

SafeDriver Monthly Newsletter

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It'll Never Happen To Me!

A serious problem afflicts many young drivers that can have deadly consequences. The affliction is the attitude that “it’ll never happen to me!” In spite of evidence to the contrary and proof that it regularly happens to others, teens hold desperately to the idea that it can’t happen to them. That attitude leads them to make some stupid and deadly choices.



Last month, two groups of teens, driving what were described as muscle cars, were racing on a suburban street in Jacksonville, FL when they hit a car occupied by a woman and her daughter. The woman was killed and her daughter was transported to the hospital in critical condition.

The muscle car flipped and rolled over another parked car before coming to rest in a parking lot. The two occupants of that car were transported to the hospital; one in serious condition. The driver of the other car involved in the race fled the scene.

As of this writing, no charges have been filed yet but, when they are filed, the charges will no doubt include vehicular homicide. If convicted, the driver could face a sentence of 40 years to life.

The drivers in this race probably thought that racing was a cool idea. They were excellent drivers who had full control over their vehicles. What's the worst that could happen? "It'll never happen to me" strikes again!

Roller Coasting

Another case of "it'll never happen to me" struck last month in Illinois. A 17-year-old driver tried to make his car go airborne with tragic results. After the car went airborne, it hit a tree and split in two, killing four teen passengers.

The maneuver the driver was attempting is sometimes known as "roller coasting." Roller coasting involves driving on hilly roads at high speed in hopes of going airborne when you reach the crest of a hill.



It looks exciting when they do it in the movies but there's a huge difference between a movie stunt and the real-life act of getting a car airborne. In Hollywood, the car's suspension system is beefed up to handle the extreme forces of landing. The car is driven by a trained stunt driver and the stunt is carefully planned out by stunt experts to keep the stunt as safe as possible.

The problem in launching a car off the crest of a hill in real-life is that, once it goes airborne, there is no longer any way to control the vehicle. Most people don't realize that the primary control device on a car is the tires. If the tires aren't in contact with the road, steering wheels and brakes are useless.

In real-life, there's no way to know where and when the vehicle will land. When it does land, the force of the crash may destroy the suspension and even pop the tires, making control of the vehicle extremely difficult, if not impossible. If you land on the roadway, you're lucky but, as in the case above, the car departed the roadway and hit a tree.

Another consideration in this case was the number of teen passengers that accompanied the driver. The Graduated Driving License (GDL) laws in Illinois prohibit a teen driver under the age of 18 from carrying more than one passenger for the first 12 months after receiving a driver's license. Studies have shown that teen drivers are more easily distracted and tend to take more risks with each additional passenger in the vehicle.



Avoiding An Animal In The Road

Last month, a Massachusetts teen driver swerved to avoid hitting a squirrel in the road. When she did so, her car left the road and plowed into a historic home built in the 1600's by Abraham Lincoln's great-great-great-great-grandfather.



The home isn't a museum but is, in fact, currently occupied by a family. The damage was great enough that the home's occupants will have to relocate while preservation experts restore the home.

We have written before about the dangers of trying to avoid animals on the road. Many teens have lost control of their vehicles and died as the result. Sometimes the hard choice has to be made to risk hitting the animal rather than driving off the road and losing control of the vehicle.

This should be part of training a teen how to drive. Teens need to consider this problem in advance and understand that they may have to make the hard choice rather than reacting purely out of instinct and risking their life to avoid the animal.

