



Nicholas Henare. Photograph supplied by Nicholas Henare

# Nicholas Henare

Ellen Lovegrove

**Nicholas Henare was nineteen when his life changed in a second.**

A split second of divided attention and a late reaction to a corner was all it took for the then Sony Music Executive to experience a devastating crash, permanently altering the course of his life.

"I ended up breaking nearly every bone in my body. If it wasn't for a first responder who found me, and I was literally down the road from the hospital, I wouldn't have made it," recalls Henare.

Henare is now a real estate agent, the latest in a long line of varied and exciting careers, and rarely talks publicly about the crash that nearly ended his life. He said that many people in his life are unaware that it happened. But he believes stories like his matter, especially for people like him navigating the same daunting road to recovery.

"I am one of very few who came out of an accident like that and actually live."

Henare was on his way to a business meeting when the crash happened. "I was changing the tape in my car looking down for just a second," he admits, "and I just didn't take the corner, it was just that simple."

According to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency, 2,453 people were seriously injured in road crashes in 2023. Survivors like Henare are often left with a long road to recovery, not only physically but also mentally.

"Looking back on it, I definitely had post-traumatic stress disorder for a couple of years. At the time, I really struggled with figuring out who I was."

Henare spent two weeks in a coma, followed by eight months in hospital, where he formed deep bonds with hospital staff. "I wasn't expected to live. I was very lucky that I had a great team of doctors and hospital support crew."

But once discharged, reality hit hard. "I'd gone from being a pretty high-flying guy, you know, nice cars and nice houses and great job, to flatting and just figuring out who I was again." At just 24 years old, he found himself having to rebuild his life from the ground up. "I was hobbling around and trying to get up to my second-story flat, which was really hard. I was out of work and living on ACC, and my whole life changed."

When asked what his advice would be to other survivors in his position, Henare keeps it simple. "Take your time. I rushed to get back to where I'd been, but you just aren't there anymore. Just relax and don't stress."

"My biggest advice would be to talk to people. Whether it's a counsellor or a family member or it's just a bloody good friend."

While New Zealand's Safe System approach to road safety has made significant improvements in overall road safety, Henare is realistic. "We've come a long way, but sometimes an accident is an accident. The roading is so much better than it used to be, but accidents are just what happens."

While a crash like Henare's might be expected to put a survivor off driving, it actually pushed him into the driving seat. While working in radio and television, he got a chance to review a Ferrari 458, which led him to a role working around the world with BMW. "I don't let the accident scare me, I still drive on motorways and I still have a fast car - I love it."

These days, his life is as dynamic as ever. This weekend, Henare is judging an international BBQ competition. Tonight, he is off to a wool fashion show. "I'm in real estate full time, and I still do MC work for causes I care about like the upcoming New Zealand Road Safety, Emergency Response and Healthcare Awards."

"Henare is particularly passionate about giving back. "What you give out is what you get back. That's why I always say yes to charity work. And if being the MC at an awards night helps even one survivor feel seen, then I'm doing something right."

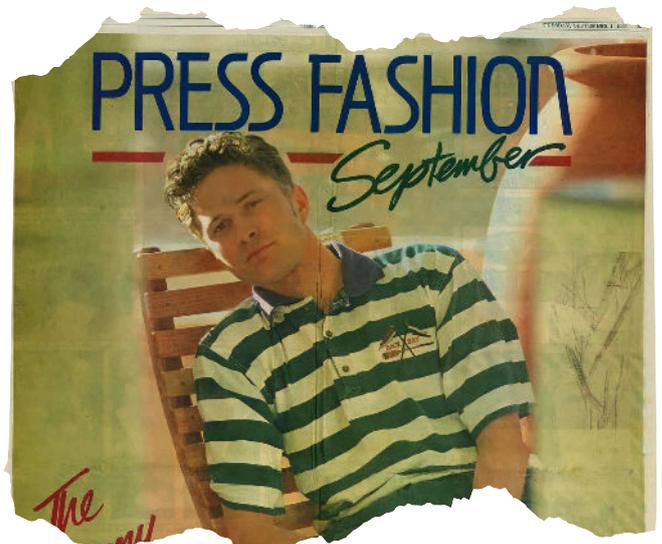
That's why he believes initiatives like a National Road Trauma Centre could be invaluable. "At the time, I wouldn't have wanted to face it. But looking back, having a place where people understand what you're going through? That could change lives."

He pauses. "People don't realise how hard it is until they're living it. And even your best friends, even if they've watched you go through hell and back, they still won't truly get it."

Thirty years on, Henare lives with both the scars and the strength forged from his crash. "The accident was tragic and awful, but at the end of the day, you can't let it stop you from living your life. I appreciate life more than ever."

He hopes that by sharing his story, others will find hope in their own recovery.

"You've got to go for what you want," he says. "Because in 1993, I learned the hard way that you might be here today, and gone tomorrow."



Nicholas Henare at the peak of his career  
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