

HEATHER MILLS

Winter Paralympian



▶ **Heather Mills is training for the 2014 Winter Paralympic Games in Russia. At 45 and a relative novice on the slopes Heather's progress is simply inspirational. She had her first trial with the British disability skiing team in December 2010 and officially joined the 19-strong development squad last year. New athletes embarking on disability skiing enter with an International Paralympic Committee Alpine Ski (IPCAS) score of 990; this is reduced through competing in Europa Cup and World Cup events. In the short time she has been skiing Heather has cut her Super-G score to 311.94, with 582.91 for downhill. Athletes need to reach a score of 220 to be eligible for the Games.**

Getting to this level has been something of an uphill struggle for Heather. As a leg amputee she would be eligible to compete on a mono-ski, however due to the metal plates which were inserted into her

pelvis after her original accident in 1993, medical experts advised against this.

Typically, this has not significantly hampered her prospects on the slopes as she claimed the Super-G Austria

Cup title in the speed race last year, followed by four golds at the US Adaptive Alpine Skiing National Championships in Aspen, Colorado. She has recently won three silver and one bronze medal at the ▶

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► National Championships in Innerkrems, Austria in March.

Speaking of the level of sacrifice that is required, Heather praised the efforts of The London Prosthetic Centre who worked closely with her to develop a specialised prosthetic skiing leg that can withstand the harsh racing conditions. She said: "A prosthesis is not just about helping people regain mobility in their lives; it's about enabling them to achieve their goals. If I'm going to do this, I'm going to do it properly. That means spending half of every month training in the Alps, and six-hour round trips on the train to the Milton Keynes indoor snow zone when I'm home. Abdo Haidar, the Consultant Prosthetist, and the team at The London Prosthetic Centre fully understood this from day one, and devoted the care, attention, ability and creativity that enabled me to push on with complete confidence."

Heather's achievements are even more remarkable when one considers that she only took up ski race training a few years' ago after being spotted on the slopes and encouraged to try out for competitive skiing.

"I was on holiday in Austria, it was really early in the morning and they'd opened the lifts for the racers and one slope was empty so I just kept going straight down," said the charity campaigner.

"I hadn't skied properly for 10 years, but the head of the Slovenian Masters said, "You know you're doing 100kph

(62mph) on slalom skis and that's very dangerous?"

But despite her impressive speed, Heather's progress was hampered by difficulties with her ordinary prosthetic leg, which frequently 'ejected' her from her skis. That's when she visited Consultant Prosthetist, Abdo Haidar, at The London Prosthetic Centre in Kingston upon Thames, to have a new specialised skiing prosthetic leg fitted that would be ideally suited to the task.

One of the difficulties was finding a design that would enable Heather to ski freely. Mr Haidar even visited the Hemel Hempstead ski slopes to watch Heather in action, and help her with any problems. It was a painstaking process that involved over a year of fine tuning and over 15 appointments. Mr Haidar explains:

"We spent so much time to find the ideal solution, working all the while with Heather and her coach. The key was to provide maximum control and manoeuvrability, so that Heather could take corners close to the ground and really attack them with complete confidence. To achieve this we designed and fitted the socket in a way that considerably reduces movement and thereby enhances control and focus."

Heather has been selected for the team and Mr Haidar believes she could do very well at the 2014 Winter Paralympics in Russia.

"Of course, the key factor is the incredible drive and courage



that Heather possesses. We come across a lot of talented people and I genuinely believe that she can achieve success at the games. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to help her in such astonishing achievements."

The London Prosthetic Centre is the only facility in London to provide cutting-edge prosthetic care within a private facility equipped with a modern workshop and silicone facilities. It is a division of RSL Steeper, which was founded in 1921, and is one of the largest suppliers of prosthetic, orthotic and assistive care in the world.



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