

# Aches and gains

Sports injury specialist Jeff Knox was so impressed with the relief he obtained from Tamars, a revolutionary new approach to back pain, he introduced the computer-controlled therapy into his own practice

WORDS JANET CHRISTIE PHOTOGRAPH CRAIG STEPHEN

**Z**IPPING along at 50mph then crashing his go-kart was all part of the fun for Northern Irish teenager Jeff Knox, but by the time he was in his 20s, he couldn't move his head without it clicking and it was becoming clear that the whiplash damage he'd done to his spine was something he could no longer just shrug off.

"Go-karts don't have seatbelts, so on one occasion when I went off the track and hit the barrier, I shot forward, banged the steering wheel with my head and bounced back dazed. Prior to that I ended up on the bonnet of a car while BMXing and needed stitches in my head - and then there was the time I was knocked off my scrambling bike by a car. Over the years I've had a few knocks," he says with understatement.

On top of the go-karting and scrambling bikes, his passion for rugby and skiing also contributed their share of trauma to his spine. They also propelled him into the logical career choice of sports injury specialist. So, at the age of 21, when he heard about a new machine that was reputed to sort out backs once and for all, he sped off to London to give it a shot.

Invented by British engineer Robert Taylor, the Tamars, or Technology Assisted Micro-Mobilisation and Reflex Stimulation, is basically a hand-held computer-controlled bionic arm that works on three settings up and down the spine to restore elasticity, mobility and flexibility.

"My dad had read about the treatment in a newspaper and recommended it to a friend who'd had to give up work - he was so crippled with back and neck pain that the surgeons said they couldn't help him. After a series of treatments he was able to go back

to work. When I heard that, I decided to give it a try too."

"When I was go-karting, I remember a few bad crashes that hurt, but I just got on with it. With whiplash it's sore at the time, then it settles down and you forget about it, but the twist in the spine is still there and the ill-effects will come back to haunt you in a few years.

"I hadn't broken anything, but I had scoliosis, or curvature of the spine. The spine should be a straight line from top to bottom, but mine was an S-shape and the twist in the neck was causing problems. I had a lot of discomfort, and when I tilted my head from side to side I would hear four sharp cracks."

**'Go-karts don't have seatbelts, so when I hit the barrier I shot forward, banged my head and bounced back dazed'**

With Tamars, patients lie face-down on a curved couch, while the bionic arm is worked up and down the spine with a handset the size of a computer mouse, producing a sensation like hundreds of tiny dancers belting out a Riverdance number. The aim is to straighten out the spine and take pressure off crooked or compressed joints that are causing pain.

So impressed was he with the treatment that he bought a machine and started working with it himself at his 21st Century Back Care practice in Banbridge, Northern Ireland. Last year he opened a second clinic in Edinburgh, where he offers the treatment, with a view to expanding the number of clinics in the two countries.

It's not just teenage BMXers and go-

karters who damage their spines: four out of five adults will suffer back pain at some point in their lives and it costs the economy £5 billion a year. Knox recommends four to five Tamars treatments to his patients, who range in age from ten to 85 and who have injured their backs through sport, work, car crashes or just wear and tear.

"The longer a problem has been going on, the harder it is to treat, but it can always be improved once everything is in the correct alignment," says Knox. "For some people who come in with a twist in the spine, bar getting surgery and having rods put in, Tamars is the only treatment that will work.

"One element of it is the straightening of the spine but the other is that this is a full

spinal treatment from the base to the neck, rather than just treating one painful area in isolation. The technology is more effective than doing it by hand, because of the number of bones in the spine. People come in bent over looking at the ground or over to the side and leave upright by the end of their session."

If Knox - now 27 - had known he was storing up pain for the future, would he still have indulged his teenage need for speed? "Yes, because I really enjoyed it," he says. "But I would definitely have had my back fixed at the time had the technology been available."

*The Tamars treatment is £65 per hour, £40 per half-hour, at 21st Century Back Care, 9 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh (0131 557 4404, [www.tamars.co.uk](http://www.tamars.co.uk))*

