

You In Shape

A major injury didn't keep this reader down. She picked up her weights and set out to stay sculpted.

By Mallory Creveling

Riding high

Carissa Joy Monroe's love for fitness began in grade school, when she started playing soccer year-round. After hanging up her cleats in college, where she majored in accounting, Carissa stayed fit by running and doing Tae Bo. Though she quickly found a position in her field, it didn't take long for Carissa to realize that a career crunching numbers wasn't for her—and that her real passion was being active and working with people. So six months later, in July 2007, she quit her desk job to help open a gym where she taught gymnastics and other sports to kids. >>>

Photograph by Brian Bailey

You In Shape

NAME: Carissa Joy Monroe **AGE:** 28

PROFESSION: Fitness model

HOME: Colorado Springs, CO

SHAPE READER: 10 years

A COMPETITIVE EDGE

In early fall 2010, Carissa—who'd been working out for at least two hours a day, six days a week, for more than a year—earned her personal training certification and began doing in-home sessions with clients. Later that year, she took her sculpted physique public by signing up for a figure competition, where judges score women on their muscle tone and appearance. "Placing second in my division was such a thrill," says Carissa. "It made me want to push myself even harder." Around the same time, she also started working with photographers and building her modeling portfolio. Competing again in April 2011, Carissa won second place overall—high enough to get a professional card, a necessity to enter elite divisions and win more prize money.

TRIUMPH OVER TRAGEDY

That May, while on a modeling job in downtown Denver, Carissa was struck by a car and pinned against a steel fence. The accident caused two fractures in each lower leg and a broken left ankle. Following surgery to insert rods the length of her shins and place pins in her knees and ankles, Carissa was forced to spend the next three months lying on the couch. "Even getting to the bathroom a few feet away was insanely painful," she says. Still motivated to exercise, Carissa kept dumbbells by her side so she could tone her upper body.

By November, she'd recovered enough from her injuries to go back to the gym. Besides riding the stationary bike, she used the weight machines to build lower-body strength; eventually she was able to do squats and lunges without falling. Just nine months later, Carissa returned to the stage. "I didn't want the sympathy vote; I wanted to be there because I deserved it," she says. "And I felt like I did just that."

LOOKING FORWARD

Carissa entered another figure competition in August 2013, and though she didn't place, she plans to try again



PEAK CONDITION
"Lifting weights helped transform my body and really tone my arms," says Carissa, who keeps her biceps buff by performing curls.

"I'm so thankful to be alive and have my legs," says Carissa, who suffered five fractures in an accident.

this year. She continues to train some of her friends too, in hopes of opening her own fitness studio one day. Though Carissa isn't quite back to her pre-accident workout regimen—she still avoids running due to pain, and she recently had surgery to remove some of the rods and pins in her legs to reduce the

discomfort—she's proud of her progress. "I'm so thankful to be alive and have my legs," says Carissa. "After the accident, stairs were one of my biggest obstacles. Now the StairMaster is one of my favorite machines, and people who see me on it don't even know I broke anything—that's a huge accomplishment."

Photograph by Brian Bailey