

Screwed for life!

TEACHER Gavin Rees is a keen sportsman — but he holds a European record he'd rather not have. With 130 screws and 22 plates holding his head together, the 29-year-old from West Wales is believed to have more reconstructive metalwork in his skull than any other plastic surgery patient in Europe.

He crushed his face and head in a skiing accident three years ago after colliding with a friend at high speed.

But thanks to the expert skills of surgeons in Geneva and Morriston Hospital, Gavin now has only the occasional headache and a few faint scars to remind him of his ordeal.

He is now so well that he is planning a sponsored cycle ride from Pembrokeshire to the French Alps this summer to raise money for Morriston's burns and plastic surgery unit.

Gavin wants to say thank you to surgeon Adrian Sugar, who not only helped rebuild his face, but helped restore his vision.

Gavin said: "I had my accident in 2003, but I don't remember much about it because I suffered from post traumatic amnesia.

"I was airlifted to a French hospital and then transferred to the University Hospital of Geneva, where Professor Michel Richter carried out a 19-hour operation.

"I stayed there for a month after surgery and then transferred to Morriston Hospital, via the Heath in Cardiff. I couldn't be transferred by air because of the pressure, so I had to travel by ambulance to Wales."

At Geneva his face had been largely rebuilt, with surgeons literally peeling his face off to his neck while plates and screws were inserted into his smashed skull.

Among his injuries were major and multiple fractures of the cranium, frontal bone, nose, orbits, and brain damage.

socks as we would be minute rounds. kicking as well as punching.

Then he wrapped my hands up to add support to my hands and wrists.

To kick-start our training session, Simon took me through a complete warm-up before teaching me a few different moves and working on my technique.

Along with doing jabs and hooks, Simon showed me some kicks called teep, snap kick and roundhouse. These were quite hard but really worked my legs and are great for toning the bum.

Once I had got to grips with doing the movements properly, we moved into the ring.

We practised a few drills on the pads before fighting through some three-



RIDING AGAIN Gavin Rees in training for his bike ride in aid of Morriston Hospital (above) and an X-ray of his head (below), which relied on advanced technology to reconstruct it.

Susan Bailey

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He also injured his legs and knees.

When he arrived at Morriston Mr Sugar took over his care, adjusting metal frames going in and out of his mouth to help repair his broken jaw and palate.

"While the operation in Geneva had been successful, I still had problems with my right eye, which was sinking back into my head," said Gavin.

"My eye socket had been built up with titanium mesh but it was not enough."

As a result Gavin, from Milford Haven, had permanent double vision which could not be corrected with special spectacles.



Using state-of-the-art computer technology, Mr Sugar and his medical application colleagues at Uwic manufactured a new eye socket bed for him out of 35mm mesh. Incredibly he was back in work last September, looking after pupils at Bryncethin Primary School, in Bridgend.

THE cutting-edge techniques used to help Gavin are the result of joint working between surgeons and specialists at Morriston, and technicians at University College of Wales, in Cardiff.

The collaboration pools surgical, IT and engineering skills to rebuild damaged face and head bones, and model realistic-looking prostheses, all with an exact fit.

Morriston's maxillofacial unit and Uwic's National Centre for Product Design and Development Research have already been working together for some time.

But last month the partnership was officially launched with the title Centre for Applied Reconstructive Technologies in Surgery, or Cartis for short.

It is devising new ways to help patients like Gavin, who were injured in accidents, and others who have suffered head or neck cancer or were born with a facial deformity.

Cartis head of medical applications Richard Bibb said: "Essentially our role is to help clinicians overcome the difficulties they encounter by using advanced 3D computer-aided design and manufacturing technologies.

"These technologies are usually used to design and make everyday consumer products, so it is our role to identify, adapt and reconfigure the technologies to make them useful for surgery."

"My new eye socket has done the trick and the double vision has all but gone. Incredibly I only have a few scars which show."

"I have a long scar which goes ear-to-ear after my face was peeled away, but that is hidden in my hair."

"I feel absolutely fine even though I have 130 screws and so many plates in my head."

To celebrate his return to fitness, in August he plans to cycle 1,000 miles to Geneva, via Alpe D'Huez, to raise money for Morriston.

Mr Sugar, who is a close colleague of Professor Richter in Geneva, said: "We reconstructed his eye socket, the one part of his face which wasn't really perfect after the operation. We rebuilt it using our three-dimensional scanning technology."



THAI HARD
Tara Hammett with her Thai boxing teacher Simon Gibbons at the WPT Gym in Swansea.

Picture:
Jonathan Myers
D060222/0009/JM

NEXT MONTH: Tara tries . . . Tai Chi

TARA'S VERDICT: The Thai boxing session was an excellent training session. As the session includes cardio-vascular and resistance training, it is a great form of exercise to help increase your fitness and tone the muscles throughout your body, and it will definitely help de-stress you.

I really enjoyed the session and all my nails were still intact afterwards, which was an added bonus!

FURTHER INFO: At the centre they hold classes for children from four years old, as well as women-only sessions. For more information, you can call the gym on 01792 472845.

If you would like to feature in Tara Tries and invite me along to your class or training session, contact me direct on 01792 657212 or email me at tara@dragon-hotel.co.uk.

Health & herbs

With Vernon Lloyd-Jones of Swansea's Health & Herbs store

Q Beth, from Winch Wen, Swansea, writes: I am suffering terrible side-effects from blood pressure tablets including severe headaches, sickness and dizziness. I have been back to my GP on a number of occasions. What can you suggest I take?

A First and foremost, Beth, you must cut salt out of your diet. Be very careful with tinned food as it contains a high proportion of salt. Also eliminate caffeine and alcohol from your diet. I would recommend that you take Olive Leaf capsules. Not only does the leaf show extraordinary effects against viruses and bacteria, but the bitter compound it produces called oleuropein can lower blood pressure, enhance blood flow and relieve irregular heartbeat. Take one capsule three times a day with 200 IU of Vitamin E. I am sure that will solve your problems. There are no side-effects to worry about.

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