

“I am 99.99% of what I was before”

One year ago, a few weeks before he was supposed to compete in Swoop Freestyle FAI World Championships 2017, Australian skydiver Miles Cottman was speed flying in the French Alps with friends. While flying down the side of a mountain, Miles hit a tree and his canopy collapsed, sending him crashing to the ground. At first he didn't realise the impact of the accident, and was mostly thinking of getting his equipment off, so it wouldn't break. But what he later would learn was that he had a broken back, two broken legs and internal injuries. The horrific crash sent him on a very long journey to recovery, from coma to going back to the place where he had his very first skydive to take his first gentle steps back into the air, and this year he is returning for Swoop Freestyle FAI World Championships 2018.



We have talked to him about his recovery process, and what it's like to rise from a body so broken, it can't even move, to be ready for the full return to the sport.

Tell us about your first jump after the accident?

“It was six weeks after I had the last surgery, and I mean that felt like the longest time. As for the day it was a bit cloudy, not the best conditions. The lady on the ground was actually the one that taught me to skydive and I went back to the same place that I learned to skydive. I was very nervous, but right away it was like being back home, like back to everything that I was used to before the accident”.

How did you react when you landed safely on the ground?

“I was a bit teary for sure, already when the parachute opened and I could feel that my back wasn't hurting, it was a teary moment. When I got to the ground the lady asked my “How was it?” and I couldn't speak at all, she was like “okay, I'll come back and talk to you in five minutes”. I was just very very happy and needed time to understand it all”.

When did you decide this is not going to be the end of skydiving for me?

“It was never really a thought, and that was something that really annoyed my mother! I had been in a coma for three days, I wasn't really asking questions about how damaged I was, and my mother was like: “Don't you care?” But it sort of never crossed my mind that I wasn't going to be jumping again. The first time it crossed my mind was when my mother asked me about it, actually. I was sure that I was going to be jumping again, just sure”.

Do you feel more fragile in any way?

“I think talking with the surgeons and the doctors made me 100% sure that my bones are not going to be easier to break just because I have broken them once and because there is some metal in them now. I am just taking it all very logically, so it hasn't diminished my confidence in any way, but it has definitely taken me time to get the same confidence. I was a bit shaky and nervous at the first couple

of jumps, but now I am 99.99% of what I was before. I am certainly back at my normal level of confidence”.

How has the skydiving community handled your journey back? Do you feel they treat you differently after your accident? “I was actually really worried about that, I mean my “thing” was canopy piloting, and I crashed it. So I was nervous that I would be viewed differently, but from the very first day I got so much support from the community. My sister started a gofundme.com page to help me cover the medical bills, and many people that I only met once in the skydiving community have supported me. It’s the friends and family that don’t skydive, they don’t really understand my desire to get back into it and they are more concerned now”.

Do you have any advice for other skydivers that are recovering from an accident right now? “I was a pain in the beginning, but my mother is a very strong woman, she put up with all my crap. It’s a silly old cliché, but you have to stay positive and see the silver lining, you have to realise that it can always be worse and if you have a goal, try to stick to it. Remember, you can do some pretty amazing things and I would like to say: I would love to hear from them and would be more than happy to help where I can, so never hesitate to get into contact!”

Contact press@swoopfreestyle.com for access to full interview.