

# **From wheelchair to saddle – a stroke survivor tells his amazing story**

May 15, 2013

“My name is Paul Conway, a 53 year old stroke survivor, once a well-known marathon runner competing in many countries around the world and Europe.

2003 was to be my year with so much to look forward to with the veterans Over 40's Marathon World Championships in Melbourne as the goal. Training was going to plan clocking 105 miles a week, running 3 times a day – the punishment I put my body through to succeed.

Then November came and my life fell apart. I suffered a stroke. My life changed that day. Not only did I lose the use of my whole left side, I lost all my drive and zest for life, I just gave up on everything. Suffering bouts of depression and having uncontrollable fits, many times I thought of ending my life at these low episodes.

A good friend told me about Equine Therapy and then one day took me to visit the RDA Unicorn Centre in Hemlington, Teeside. Sitting in the gallery watching all the disabled children having riding lessons, all of them smiling as they rode past, made me feel ashamed of myself giving up so easily.

I have now started to take lessons myself and it has changed my life so much. My body has become supple. I won't lie, I was terrified at my first lesson but my instructor Heidi has a vast knowledge of disabilities caused through stroke and head injuries and she and all the staff instil confidence in me.

I now try everything. My mind is clear and I don't get depressed. I even walk with a stick now, no more wheelchair for me! The Centre has its own physiotherapist if needed. I cannot put into words how much Equine Therapy has changed my life for the better, both mind and body. My spirits are up as I have a goal to achieve with every session.

I have been for my consultant review and he was amazed at my transformation since starting Equine Therapy. I am on my feet, the epilepsy has settled and I haven't had any down and dark days since starting to ride. I'm so focussed now on the future, life doesn't stop after a stroke but opens other doors. Who knows what can be done until we try it.”