success in his first year as a triathlete was incredible. He'd achieved so much in a short space of time, and that was fresh in his memory. We talked about him competing in a triathlon in the future, but on day one he couldn't even lift his arms. I had to ensure that his ultimate goal didn't overwhelm him, so we included

small steps and specific exercises that would help him to get back into tri.

I treated Pete twice a week using a variety of techniques. I stretched him out manually, massaged and mobilised the areas where he'd become weak, and showed him exercises to build strength. I also used laser therapy. It uses light to stimulate the mitochondria in cells, accelerating the healing process and improving the quality of the healing, which is important when it comes to injuries like the fractures and muscle wastage that Pete had suffered.

He thought physio was good because we talked about how his physical condition affected his mental state.

It was so satisfying to see Pete go from the man who'd walked into the clinic on crutches to watching him compete in a triathlon again."

"The crash has definitely slowed me down and made me realise that life is a marathon not a sprint"