

From National Records

# Crazy Accidents Which Occurred In US This Year

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Do you ever have the feeling that things in this good old U.S.A. may just possibly be a little wacky? Well, take it from the National Safety Council—you're right!

The Council has just completed its annual roundup of odd accidents, and dazedly reports some mighty queer goings-on in the field of freak squeaks.

A dog who's a hot rod driver . . . a fish that caught a fisherman . . . an airplane that crashed a red traffic light . . . a horse and wagon that collided with a sailboat . . . a garden rake that shot the raker—these and many other ditty doings indicate that things have been slightly screwy in 1951.

**THE POOCH WHO PINED** to drive a hot rod was riding in a truck with his master, William C. Hollis of Denver. As Hollis drove through Topeka, Kan., at a prudent pace the dog stirred impatiently, reached over and planted a heavy paw on the accelerator. The truck leaped forward, went out of control, collided with a passenger car. Four persons were injured. The dog hasn't driven since.

**POLICE IN MIAMI, FLA.,** are used to seeing all kinds of traffic on busy U. S. Highway 1 during the tourist season. But even they were startled when Robert Simmons, of Dayton, Ohio, landed his airplane on the highway one August afternoon, rolled through a red traffic light and nudged a truck before he stopped.

Simmons had been forced down by carburetor trouble. Nobody was hurt. No traffic ticket.

In Chicago a sailboat got on the wrong tack and collided with a horse and wagon driven by Randolph Johnson, a non-nautical pilot who found himself a little at sea when confronted by a boat traveling along a busy street on a trailer. Damage to the boat was \$500. The land forces suffered no casualties.

Many a tired and perspiring gardener has moaned "I'm shot!" as he finished his raking. But Lincoln Stewart, of Columbus, Ohio, really meant it. He was raking trash in a dump when the rake struck and discharged a bullet in the trash. Stewart was shot in the ankle.

And all of us who have greeted a new day by groaning, "I feel like I've been run over by a steam roller," can get a first-hand report on the feeling from eight-year-old Stanley Willoughby, of Portland, Ore., who actually underwent the experience. Fascinated by a three-ton roller, Stanley grabbed on to a pipe at its back and walked along as it rolled.

Suddenly the roller backed up. It knocked Stanley down, passed over his legs and hip, and imbedded him neatly into the hot, soft asphalt. He was injured only slightly.

**EVERY DIRECT MAIL ADVERTISER** yearns to turn out copy that smacks the recipient right in the eye. But few achieve it so literally as the writer of a letter addressed to Policeman Joseph Green of the Chicago traffic detail. The envelope was blown off the top of a filing cabinet by an electric fan and hit Green squarely in the eye, sending him to the hospital.

**TO SKEPTICS** who believe chivalry is dead, here is a note of comfort: Cab Driver James Deeds, of Des Moines, Ia., gave up his seat for a lady—and did it the hard way.

Helping a fair passenger unload a big sack of groceries from his cab, Deeds backed into a passing car, felt a draft, looked up in time to see the seat of his pants disappearing down the street on the door.

And in Boston, Mrs. Catherine Meenan was injured in an automobile accident as she sat in her second floor apartment. In the street below, a car had struck a pedestrian, knocked off his shoe, hurled it 25 feet through the open window of Mrs. Meenan's living room. It hit her on the head, inflicting scalp wounds.

In Gouverneur, N. Y., Sterling Tait beat out Harold Murphy in a hot Republican primary race for town clerk. A few weeks later, Tait's car hit Murphy's dog. Tait stopped to investigate. The dog bit him. Murphy rushed Tait to the hospital. On the way he had to stop so suddenly that Tait's head banged against the windshield hard enough to shatter the glass. An hour later, Murphy's dog died. Republicans Tait and Murphy shook hands, agreed the New Deal must be to blame for it all.

Every year a few lucky people survive fantastic falls. In 1951 the champion freak squeak faller was two-year-old Tommy Paiva, of New York City. Tommy fell 15 stories (120 feet) from a window in his apartment, landed in some shrubbery and escaped with a broken thigh and assorted cuts and bumps.

**AND IN RICHMOND, IND.,** Steeplejack James Swoot went to the hospital with injuries suffered when he fell—not from a steeple, but off a bar stool!

**IN CINCINNATI,** Clayton Busch's car was struck by two trains traveling in opposite directions. He was left standing on the tracks, steering wheel in hand, suffering only from cuts and bruises complicated by acute amazement.

**DRIVING ALONG** a highway near Fort Wayne, Ind., Mr. and Mrs. James Gibson of that city were having one of those sprightly little chats husbands and wives sometimes have about the husband's driving habits.

Mrs. Gibson ended the discussion by throwing the car keys out the window. Mr. Gibson slammed down on the brakes, and two cars following him piled up in a three-car collision. Gibson was charged with reckless driving.

## Auto Accidents Aren't Bloodless

# Horrible Stories Still Repeated in '50s

(Reprinted from the Reader's Digest, Aug., 1935)

(Like the gruesome spectacle of a bad automobile accident itself, the realistic details of this article will nauseate some readers. Those who find themselves thus affected at the outset are cautioned against reading the article in its entirety since there is no letdown in the author's outspoken treatment of sickening facts.)

Publicizing the total of motoring injuries—almost a million last year, (1934), with 36,000 deaths—never gets to first base in jarring the motorist into a realization of the appalling risks of motoring. He does not translate dry statistics into a reality of blood and agony.

**FIGURES EXCLUDE** pain and horror of savage mutilation—which means they leave out the point. They need to be brought closer home. A passing look at a bad smash or the news that a fellow you had lunch with last week is in a hospital with a broken back will make any driver but a born fool slow down at least temporarily. But what is needed is a vivid and SUSTAINED realization that every time you step on the throttle, death gets in beside you, hopefully waiting for his chance. That single horrible accident you may have witnessed is no isolated horror. That sort of thing happens every hour of the day, everywhere in the United States. If you really felt that, perhaps, the stickful of tape in Monday's paper recording that a total of 29 citizens were killed in week-end crashes would rate something more than a perfunctory tut-tut as you turn back to the sports page.

An enterprising judge now and again sentences reckless drivers to tour the accident end of the city morgue. But even a mangled body on a slab waxily portraying the consequences of bad motoring judgment, isn't a patch on the scene of the accident itself.

**NO ARTIST** working on a safety poster would dare depict that in full detail. That picture would have to include motion-picture and sound effects, too—the flopping, pointless efforts of the injured to stand up; the queer, grunting noises; the steady, panting groaning of a human being with pain creeping up on him as the shock wears off.

It should portray the slack expression on the face of a man, drugged with shock, staring at the Z-twist in his broken leg, the insane crumpled effect of a child's body after its bones are crushed inward, a realistic portrait of an hysterical woman with her screaming mouth opening a hole in the bloody drip that fills her eyes and runs off her chin. Minor details would include the raw ends of bones protruding through flesh in compound fractures, and the dark red, oozing surfaces where clothes and skin were flayed off at once.

**THOSE ARE** all standard, everyday sequels to the modern passion for going places in a hurry and taking a chance or two by the way. If ghosts could be put to a useful purpose, every bad stretch of road in the United States would greet the oncoming motorist with groans and screams and the educational spectacle of ten or a dozen corpses, all sizes, sexes and ages, lying horribly still on the bloody grass.

Last year, a state trooper of my acquaintance stopped a big red Hispano for speeding. Papa was obviously a responsible person, obviously set for a pleasant week-end with his family—so the officer cut into papa's well-bred expostulations: "I'll let you off this time, but if you keep on this way, you won't last long. Get going—but take it easier."

Later a passing motorist hailed the trooper and asked if the red Hispano had got a ticket. "No," said the trooper, "I hated to spoil their party." "Too bad you didn't," said the motorist, "I saw you stop them—and then I passed that car again 50 miles up the line. It still makes me feel sick at my stomach. The car was folded up like an accordion—the color was about all there was left. They were all dead but one of the kids—and he wasn't going to live to the hospital."

**MAYBE IT** will make you sick at your stomach, too. But unless you're a heavy footed incurable, a good look at the picture the artist wouldn't dare paint, a first-hand acquaintance with the results of mixing gasoline with speed and bad judgment ought to be well worth your while. I can't help it if the facts are revolting.

If you have the nerve to drive fast and take chances, you ought to have the nerve to take the appropriate cure. You can't ride an ambulance or watch a doctor work-

ing on the victim in the hospital, but you can read.

The automobile is treacherous, just as a cat is. It is tragically difficult to realize that it can become the deadliest missile. As enthusiasts tell you, it makes 65 feet like nothing at all. But 65 miles an hour is 100 feet a second, a speed which puts a viciously unjustified responsibility on brakes and human reflexes, and can instantly turn this docile luxury into a mad bull elephant.

**COLLISION,** turnover or side-swipe, each type of accident produces either a shattering dead stop or a crashing change of direction—and, since the occupant—meaning you—continues in the old direction at the original speed, every surface and angle of the car's interior immediately becomes a battering, tearing projectile, aimed squarely at you—inescapable. There is no bracing yourself against these imperative laws of momentum.

Anything can happen in that split second of crash, even those lucky escapes you hear about. People have dived through windshields and come out with only superficial scratches. They have run cars together head on, reducing

both to twisted junk, and been found unhurt and arguing bitterly two minutes afterward.

**BUT DEATH** was there just the same—he was only exercising his privilege of being erratic . . . a wrecking crew pried the door off a car which had overturned in an embankment and out stepped the driver with only a scratch on his cheek. . . his mother was still inside, a splinter of wood from the top driven four inches into her brain as a result of son's taking a greasy curve a little too fast. No blood—no horribly twisted bones—just a

gray haired corpse still clutching her pocketbook in her lap, as she had clutched it when she felt the car leave the road. . .

A trooper described an accident (which occur when improper passing of cars on the highways is attempted) . . . five cars in one mess, seven killed on the spot, two dead on the way to the hospital, two more dead in the long run. He remembered . . . the quick way the doctor turned away from a dead man to check up on a woman with a broken back; the three bodies out of one car soaked with oil from the crankcase so that they looked

like wet brown cigars and not human at all; a man walking around babbling to himself, oblivious of the dead and dying, even oblivious of the dagger-like silver of steel that stuck out of his streaming wrist; a pretty girl with her forehead laid open, trying hopelessly to crawl out of the ditch in spite of her smashed hip. . .

**OVERTURNING CARS** specialize in certain injuries . . . cracked pelvis, broken spines, smashed knees, (all which guarantee agonizing months in bed, motionless, perhaps crippled for life) . . . and the lethal consequences of broken ribs, which puncture hearts and lungs with their raw ends. . .

But all that (injuries from flying glass, driving through telephone posts, careening cars rolling over banks) is routine in every American community. To be remembered individually by doctors and policemen, you have to do something as grotesque as the lady who burst the windshield with her head, splashing splinters all over the other occupants of the car and then rolled with it down the edge of the windshield frame and cut her throat from ear to ear. . .

None of all that is scare fiction; it is just the horrible raw

material of the year's statistics as seen in the ordinary course of duty by policemen and doctors, picked at random. . . it's hard to find a surviving victim who can bear to talk . . . for when you stop screaming it all comes back—you're dying and you hate yourself for it. . .

**AND EVERY TIME** you pass on a blind curve, every time you hit it on a slippery road, every time you step on it harder than your reflexes can safely take, every time you drive with your reactions slowed down by a drink or two, everytime you follow the man ahead too closely, you're gambling a few seconds against this kind of blood and agony and sudden death.

Take a look at yourself as the man in the white jacket shakes his head over you, tells the boys with the stretcher not to bother and turns away to somebody else who isn't quite dead yet. And then take it easy.

Seventeen of every 100 drivers involved in fatal traffic accidents during 1950 were reported to have been drinking.

Motor vehicle collisions with railroad trains killed 1,520 people last year.

**Persons Killed—By Age Groups**

	Age 14-24	Per cent	Age 25-34	Per cent	Age 35-44	Per cent	Age 45-54	Per cent	Age 55 & over	Per cent	
<b>COLLISION WITH:</b>											
Pedestrian	470	37.9	970	44.1	5,630	20.7	2,230	48.3			
Automobile	410	33.1	530	24.1	10,910	36.8	1,460	30.2			
Horse-drawn vehicle					30	.1	10	.2			
Railroad train	50	4.0	50	2.3	1,250	4.6	80	1.7			
Street car					30	.1	10	.2			
Other vehicle					100	.4	20	.4			
Fixed object	60	4.8	70	3.2	2,680	9.8	190	3.9			
Bicycle	10	.8	280	12.7	140	.5	20	.4			
Non-collision	240	19.4	300	13.6	7,280	26.7	710	14.7			
Miscellaneous					80	.3					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,240</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,200</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>27,230</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4,830</b>	<b>100.0</b>			

## Don't you be the Millionth Man to die in a traffic accident

Some dark day this December, the National Safety Council estimates America's millionth traffic fatality will occur.

How can we postpone the millionth death? How can you avoid being the 1,000,000th victim of carelessness?

These simple safety rules will help:

**Safety-check your car!** Faulty brakes, worn tires, defective horn and lights, bad steering gear, a worn-out windshield wiper—any one of these can involve you and your family in a terrible accident. Get your car in perfect running shape now. It's cheap insurance on your life.

**Obey traffic laws!** Speeding drivers are involved in 1 out of 3 fatal traffic accidents. So take your time, not your life. Slow down at intersections. Don't pass on hills and curves. And remember that bad weather conditions can make the safe speed lower than the legal, posted limit.

**Watch out for children!** Youngsters forget safety rules; that's why grown-ups have to be extra careful. Last year 120,000 school-age children were involved in traffic accidents. Be extra cautious when driving near schools, playgrounds, or in residential areas.

**Be doubly alert at night!** Over half of all traffic fatalities occur at night. It takes a double order of caution to make up for reduced visibility. Keep your windows and windshield clear of mud, rain, sleet, snow. Use chains on slippery roads. Keep an eye out for people walking, or crossing at intersections.

Four simple rules—for life. Follow them!

**Don't you be one in a million!**

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