Austrian with high-tech robot arm dies after crash

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The Nov. 27, 2009 file photo shpws Christian Kandlbauer from Austria presenting an artificial arm in Vienna, that is temperature and pressure sensitive and feels real to the person wearing it. He was the first in Europe to wear the innovative high-tech artificial arm and died after the car he was driving veered off the road and crashed into a tree. Christian Kandlbauer lost both arms in an electrical accident in 2005 but was able to live a largely normal life thanks to a mind-controlled robotic prosthetic left arm and a normal prosthesis in place of his right arm. The 22-year-old died Thursday, Oct. 21, 2010 said Andreas Waltensdorfer, a senior physician at a hospital in the southern city of Graz, where Kandlbauer had been in intensive care since Tuesday, the day of the crash. (AP Photo/Ronald Zak)

(AP) -- In the five years since losing both arms in an accident, Christian Kandlbauer had regained much of his cherished independence thanks to

a high-tech, mind-controlled robotic limb. He even got a driver's license.

Now the 22-year-old has died of injuries suffered when the car he was driving veered off the road and struck a tree. The cause of the crash is unknown - including whether the arm had anything to do with it.

"Don't live for others, live for yourself!" Kandlbauer had written on his website, which on Friday was filled with condolences after hospital officials in the southern city of Graz said he did not recover from injuries sustained in Tuesday's accident.

Kandlbauer was the first person outside the United States to wear the innovative, robotic limb that recognized signals from his brain and moved accordingly, said Otto Bock of HealthCare Products GmbH that produced the prothesis.

With a normal prothesis for his right arm and the high-tech prosthesis in place of his left, Kandlbauer's daily life had largely returned to normal. He was able to get a job at a warehouse for an auto repair shop and obtain his driver's license in October 2009.

"Thanks to the mind-controlled prothesis, I'm almost as independent and self-reliant as I was before my accident," he said in comments on the Otto Bock HealthCare Products GmbH website. "I can pretty much live the life before the accident."

For the prothesis to work, four of Kandlbauer's nerves were redirected to his left chest muscles, expert Hubert Egger was quoted as saying on the website in describing the experimental prosthetic.

To enable Kandlbauer to drive himself to work every morning, his Subaru Impreza was adapted with special equipment, including a modified emergency brake and a button to operate the horn, indicator

lights and windshield wipers. It was approved by local transportation authorities.

"I like driving," the boyish-faced video game enthusiast said on his site, and he punctuated the remark with a smiley emoticon.

He also posted photos of himself exuding confidence as he sat at the wheel in a white, short-sleeved shirt.

Interviewed earlier this year by the BBC, he said he felt very happy with the high-tech arm.

"It is like my earlier arm," Kandlbauer had said. "I feel that my arm is a part of my body."

He said he lost both arms when he was 17 after climbing up a utility pole and getting shocked by touching a power line in September 2005.

His disability certainly didn't keep him from making plans.

Aside from getting his driver's license, other goals included moving into his own home and taking a trip to Australia.