



International Day of Persons with Disabilities

## Getting back behind the wheel

- / **Cristina Sales suffers from a spinal cord injury which prevents her from walking; since then she has been undergoing rehabilitation treatment at the Institut Guttmann in Barcelona**
- / **One of her desires is to get back in the driver's seat, so at the clinic she practices getting in and out of a car and loading her chair inside**

**Martorell, 01/12/2016. – “When I woke up I saw my parents and told them I was never going to walk again. They told me I would, but I knew better; I couldn't feel my legs”.** It was clear to Cristina Sales from the very beginning. Since suffering a spinal cord injury last March she has had her sights on a single goal: to get the most out of her rehabilitation, or as she puts it, **“shift into high gear and go all out”.**

Every day she spends six hours at the Institut Guttmann in Barcelona, a clinic that specialises in the full rehabilitation of people affected by spinal cord injury, among other neurological disabilities. She performs all kinds of exercises at the clinic aimed at gaining autonomy and independence and looks to the future with great optimism. **“Not a day goes by where I don't see some kind of improvement; I'm constantly making progress and I know I can go even further. I think about what I want to do and work hard towards achieving it”.**

One of her main goals is to be able to drive again. People like Cristina who suffer from spinal cord injury have to go back to driving school. There is no question in her mind: **“From the very first minute I said I wanted to get my driving licence. To me, driving means freedom, and I don't want to give that up”.**

But before that can happen she has to work on something crucial that the experts call transfer: how to get in and out of the car? How to load the chair in the vehicle? At the Institut Guttmann they repeat these exercises every day with a SEAT Leon that was donated by the car company and the help of a therapist to guide her through the process.

First you have to get your legs inside the car, followed by the rest of your body. This is one of the most difficult parts of the transfer. **“It has to be done in one or two movements, and with great confidence. Falling to the ground is the worst thing that can happen when attempting to get in or out of the car”**, says Salvador Hidalgo, a therapist at the Institut Guttmann. Once inside you can start dealing with the chair. **“Grab the chair by the handlebar and lean it up against the door”**, he coaches Cristina as she practices. From there it has to get disassembled and loaded into the car piece by piece. It takes a lot of effort. **“Technique, strength and a positive attitude are the most important attributes”**, emphasises Hidalgo.



Cristina can finally return home after spending several months in hospital. She still has many weeks of rehabilitation ahead of her, but she is looking to the future with a healthy attitude and her family's support is fundamental. **“None of my friends or family have made me feel like I have a disability. They tell me ‘Cris, you may be in a wheelchair, but you’re still the same person’”.**

SEAT is the only company that designs, develops, manufactures and markets cars in Spain. A member of the Volkswagen Group, the multinational has its headquarters in Martorell (Barcelona), exporting more than 80% of its vehicles, and is present in over 75 countries. In 2015, SEAT's turnover amounted to over 8.3 billion euros, the highest in its history, and the company achieved worldwide sales of more than 400,000 units for the first time since 2007.

SEAT Group employs more than 14,000 professionals at its three production centres – Barcelona, El Prat de Llobregat and Martorell, where it manufactures the highly successful Ibiza and Leon. Additionally, the company produces the Ateca and the Toledo in the Czech Republic, the Alhambra in Portugal and the Mii in Slovakia.

The multinational has a Technical Centre, which operates as a knowledge hub that brings together 1,000 engineers who are focussed on developing innovation for Spain's largest industrial investor in R&D. SEAT already features the latest connectivity technology in its vehicle range and is currently engaged in the company's global digitisation process to promote the mobility of the future.

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