

Meet the Gold Coast woman Julie Matthews-Eva who does ballroom dancing with a bionic leg

For decades this Gold Coast woman used to “hate the fact” she was disabled. Now, she has become Australia’s first ballroom dancer to compete nationally on a bionic leg.

JULIE Matthews-Eva used to “hate the fact” she was disabled. “People were cruel, they would stare. Your leg had a cosmetic cover.”

Now the Mudgeeraba woman can fly a plane, water ski and ballroom dance.

Ms Matthews-Eva has been an amputee for 39 years since undergoing invasive surgery to remove bone cancer when she was 16. She is classed as a rare amputation called hip disarticulation, with no limb past her lower hip on her left side.

But her life has changed greatly in the past year, to the extent she has become Australia’s first ballroom dancer to compete on a bionic leg.

It wasn’t until she applied to be on Channel 9’s *This Time Next Year* show one year ago that she decided to take up ballroom dancing on the suggestion of producers. The National Disability Insurance Scheme agreed to fund her new-age, bionic replacement limb.

this Time Next Year profiles Australians who want to make a life-changing pledge and checks in to see if they’ve achieved their dream one year on.

Ms Matthews-Eva has since won medals as a professional-amateur and recreational dancer including placing third at the Tasmanian Open DanceSport Championship last month.

“It’s quite exciting and cutting edge,” she said. “(Prosthetic) legs are not designed to walk backwards. I ballroom dance, I’m moving backwards all the time, especially when I’m foxtrotting, nearly every step I take is backwards. It’s very challenging but the foxtrot is actually my favourite dance.

“I’m controlling three joints and trying to keep in time with the music.

“I am confirmed from the (prosthetic) manufacturer Ottobock as the first bionic woman in South Pacific Asia, and I’m definitely the first person to compete at national level in ballroom and Latin dancing on a bionic leg. I’m not in a disabled category, there’s no disabled category.”

The new leg is worth close to \$200,000 and is subsidised by the NDIS.

Ms Matthews-Eva said she did not consider herself disabled and wore her new leg with pride, giving her a new lease on life.

“Thirty-nine years ago you hated the fact you were disabled. People were cruel, they would stare. Your leg had a cosmetic cover.

“Recently, all the heroes and athletes that have been injured had really changed that. Now you don’t cover it up, you go commando.

“(As an amputee) I fly a plane, I water ski, I sail. Ballroom dancing wasn’t that difficult a challenge as a physical level but more on a mental level.

“I’ve been told ‘no, you can’t do that’ before and to be honest, it drives me to want to do it more.

“I think I’ve had a wonderful life. Now to actually live life, to be able to walk along the beach, walk quickly with my dog, go down the stairs, as awkward as it is at times, there are definitely positives. It’s made me the person I am.”