

Help at hand for injured bikers

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 Special to PSN

If you know anything about the hazards of motorcycling, chances are you know of an injured motorcyclist.

It seems that everyone who gets around on two wheels has a story to tell about coming close to a spill or major accident caused by car drivers pulling out without looking (or looking and still pulling out), unsafe road surfaces and other obstacles. Many, sadly, did have the accident, and wear the scars to prove it.

According to ICBC statistics, there are more than 2,000 motorcycle "crash incidents" reported each year in BC - injuring around 1,200 people and killing 40.

Reasons behind this - ranging from inattentive car drivers to risk-taking riders (although many more of the former) - or even the strategies for making your riding safer, the reality is that there are thousands of people in BC whose lives have been changed through injuries suffered in a motorcycle accident.

There are a number of organizations working behind the scenes that can offer assistance to downed riders. The problem is that few have heard of them.

Often the first to contact crash victims, the Association for Injured Motorcyclists (AIM) is a registered non-profit society created in 1983 to deal with immediate needs of accident victims and their families.

With six chapters throughout BC, AIM offers a direct response: hospital visits, on-call lawyers (who are also riders), help with immediate cash needs, pickup of bikes from accident scenes, new clothes for downed riders being released from hospital and the many other issues that arise after a rider takes a spill.

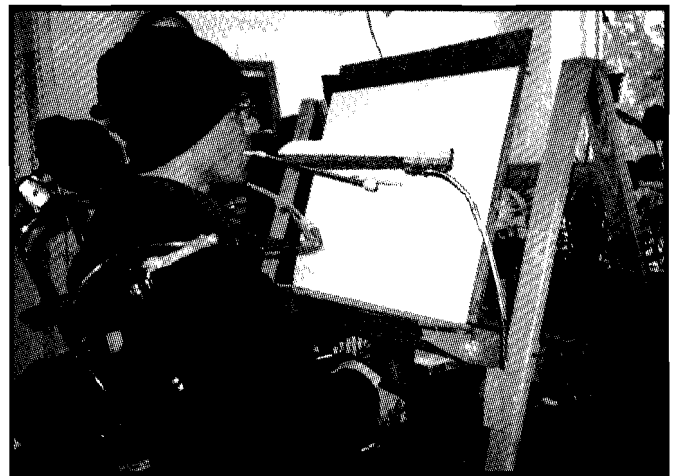
"It started with a handful of motorbike riders, who knew each other, that all had experienced problems getting the information they needed after a motorcycle accident," explained AIM membership secretary Greg Swallow. "Everyone decided to pool their resources. AIM has got bigger since, and can offer more."

As much work as this group does, many injured riders find themselves with the kind of long-term problems - like coming to terms with living with a disability - that require help from a variety of sources. Indeed, it's difficult to even imagine what a major injury would do to your life until you talk to those with firsthand experience.

Art Jonker was critically injured in a dirt-bike accident in September 1977, at the age of 30.



AIM DIRECTOR TED ALLEN HONORS SOCIETY FOUNDERS SKIP STEWART (left) and ED BELL (right) with PLAQUES, at GF STRONG REHAB., VANCOUVER, THIS SUMMER



FORMER DIRT BIKE RIDER, ARTIST ART JONKER, with power easel that enables him to create on canvas, making mouth-painted masterpieces.

Milestones



SUPERCLAMP, displayed at recent Abbotsford snowmobile show by Randall and Don Bowman, assisted by PSN Personality Julie, clamps down snowmobiles in a minute. Made by BowDriks Ind. Ltd., Calgary, AB, clamp holds sled skis firmly to trailer, eliminating need for front tie-downs. Padlocked Super-Clamp also offers measure of theft protection www.superclamps.net

Disabled, creative talent, brought together by Tetra

The Tetra Society of North America is always on the lookout for new clients and volunteers.

The former includes anyone with a significant disability that faces some kind of barrier they need to overcome, while volunteers that make it all happen, come from a variety of technical backgrounds. Most are engineers, or otherwise mechanically minded, although carpenters and health professionals are also represented.

Founded in 1987, The Tetra Society of North America is an independent non-profit that recruits skilled technical volunteers to design and fabricate custom assistive devices for people with disabilities. More than 300 Tetra volunteers are organized into 39 Chapters coast-to-coast.

Over the years, Tetra volunteers have completed more than 4,000 projects, ranging in complexity from a door opener fashioned from a coat hanger to a clock designed to display time as a bar graph.

The strength of the organization is that the needs of two groups are met: people with disabilities receive an "enabling" device, while skilled volunteers get an opportunity to exercise their creativity and ingenuity to make a difference for someone.

It's a win/win situation; Tetra simply acts as the catalyst.



ROLAND, of Western Powersports, Langley, BC, smiles thru snoshow. PS: Thanks for the Nitrogen fill for the tires on PSN's V-Max!

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Power Sport News (PSN) & Empower published by WheelWrite Publishing Ltd., Marlborough Tower, 130 West 14th Street, North Vancouver, BC, V7M 1N9 All rights reserved.

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Helping hands

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He took a 250cc bike out on Nanaimo's Wastelands Motocross track for his first ride on that machine. Unfamiliar with its handling, he lost control on a jump and hit the ground head first.

The impact shattered the fifth vertebra in his neck, leaving Jonker quadriplegic. After two months' intensive care, he was transferred to Vancouver's G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre. He recalls going in full of hope about the future, but gradually becoming jaded, until Art found a new outlet – art.

"I'm an optimist, but it got to a point when I could not figure out what to do next," he recalls. "It kind of wore me down."

For an active person – who still can't abide being a "watcher" when he could be a "doer" – it was humbling. Eventually, Jonker was cajoled into trying mouth painting.

He had sketched as a child, and so one day attempted using a mouth-stick paintbrush in the G.F. Strong art therapy room. He was pleased with the result. Even better, painting was new, something impossible to compare to his life before the accident.

He returned to his apartment to work on his new skills – incidentally, made possible by AIM's donation of \$7,500 for an automated door opener, which Jonker needed because he could not use a key himself.

It became clear that Jonker could only paint a

small area without an assistant to keep moving his canvas. He needed an automated way of doing this, and was steered to the Tetra Society of North America, an independent non-profit that invents customized assistive devices for people with disabilities. Tetra was formed 19 years ago by current Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan, to connect engineers wanting to volunteer their time to people with disabilities needing some kind of device created. There are now 37 Canadian chapters and two more in the United States – all based on volunteerism within the local community.

Tetra volunteer Gregg Harris created a workable easel late in 2000, which developed over two years into the world's first power easel. It has helped Jonker to develop his art to the point where it can become a commercial venture. There have been other Tetra projects for Jonker since, relating to day-to-day living (a computer stand and a proposed system for answering the phone), that allow him expression on a daily basis.

Dan LeBlanc, aged 28, became a ventilator-dependent quadriplegic in a dirt-bike accident in Yukon two years ago, and spent a year at G.F. Strong.

"About 18 months ago I was at G.F. Strong, sitting in my room feeling not too good," he recalled.

"Someone came in with a leaflet about the Disabled Sailing Association of BC (DSA BC) and gave it to me.



Picture by Mits Naga

INNOVATION: TETRA VOLUNTEER David Graham (left) and client Dan LeBlanc, of Vancouver, BC. Graham's technical genius enabled LeBlanc, a quadriplegic following a dirt-bike accident, to sail again.

"It gave me a little hope for the future, but I was thinking, first how am I going to fit into the boat going to fit into the boat because I have this great big ventilator?"

He asked his recreational therapist, Mary Clark, how it would be possible to bring his ventilator onboard a small sailboat. She wanted to make it happen, knowing that LeBlanc used to sail and surf before his accident – and that having sporting pursuits was vital to his well-being.

She called around the world to try to find a boat for her client, before she contacted Tetra – a sister organization of the DSA.

"It took time and a lot of effort from a lot of people, but eventually I was sitting on a sailboat with the biggest smile on my face," said LeBlanc. "Finally, I was out of my wheelchair and in a sailboat."

Tetra volunteer David Graham worked on a team effort with LeBlanc's recreational and physiotherapists,

which involved months developing prototypes and mock-ups before they were satisfied the system was safe enough to go out on the water. LeBlanc sailed five times last summer with an instructor, and intends to go out solo when DSA sailing resumes in 2007.

"It lifted me up, just to be meeting people and on the water again. Sailing is very important to me, because it's kinda hard for me to do something outdoorsy. But before my accident I was always outdoors doing stuff."

For more information:
Association for Injured Motorcyclists: 604-580-0112
www.aimvancouver.com

Tetra Society of North America:
604-688-6464 ext. 108
www.tetrasociety.org

Art Jonker's website:
www.artsgallery.biz

Disabled Sailing Association of BC:
www.disabledfoundation.org/dsa/index.html

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