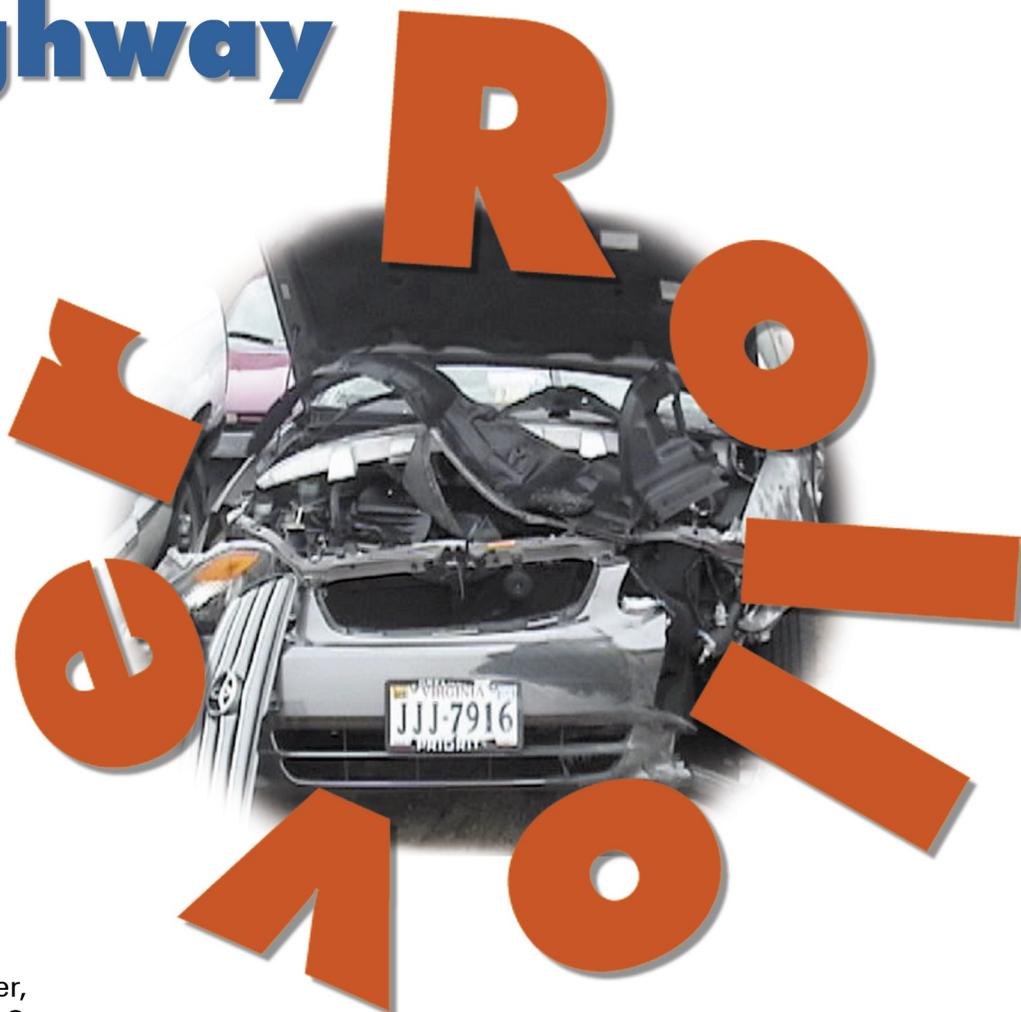


Navy Family Survives Highway



By Dan Steber,
Naval Safety Center

Navy SK2 Vernon Ferrer, his wife Loryjane, and 2-year-old son Charles were on I-64 in Norfolk, when another vehicle cut into their lane, forcing their car into a Jersey barrier. Impact caused their vehicle to flip and roll four times before coming to rest on its wheels.

This incident is not unlike hundreds of others on the roads, streets and highways of America. What is special about this case is that the Ferrer family survived with only a few minor injuries. After looking at their damaged car, many people would say it's a miracle they weren't injured more severely. Petty Officer Ferrer credits his family's safety awareness, saying, "We always wear our seat belts and ensure that Charles is buckled in his approved child-restraint seat before the vehicle moves."

Loryjane was driving that day. She and Vernon were discussing a future trip to New York when a car drove up beside the passenger door and moved slightly ahead of their vehicle. "It suddenly steered into our lane," Loryjane said, adding, "I wondered what was happening."

Vernon screamed, "Honey, honey, honey...Oh no! Oh no!"—his last words before their vehicle hit the barrier, flipped, and started rolling over and over again. The Ferrers remember loose items floating around inside their vehicle and peppering them.

"It felt like a horrible amusement-park ride," Loryjane noted. "I just wanted it to stop!"

Her husband added, "It wasn't slow motion like in the movies."

Their car finally landed on its wheels, with the engine still running. About the same time, the

car started rolling forward. Vernon yelled at his wife to hit the brakes, which she did. Once the car was stopped, Vernon and his wife just sat motionless for a moment—in shock. Then Vernon made sure his wife and son were OK. For an instant, he also was worried that another car might hit them, but their car had rolled down the barrier and had stayed in their lane.

Among the other drivers who stopped to help the Ferrers was an off-duty Chesapeake, Va., firefighter and a nurse from a local hospital. They told the family to stay in their vehicle until their injuries could be assessed. Meanwhile, the firefighter reached in the car window and shut off the engine. He also told them an ambulance was on the way.

Emergency-medical technicians removed the Ferrers from their vehicle and placed them on backboards to limit any possible injuries. Two separate ambulances took them to a hospital, where they were checked and released.

The police took a description of the other vehicle from Vernon, who was able to provide the last two digits of the license plate—one of the last things he remembers before the crash. That driver and vehicle have yet to be found.

The Ferrer family's incident had a little to do with luck but much to do with making the right decision. They have a good family attitude about safety. They made the conscious decision to use their safety belts and survived a horrific accident.

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In FY2004, we lost 119 Sailors and Marines in PMV mishaps, many of whom didn't wear their seat belts, including at least 10 Sailors (some reports were received with “unknown” in the seat-belt block). *[Although Marine Corps data wasn't available, their numbers tend to be similar.]* We must learn from these incidents, and the families of those 10 dead Sailors would want us to do more.

The Ferrer family was willing to do a testimonial about their incident, and the Naval Safety

Center put together a video about their story, other successes, and a few mishaps that didn't end on a happy note. At a command gathering shortly after this incident, Petty Officer Ferrer's CO put it in perspective. He summarized the event this way: “I'm thankful today that we are having a potluck luncheon in conjunction with our staff and student safety stand-down, rather than attending a family funeral.”

For more information on traffic-safety mishaps and efforts to curtail the problem, visit our website at www.safetycenter.navy.mil. **S**

