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Mount Barker’s Leonie Dean likens her new Extreme X8 power wheelchair to the fictional starship USS Franklin (NX-326) featured in the latest Star Trek trilogy, Star Trek Beyond.

“It’s just like it, so I call it Franklin,” she said. “It does awesome things you’d never expect.

“It’s just so good. I don’t think I can break it. I normally don’t like power chairs. They can make you feel dizzy or wobbly, but this thing is so stable. It’s like a mini-monster truck!

“With some helping hands on the ground we’ve even worked out we can elevate the seat to get me on and off my horse so I can ride again.

“Before my disability, I was a spray painter by trade. Classic cars are a passion of mine and I’ve got a few of them. I really enjoyed working on them, but it became hard.

“I had to wriggle like a worm on the ground to get under them to fix them, but now with Franklin I can elevate the seat and lean over the engine bays and tinker with them again.

“I also live at my parents place. They’re on 25 acres. It’s hilly, steep and very rocky. There’s a creek at the bottom of their property and can ride Franklin over the rough terrain, down to the creek and even get in it,” she said accomplish.

Leonie, now 35, said in her 20’s she started experiencing weakness in hands, then it progressed to her legs.

“The weakness would come and go, then one day I was shopping and my legs just gave way. I had to get people to come and get me. That was about five years ago,” she said.

Finally, after many tests, Leonie was diagnosed, at 30, with a condition called Functional Neurological Disorder (FND), which like Multiple Sclerosis (MS) affects body function.

“Where MS damages the nerves in your brain’s grey matter, FND damages the nerves in your brain’s white matter,” Leonie said.

“Everyone kept thinking it was MS, but FND is a tricky condition. It’s so judged and misunderstood. I guess MS was like that at the beginning.

I had people telling me things like ‘just don’t think about it and it will get better’.

“FND is so debilitating. It affects my whole body and my right hand doesn’t function either.”

Unaware about NDIS initially, Leonie said she purchased a $100 manual wheelchair off second hand goods website, Gumtree, and having to push it places “was like moving a mountain”.

On a disability pension, Leonie saw how much assistive technology (AT) cost and knew, as a disability pensioner, her prospects of securing a loan to pay for any equipment was low, so you can imagine her surprise when she discovered the NDIS.

“I’m so grateful for Franklin and the supports I’ve received so far. I even have a support worker to assist me with activities, like caring for my horse, and I’ve got other equipment around the house to help me to function better,” she said.

“It’s just so good to be back doing the things I love, riding my horse and working on cars, all because of Franklin,” she said.

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