

# Ain't no mountain high enough for Hill



DANIELLE HILL with her daughter, Brooke

By PAUL COURTS

## ON THE surface, Danielle Hill was in a terrible mess as she lay in a hospital bed.

Injuries suffered from her horrific fall at Globe Derby the day before included a sunken eye socket, broken jaw, cheek and nose.

For doctors, the biggest concern was Hill's right eye, which had lost vision after taking the brunt of the impact when trodden on by the only horse in the field following her – Il Sogno.

Hill's injuries required several operations, which were also hampered by a bout of pneumonia.

While those scars were in the open for all to see, Hill was in an even worse condition under the surface, with the 'cuts' a lot deeper.

South Australia's leading reinswoman at the time, Hill quickly slipped into a state of shock upon realisation of her situation, which was promptly replaced by depression and despair.

Life as she knew it was over...or so she thought!

"I was in a dark place, I couldn't really see much of a future," Hill said.

"The first time I looked in a mirror I was horrified, it was too much to take on board.

"I was worse than shocked...I just broke down crying and slipped into depression.

"That was the hardest part to overcome, the depression, I just felt I had nothing left.

"I couldn't even go out in public as I couldn't accept it myself."

Although she had family, friends and colleagues offering support, Hill eventually came to the conclusion that the only person who could help her was herself.

With her inner-strength taking command over her doubts, Hill battled her way out of depression and into a new frame of mind.

"I was in the hospital for a month before I even had my first surgery, it was just so depressing and I was getting worse," Hill declared.

"In those dark days, and there were a lot of them, I never thought I'd get back to normality.

"There was a huge adjustment period and a lot to take in.

"At first I couldn't even go to the bathroom without passing out, then I couldn't bear to go outside.

"I needed someone with me to help me get around, which added to the depression.

"I told myself 'I like a challenge' and this was my biggest one that I had to get over, so I met it full on.

"I started training myself to adjust to the loss of vision on one side and how to work around it and overtime I got better."

Fast forward two years and Hill is "better than ever."

The physical scars are still there, but for Hill, the quality of life has exceeded any plans she had before the accident.

Amazingly, Hill credits the worst period of her life as the catalyst for the great times she is now experiencing.

Not only is she back driving – and winning – Hill is in a loving relationship with premier reinsman, David Harding, with the pair the proud parents of a beautiful daughter, Brooke.

Had anyone suggested the race fall on May 17, 2010 was "for the best" to Hill at the time, however, she admits she "would've lost the plot."

"I am a completely changed person and for the better," Hill said.

"I have a totally different outlook on life and it is just so stupid that it was something this horrible that improved me.

"Not only do I see things differently, my values have changed, including motherhood.

"I had no plans of being a mum before the accident, now I can't understand how I could've wanted anything else.

"The accident has given me my best gift in life, my daughter."

Spurred by Brooke's birth in 2011, Hill set her mind to a new challenge – returning to the sulky.

The first and obvious obstacle was the loss of vision, but that was soon dismissed by doctors.

"It doesn't make a difference," Hill declared.

"I've still got great overall vision, with my peripheral vision so strong even the doctors are surprised.

"The biggest push I had to fully get over the accident was the ambition to be back driving and around horses.

"Then there was the drive and desire to prove people who said I couldn't do it wrong.

"Like every driver, I hear the horses on my outside coming, and I turn to see, the only difference is I have to turn a fraction more than I once did."

Admitting to harbouring a few nerves as she returned to the races, Hill revealed 'ring rust' was the only factor she noticed once the competition started.

"I wasn't overly rapt with my first few drives as I was just so rusty after a couple of years," Hill declared.

"I definitely put a lot of pressure on myself thinking I would pick up where I left off and didn't allow for the fact the rust had to crumble away."

Hill completed the rust 'crumble' at Globe Derby last weekend when she partnered Jacobs Well to victory – her first Saturday night win along the comeback trail.

That followed on from her initial success with Hair Trigger during a country meeting just 10 days earlier.

"I thought he was a good chance before the race, so I was pretty keen to get out there and get that win on the board," Hill said.

"It was a terrific feeling and hopefully things can continue to flow.



DANIELLE HILL during one of her operations

"I haven't got any massive goals, but there is one thing I would like to achieve.

"I know it might be unrealistic, but I want to get 100 winners in a season again."

In 2008/09, Hill became the first South Australian reinswoman to reach a century, with her 122 wins placing her second on the Drivers' Premiership behind Harding.

She was on target to repeat the dose the following year only to be halted by the accident.

"Like I said, it may be unrealistic, but it's something to aim for," Hill said.

"If there is one thing I've learned, winning or losing races is not the most important thing in the world.

"It's just a part of my world, which is so much wider now because of that day."