

A VENT WINDOW VIEW – *RECKLESS TEENS*

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Each year, when high school classes resume in September or during those springtime months when graduation ceremonies occur, there are numerous automobile accidents involving teenaged drivers all over the United States. Fortunately, my reckless behavior with a car was limited when I was a teen and feeling my oats, but I hereby admit to committing a number of foolish acts.

What kept me from overextending my luck was the knowledge that an accident would result in being grounded for the rest of my life. The only time I used Dad's car was when my pal Robbie's vehicle was unavailable; he had acquired a 1938 Oldsmobile from his elderly grandpa. The Olds was a grand piece of transportation. It was comfort, room and reliability wrapped up in heavy steel. Black gave it a serious aura, funereal even, that really saved us from getting disapproving looks from older folks around the community that many teen drivers deservedly received. I often drove the big Olds, usually after we dropped my date off at her house. On those occasions, Robbie would snuggle with his girlfriend for the 20 minute drive to her house. Frankly, I was jealous, but what I remember most about those late night outings is not the girls, but the manner in which the Olds' front end bobbed up on its aged front shocks—or, stabilizers as they were termed by GM or Robbie's grandfather. The machine's stabilizers had worn out long before Robbie took ownership of the car and were no longer very good at stabilizing! Sometimes when topping a hill at 40 mph we would be halfway down the other side before the car's front half settled back enough that the road ahead again became visible.

This occasional loss of forward visibility is what did in our pal Charlie's '36 Plymouth. Charlie was a classmate whom had generously offered several of our high school buddies a ride down to meet up with Robbie and me at a local ball field where a "town-team" softball game was scheduled. Sadly, en route on a gravel road after topping a hill at too great a speed, Charlie failed to spot the slight left correction needed to clear a concrete bridge railing; turns out that his ancient Plymouth had a problem with its front-end suspension system similar to Robbie's elderly Oldsmobile. What remained of the Plymouth ended up scattered over about an acre of prime Missouri farmland. Charlie and his companions lived to drive another day but, possibly, stories about that accident may have served to save Robbie (and me) from a similar mistake.

Sadly, Charlie's mishap did not teach caution to our buddy, Orrin, owner of a yellow '47 Chevy convertible. That vehicle was without question the sportiest bit of Detroit iron that ever graced our school parking lot.

The problem in this instance was less a matter of weak front suspension than it was Orrin's appetite for speed which the six-cylinders powering his car were not exactly meant to achieve. Orrin met his Waterloo when he failed to remember that his route, a local blacktop highway, terminated in a "T-type" junction at the end of a mile-long downhill grade. Orrin's elected speed simply overwhelmed the Chevy's brakes.

The maple that finally halted the automobile's forward progress was basically unscathed and may still stand in front of the old farmhouse it protected from drunks, sleep-deprived drivers, and speed demons like Orrin. That accident, whether it was the tape on Orrin's nose or the totaled carcass of the little yellow convertible, may have served to reduce teen car accidents in that community for several succeeding years. The improved suspensions emanating from Detroit by the mid-fifties may have helped, too.