Posted on:
30 January 2023

Ahead of International Women's Day on March 8, former jockey Kristy Banks is showing the cowboys a thing or 2 about speed and agility as she vies for the 2023 Queensland Barrel Racing title.

While rodeos are a male-dominated sport, Kristy, a NDIS participant, is leading the way in barrel racing after getting back in the saddle following a serious fall during a race on New Year's Eve in 2011.

"It was just a normal day at the races until I unfortunately clipped heels with the horse in front of me and fell," Kristy, 41, said.

"I was fully conscious through the whole incident. I knew there was no movement in my legs.

"It was pretty scary, not knowing what your life will be like never being able to walk again."

But, within a few months, the veteran jockey with more than 400 wins was back riding again, this time in barrel racing, where the rider and horse race around a course of barrels using speed and agility.

There was, however, a problem.

Once on top of the horse, due to her paraplegia, she had poor balance. Then she found the answer.

"I saw a woman on YouTube barrel racing in America with her legs strapped into the saddle," Kristy said.

When Kristy became a NDIS participant in 2017, her quality of life improved dramatically.

Kristy's positive experience since joining the Scheme reflects her broader cohort.

The number of participants over 15 years old who reported improved life satisfaction grew by 42%.

“If my husband couldn’t take me to an event, I’d miss out because I couldn’t get on the horse without help but now with my supports in place, it’s a relief to know I can have some independence back,” Kristy said.

Kristy’s NDIS supports include an adapted motorhome fitted with a wheelchair lift, a modified horse float with a hoist to help get Kristy in the saddle, and a 4WD wheelchair as well as

support workers.

“Without the hoist, I previously needed someone to lift me up into the saddle,” she said.

“The four-wheel-drive wheelchair also makes it easier to get myself around the property and get jobs done.

“What I can’t do myself, I can get help through my NDIS funding.

“I have a friend who migrated from Ukraine, and she was in awe of what Australia does for people with a disability.

“The NDIS has been fantastic for me. It’s given me my independence back and allowed me to do the things I love.”

Increased independence is a trend among 78% of participants aged over 15 who have found they have more choice and control over how they spend their free time (after five years on the NDIS).

Kristy, who took to competitive barrel racing instantly, has already won three titles in the premier division.

“I was devasted initially because I knew I’ll never be a jockey again, but I also didn’t think I could still compete like I do now,” Kristy said.

“I’ve always loved barrel racing as a kid. I love the faster side of competition and the adrenalin rush you get.”

The other half of this success story is a horse hand-picked for a rider with a disability.

“My previous horse, he was pretty smart, and he knew I didn’t have the use of my legs, so I had to find a horse that would cater to my riding style,” Kristy said.

Enter Bob, who Kristy bought from a central Queensland farmer.

“Bob’s an easy-going dude. I knew he was suitable for me as soon as I hopped on him,” Kristy said.

Kristy is in training for the new season, which begins on February 26 at Rosewood, southwest of Brisbane.

Queensland Barrel Racing Association president Shelly Frame says Kristy is a star on the barrel-racing circuit, where she often competes against more than 50 other riders.

“On her day, she is unbeatable,” Shelly said. “We have one of the best competitions in Australia and Kristy is the best of the best.”

“Kristy's got so much support through her family, friends and the NDIS and that's why she is so successful in barrel racing.

She’s exceeded all expectations and will be hard to beat again this year.”

When she’s not tearing around barrels with Bob, Kristy is busy raising two boys – Nash, 9, and Nova, 8 months, along with husband Dale Groves.

“Nash is an accomplished little horseman and I’ve already got a pony for Nova, so once he’s walking, he will be riding,” Kristy said.

Together, they manage a 40ha property in Yalangur, 160km west of Brisbane, spelling horses from the nearby Darling Downs region.

“I grew up around horses,” Kristy said. “Nothing has changed, I still love being around them and with my supports in place, I can.”

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