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# Inside Out

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NEWS AND NOTES FROM THE WORLD OF ADVENTURE SPORTS

**SEA CHANGE** In swims such as this 21-mile Catalina crossing last year, Pipoly can escape his wheelchair and reclaim his preaccident athleticism.



Pipoly drifted away from swimming to surfing and later auto racing.

It was in a road car, though, on a highway in the Colorado Rockies, that Pipoly skidded on an icy patch and flipped down an embankment. The car landed atop a tree in a ravine.

"When I opened my eyes, I said, 'Oh, I made it through;'" Pipoly recalls, "I'm fine."

He wasn't. Rescue workers cut him from the car and airlifted him to a hospital in Grand Junction, where three days later he underwent surgery and learned he would be paralyzed for life from the chest down. After his accident he went for days without sleeping, he recalls, because of muscle spasms in his legs. He was



able to continue at his job in a photo lab, but some days he would miss work, lying in bed daydreaming about the things he used to do. He was drinking, smoking marijuana and snorting cocaine. Then one day he saw a tape of his *Tonight Show* appearance. "I felt a sense of accomplishment," he recalls. "At the time I was crushed because I didn't make it across. But I saw I had a tremendous amount of courage to try that at that age." A week after watching the tape, he was back in the water. At first he could do no more than float on his back. But he kept trying, gaining strength and purpose.

Now he's back at Cherry Creek, churning out four miles a day preparing for another challenge. He wheels himself across the sand and into the water, where he fixes a large black rubber band around his legs to keep them afloat. He swims at a steady pace, stretching his arms to pull deeper, and he waits for that moment when his body rolls effortlessly and it feels as if he were born in the water.

- Encka Blount Danois

## Open Water

**Paralyzed six years ago, Jason Pipoly is back in the swim and setting long-distance records**

ON A SUMMER day the 15-mile ferry ride across Long Island Sound from Port Jefferson, N.Y., to Bridgeport, Conn., can be a pleasant interlude for commuters and vacationers. On Aug. 7 the crossing will be a little more taxing for Jason Pipoly. The 36-year-old Denver native plans to swim across the Sound to raise money for cancer research. The feat would be an impressive one for any swimmer, but for Pipoly, who was paralyzed from the chest down in a 1998 automobile accident, it will be merely the latest in a string of inspiring accomplishments. In 2002 Pipoly, who works as a representative for Hanger Prosthetics and Orthotics, became the first American paraplegic to swim the English Channel, covering the 21 miles from

Dover to Wissant in 13 hours, 48 minutes. Last year he became the first paraplegic to swim the 21-mile channel from Catalina Island to the California mainland.

Consider, too, that the Sound crossing is a backup challenge. In March, Pipoly was training for a 24-mile swim across Tampa Bay the following month when he fell down the stairs at his home and broke his left leg. The injury kept him out of the water for six weeks.

"This is testing my dedication," Pipoly said of the setback as he began a recent training session at Denver's Cherry Creek State Park. He extracted his wheelchair from the back of his rental car, unfolded it and locked the back wheels. He then scooted his body onto the chair to head to the backseat to tug

on his swim trunks. He inserted a catheter and relieved himself into a bottle, strapped a brace on his broken leg and then took his baclofen, a prescription medication for muscle spasms. Then he downed some Gatorade and made his way to the water.

"Jason has a high threshold for pain-an ability to tolerate discomfort and excessive training," says Pipoly's coach, Mark Joyner, who was the swim coach for the 1984 U.S. Olympic pentathlon team. "He has always asked for more."

Pipoly was a promising young swimmer when he first worked with Joyner as a kid growing up in Colorado. A sports prodigy, Pipoly was skiing black diamond slopes at age six and made his first attempt to swim the English Channel at 11. He didn't make it that time-with weather conditions turning dangerous, Pipoly's father, Carl, plucked him from the waves four miles from the beaches of Normandy-but he wound up on *The Tonight Show*, bantering with Johnny Carson. As a teen