



"Field"-Te Pontiac Bo



A day or two after their memorable crash, Cindy Ensinger and her two daughters pause for a photo beside the crumpled Pontiac.



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(Left) The only reason the daughter in the crushed right rear corner wasn't injured is that she had dived to grab the family pet, Newton. Note all the evidence that the car landed in a bean field.

(Middle) A glance around the crashed Pontiac's interior revealed few scars. **(Right)** With the exception of the trunk and engine compartment, the Pontiac had considerable damage—more than enough for the insurance company to total it.

By Ken Testorff,
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Some people never leave home without their Visa or Master Card. In the case of Cindy Ensinger, though, she never leaves home without OnStar, a sophisticated Global Positioning System that brings you safety, security and information via live, personal service—24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

With this technology, you can get driving directions, emergency assistance, up-to-the-minute stock quotes, e-mail, and more—all in your vehicle. Cindy swears by the system, along with seat belts and the power of prayer, as the result of a car crash she had recently. Even before all the shattered glass had settled inside her tumbling car, she heard a most welcome voice telling her, “We know what has happened, where you are, and have dispatched emergency vehicles to the scene.”

That reassurance meant a lot to Cindy, her 16- and 14-year old daughters, Jennifer and Christina, respectively, and the family Yorkshire terrier, Newton. While driving along two-lane Elbow Road in Virginia Beach on Sept. 7, 2002, Cindy happened upon an older male driver who, according to her, was weaving around the road a bit. He made her nervous enough to decide to pass.

When oncoming traffic had cleared, Cindy made her move. She was beside the other car when she thought it wandered ever so slightly toward her 2001 Pontiac Bonneville. This movement happened as both drivers momentarily turned their heads to look at each other. In response, Cindy inched her car farther left, a decision that would prove costly and terrifying.



Both left-side wheels of the Pontiac suddenly dropped off the built-up pavement. In her

frenzy to get the car back on the road—after all, a deep ditch lay mere inches away—Cindy evidently over-corrected. “I got all four wheels back on the pavement,” she noted, “but my car didn’t seem to have any traction—and braking didn’t help.” The police measured 125 feet of skid marks. In a matter of seconds, she lost all

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control, and the car left the roadway. Four rolls later, it came to rest—on its wheels—100 yards into a farmer’s bean field.

Feeling dizzy and a bit sick to her stomach, along with having blurred vision—mostly because she had lost her glasses while rolling—Cindy started taking stock of everyone’s injuries. The only visible mark was a cut on one daughter’s hand, and both were complaining, “My hair’s falling out!” The culprit was flying glass from broken windows, which had cut patches of hair from both daughters’ heads. In the days following this mishap, Cindy and her girls also would discover a wealth of soreness, bumps and bruises—the most notable being well-defined seat-belt bruises.

Thankful that both her daughters seemed fine, Cindy looked up to see about 20 or more people who had witnessed her ordeal running to help. Moments later, the police and EMTs arrived. They had to remove Cindy and the girls through the windows because all four doors had jammed during the mishap.

“But, wait!” You’re probably saying. “What about Newton—what happened to him?” That’s what Cindy wanted to know, too, once she was out of the car. First, though, she had to clarify something: The police had mistaken “Newton” to be a person’s name.

As luck would have it, the Ensingers’ dog had been ejected from the rolling car—something that won’t happen ever again because Cindy now has a special seat restraint for Newton. It was the next day before she, with the help of a fellow who lives along the stretch of road where the mishap occurred, found the family pet still in the bean field. Not that Cindy didn’t try to find Newton sooner—in fact, she (against doctor orders) had gone back to the mishap site and searched unsuccessfully shortly after midnight, just moments after being released from a hospital.

As this story was being written—nearly two weeks after the fact—Cindy was back to work, Jennifer and Christina were back to school, and Newton was back to being his lovable self in the safety of the Ensinger home.

For Cindy, this incident was a reality check: “I really figured I’d go through life and never have a major car wreck,” she said. With this wake-up call, she has a deeper appreciation for seat belts—and she has reclaimed her place in a local church pew. You see, as she was rolling through that farmer’s bean field, she whispered a little prayer: “Just let my daughters and me be OK from this, and I’ll get back in church,” she confessed.

Has Cindy found a new car yet? Yes—another Pontiac, because she knows it does a good job of protecting the occupants. And, in case you’re wondering, her new set of wheels has OnStar. ■

Cindy Ensinger is the wife of Lt. Chuck Ensinger, aide to Commander Naval Safety Center, RDML Stephen A. Turcotte. She also is a civilian employee on the staff of ComLantFlt, Adm. Robert J. Natter.