



Official Release

Rescue Helicopter Survivor Eyes Up Ultimate Comeback

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Rescue helicopter survivor and 'hard man' hill country farmer Harvey Nelson is eyeing the ultimate comeback to celebrate his accident recovery – another tilt at the notorious Coast to Coast enduro event.

When he lines up on the start line next February, it'll mark two years since a fall off his horse that brutally snapped his femur and tibia and very nearly saw him lose his leg.

Seven gruelling surgeries, a painstaking skin graft and months of rehabilitation have left Harvey more determined than ever to get back doing what he loves. He's recently been back in the saddle and on his bike one year on from his horrific accident that thanks to the Hawke's Bay rescue helicopter, saved his life and limb.

Taking on the country's toughest endurance event isn't new to Harvey, he completed the 243 kilometre event for the first time back in 2023. Whilst feeling a few nerves committing to the two-day solo competition, he's backing himself to put his best foot forward.

"My physio has always said there's no reason why I couldn't one day have another crack at it. I liken it to biting off more than you can chew and then chewing like crazy to get it done!"

Being back on his bike and in the saddle has Harvey reflecting on just how far he's come.

"Mustering on horseback is what I know and love, the accident that day was nothing the horse did wrong. It was just bad luck and I'm so grateful I'm here to tell the tale. I'm

thrilled the rescue helicopter picked me up that day because I probably wouldn't be here otherwise.”

Time and tenacity have helped Harvey through the aftermath of his accident and he now goes nowhere on the farm without his personal locator beacon – a purchase made thanks to his aunt and uncle Jill and Rod Dean.

“I didn't have a locator beacon or any cellphone coverage the day of the accident but have since got a P.L.B., it's a must. I would have only been lying there for a matter of minutes instead of five hours if I had one. I now carry it on my belt and urge anyone who lives and works in remote locations to get one, it could save your life.

“We all think ‘it won't happen to me – but it does and it did.’ The Hawke's Bay rescue helicopter is a service we can't do without so we all need to get behind it whenever we can.

“There's no way six men could have pulled me out of where I was lying at the bottom of a gorge, my rescue would have been physically impossible without the chopper. The pilot that day was pretty gutsy, there was not much room for error and it's amazing he did what he did.”

Overcoming adversity seems to be a hallmark trait of Harvey. He and wife Rachel and their young family suffered significant devastation following damage to their Waimarama farm in the floods of 2022, resulting in the loss of their home. A relocation to an Elsthorpe farm block earlier last year has offered a new start and a chance to set new goals.

“When the accident happened I was really fit and healthy thanks to my training for Coast to Coast at the time, my surgeon is convinced that's what helped save my leg and aided my ability to heal,” says Harvey.

“It's been a tough haul for my family, they've been at my beck and call for a year, our youngest boys Sam and Joe helped us shift house and run the farm, stepping up doing things kids their age shouldn't have to, while Rach has been my rock. They've been outstanding.”

As for Harvey's leg. “I've been told by my specialists that I may not need a bone graft after all. It'll never be a skinny shank like the other leg, but that doesn't worry me. I'm not about to hit the catwalk anytime soon!”

Harvey laughs, “it's halved in size and the specialists say it's ‘a good flap!’. They're keen to do a bit of liposuction on it but to be honest, they've probably got more needy patients than me. I've always had chicken legs so having one bulky one is fine by me.”

ENDS.

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