



SURROUNDED BY FAMOUS FRIENDS EDDIE KIDD

BRAVELY BATTLES HIS DISABILITIES TO WALK UP THE AISLE WITH LONGTIME LOVE SAMI



Assisted by his new wife, ex-model and actress Samantha Kirli, and best man Tony "Banger" Walsh, a former professional wrestler, Eddie makes his painful way down the aisle, a triumph after years of paralysis following an accident in 1996 brought his stunt-riding career (inset, top) to an end

When former motorcycle stuntman Eddie Kidd got out of his wheelchair to take slow, careful steps up the aisle at his wedding to former model and actress Samantha Kirli, he was greeted with applause and encouraging cries of: "Go on, Eddie."

The 51-year-old groom, partially paralysed after suffering spinal and brain injuries in a 1996 motorcycle crash, was aided by his best man, former wrestler Tony "Banger" Walsh, and a carer before he sat back down in his wheelchair and turned to wave and smile at guests who had crowded into the Secret Garden in the Paradise Wildlife Park in Hertfordshire.

Many of the congregation were visibly moved by Eddie's determination, among them filmstar Ray Winstone, paranormalist Uri Geller, former *Coronation Street* actor Christopher Quinen and ex-*EastEnders* actors Carol Harrison and John Altman.

"I could see a real difference in Eddie today," Ray told HELLO!. "He's very happy."

When Samantha, 41, arrived on the arm of her father Matt, both bride and groom began to cry. "I can't really describe it but my heart felt like it was going to burst out of my chest," said Samantha, who wore a bespoke gown by Brighton-based designer Toni Pickles. "Eddie is the love of my life."

A FALSE START

Eddie and Samantha, who is sometimes called Sami, first met in a London restaurant in the mid 1980s, when Eddie was at the height of his career, famous around the world for his daredevil jumps. In 1976, at the tender age of 16, he had achieved his first world record by jumping over 13 double-decker buses. Three years later he began work as a stunt double, firstly for Harrison Ford in *Hanover Street*, then later for stars Michael Douglas, Michael Caine and Pierce Brosnan. He also worked as a model for, among other brands, Levi Strauss.

The couple dated for a short period. "He was dastardly handsome," recalls Samantha. "If you had put him in a room with Elvis Presley in his prime, it would have been hard to choose between them. But Eddie was a player. I was totally in love with him, but he never took me as seriously."

Eddie instead married former Stringfellows waitress Sarah Carr, with whom he has a son, Jack, now 16. She was his second wife - he had split from his first, Hot Gossip dancer Debbie Ash, shortly after their daughter Candie, now 27, was born. He also has another son, Callum, aged nine, from his relationship with physiotherapist Olive Reynolds.

Candie was one of Samantha's bridesmaids, and her three-year-old daughter Amalia a flower girl.

Eddie and Samantha rekindled



Eddie places the wedding ring carefully on his bride Samantha's finger, overseen by registrar Anne Lloyd-Skinner (above). He has difficulty speaking, so gave a shortened version of the vows. The couple sign the register (below) with Samantha's dad Matt, matron of honour Hilary Gibbs, Eddie's mum Marjory and best man Banger gathered proudly round (right)





Showered with rose petals and surrounded by family and friends, Eddie and Samantha celebrate their big day. Their relationship has not been without its testing moments. "There have been lots of ups and downs," says Samantha. "The transition has been quite difficult. Eddie and I have had to get used to his disabilities"

their relationship in 2007, after bumping into one another at the 50th birthday party of their mutual friend, actor Chris Quinten.

"I know Sam has always been in love with Eddie," said Chris. "It really is a fairy story."

Six months later Eddie proposed with the question: "What are you doing for the rest of your life?"

Samantha wanted to make a public commitment "to show Eddie that even if we go through rough patches, I'm not going to disappear", she says. "There have been lots of ups and downs. The transition has been quite difficult. Eddie and I

have both had to get used to his disabilities."

Eddie's neurological problems, which make speech difficult, meant he had to restrict himself to an abbreviated version of his wedding vows. "To hear Eddie struggle to say those words was so heartbreaking," said actress Carol Harrison, a friend of the couple. "Every wedding is special, but to hear them say, 'For better, for worse...' They are truly, truly in love."

As the couple signed the register, their friend Peter Straker, an original cast member of the musical *Hair*, sang *Loveliest Night of the Year*. They then released white doves in memory

of Eddie's late father and manager, Eddie Kidd Snr, and a friend, former Hell's Angel John "Charger" Surridge, who died in a bike accident earlier this year.

When it was time to walk down the aisle with his new wife – to Aerosmith's *Livin' on the Edge* – a beaming Eddie got to his feet once again, and the congregation gave the newlyweds a standing ovation.

Eddie had prepared for the big day by training at the gym three or four times a week, showing the same indomitable spirit that he had when Stunt Bike World Champion. He cites as his role models Muhammad Ali, ►

'To hear Eddie struggle to say those words was heartbreaking... They are truly in love'

martial arts icon Bruce Lee, motorcycle daredevil Evel Knievell and his father. "I get my determination from Dad, who was an army boxing champion," he says.

"Eddie's dad gave him back his fight after the crash," adds Samantha. "He used to tell him, 'You will get through this.'"

Eddie's accident happened in 1996, at the Bulldog Bash rally at Long Marston Airfield in Warwickshire, when, after clearing a speeding car on his stunt bike, he crashed into an embankment on landing.

When Eddie was in hospital after the crash, his dad and mum Marjory were constant bedside visitors. Another wedding guest, Uri Geller, had also played a role in his recovery.

Eddie had been in a coma for 40 days when Uri sent the family a cassette with a message that he had recorded. Eddie's mum played the cassette to her son three times that night, and the next day Eddie uttered his first words.

"Whether it was my cassette or my voice or just a coincidence – who knows? – but we've been friends ever since," says Uri. "It's been a beautiful day and Sam is just tailor made for Eddie."

'ALWAYS ON MY MIND'

Eddie says that, while he had other relationships: "Sam was always in the back of my mind. She's very good looking, very sexy and a very kind person. Sam's been so good for me and has given up loads. If she wasn't strong, she'd be no good. She's my rock and my world."

And what does Samantha love about Eddie? "He's witty, entertaining and handsome," says Sam.

"You're very lucky," jokes Eddie in response.

Samantha, who hasn't been married before, admits: "I was quite lonely before Eddie came back into my life, and when he did I felt complete. Maybe the time wasn't right for us before."

Some days are more difficult than others for the couple.

"I find it quite hard sometimes when I see him struggling," says Samantha. "There have been times when I've had to walk out of the room and stop myself from bursting into tears, telling myself, 'Just be strong.'"

"Eddie could have given up so easily, but he's still trying. Sometimes you wish you could just wave a magic wand so that he could do everything he used to be able to do."

Samantha looks after Eddie with the help of carers. "It can be stressful," she says. "It's quite intrusive having so many people in the house. And every time you want to have a conversation, there are other people there."

She is full of admiration for her new husband, though: "Eddie won't give up; he'll keep trying and trying. To see how far he's come is ►



Close friends Tony Walsh, actress Carol Harrison, actor Ray Winstone, Imagination singer Lee John, actor John Altman, and singer and actor Peter Straker (above, left to right) were delighted to share the couple's joy. Samantha catches up with her actor friends John Altman and Chris Quinten (below). Paranormalist Uri Geller (right, with Eddie and Samantha) helped draw the motorcycle stuntman out of his coma in 1996



'I had a good life but I was stupid. Even if my mum and dad had tried to stop me, I would have still got on my bike'



phenomenal." Ray Winstone, who has been friends with Eddie since the 1980s, and is patron of the Eddie Kidd Foundation, which aims to offer support to injured stuntmen and women, agrees: "He's never been one to shun hard work. Stuntmen make us look great – they are the unsung heroes."

Eddie continues to receive emails from his fans, including injured soldiers, who tell him he's an inspiration. "When you know that you inspire other people, it gives you extra drive," says Samantha.

NO STOPPING HIM

Eddie admits he never thought about the dangers of his former career: "I had a good life, but I was stupid. I never thought it was going to end. Even if my mum and dad had tried to stop me, I would have still got on my bike."

Eddie and Samantha are not planning to have children. After having a miscarriage last year, Samantha is philosophical: "Maybe it was a mixed blessing as we've got our hands full."

The couple have plenty to look forward to though. Eddie is hoping to complete the London Marathon next year, and is planning to get back on his quad bike. "I slapped a ban on his bike before the wedding because sometimes he falls off," says Samantha.

After everything that has happened, does Eddie have any regrets? "Yes," he says. "I wish I'd married Sam earlier." **H**

INTERVIEW: DAWN EMERY
PHOTOS: ALAN STRUTT



Eddie's granddaughter Amalia, daughter Candie and son Jack (top) make the day a real family affair. Tough guy actor Ray Winstone (above left) has been friends with Eddie for more than 20 years. The cake (left) is a reminder of Eddie's former career, as is one of the wedding gifts (below)



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