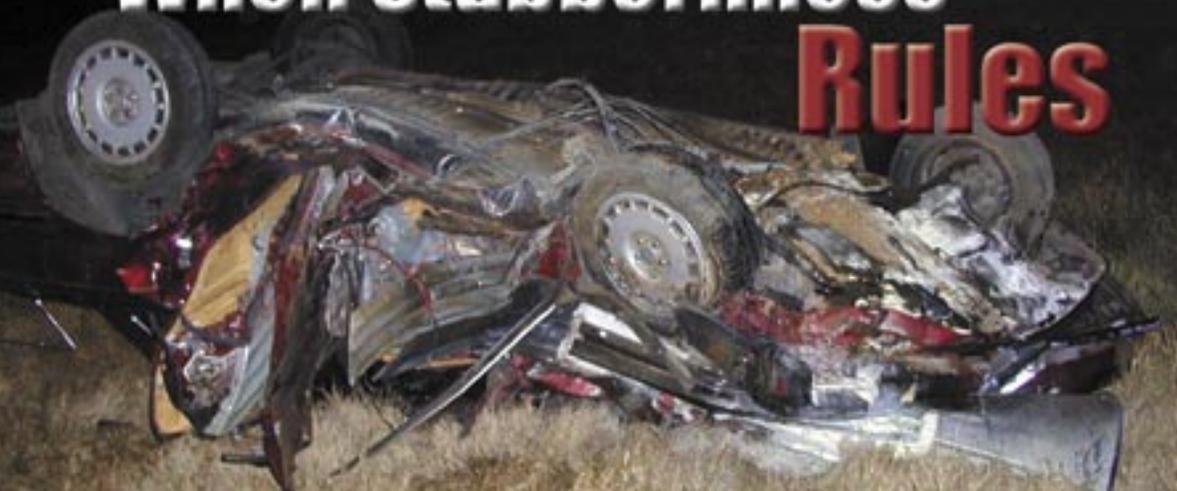


# When Stubbornness Rules



By AZAN Timothy Clark

A local newspaper called it one of the worst days on record for traffic accidents; the rain caused more than 400 accidents—in one county alone. Despite the bad conditions, we decided to trek the 400 miles to my parents' house so they could meet my soon-to-be wife for the first time.

We packed the car, discussed our travel plans, put on our seat belts, and started our journey, with my fiancée driving. We were on a road known for its numerous traffic accidents, so we were being cautious. We already had seen three accidents, including two rear-end collisions and a car that had gone out of control and ended up in a ditch. The rain was getting worse, but we weren't going to let it stop us.

As we came to one of a few stoplights on this road, my fiancée applied the brakes, but the car didn't stop. It slid about 100 feet, and we nearly rear-ended another car stopped at the intersection. Despite this close call, we still pressed on.

When we reached the freeway, the rain had slowed down, and we thought the worst was behind us. Traffic was flowing, with the exception of a few older, wiser couples driving in the slow lane. We merged into the fast lane, traveling 70 mph—much slower than my fiancée usually drove.

Fifteen minutes later, the rain returned with a vengeance, and my fiancée reduced her speed to 55 or 60 mph. We still were in the fast lane when we came to a slight bend in the freeway and hydroplaned on a large puddle of water. We knew we were in for the ride of our lives.

The rear end first turned completely sideways—not a big problem, I thought, as long as we stayed in the fast lane and no one hit us from behind. Then, I saw an embankment. We still were sliding sideways when the wheels caught the embankment's soft dirt, and the car rolled onto its roof. Immediately, the roof collapsed, and mud, dirt, glass, and other items started

flying around inside the car.

We slid on the roof more than 100 feet before coming to rest in the fast lane. Hanging upside down, my fiancée was gripping the steering wheel as tightly as she could, unable to move. I unbuckled my seat belt, climbed into the back of the car, and unbuckled her. She fell and hit the car's roof.

We then climbed out the rear window and went to the side of the freeway. Within minutes, emergency personnel were on the scene, and they rushed us to a hospital. Doctors checked and released us, with only a few scrapes and bruises. The highway-patrol officer couldn't believe we had survived, especially with such minor injuries. We were grateful we had worn our seat belts.

A few days later, we went to the junkyard, where our wrecked car had been towed. We wanted to pick up some personal items we had left behind the day of our wreck. The car looked worse than we could have imagined. The front part of the roof was flattened to the same height as the hood, and every window was smashed and every panel dented. The driver's side door was mangled, and the left, front wheel was bent under the car. Dealing with the insurance company and medical bills was a headache that lasted more than six months.

I realize we made some bad mistakes. We should have rescheduled our trip to a day when it wasn't raining. We also should have reduced our speed and gotten in the slow lane—like the older, wiser couples. We should have been more aware of our situation. A month later, my parents finally got to meet my bride-to-be. 

Airman Clark wrote this story while assigned to VR-55.