

# Another Dumb Trick



By Ken Testorff,  
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**A** 20-year-old seaman stands on the roof of his PMV with his civilian friend accelerating to about 20 or 25 mph. Suddenly, the seaman loses his footing and falls onto the pavement. Injuries include a closed head injury, a skull fracture, and contusions.

The victim is taken to a local hospital, where he's admitted to the ICU under the care of a neurosurgeon for approximately three weeks. He subsequently is transferred to a naval hospital, evaluated by neurology, and placed on convalescent leave. Doctors estimate his lost work time at 45 days, including 25 in the hospital. They also say he could be partly disabled.

Alcohol use is suspected but never confirmed in this case.

In another incident, an AEAR and an AEAN go drinking one Saturday at 1000. The AEAR

consumes several drinks of two different kinds of alcohol. After playing video games at the AEAN's residence, the two go for a drive about 2015 in the AEAN's pickup. Fifteen minutes later, the AEAN is doing donuts with the AEAR riding on top of the truck cab. Suddenly, the AEAR gets thrown off, but he doesn't hit the ground right away. Instead, he first collides with an electrical box.

Injuries include fractures of thoracic and cervical vertebrae, a skull fracture, bleeding under the lining of the brain,

and nerve damage. The AEAR subsequently suffers visual defects, memory loss, and speech problems. Doctors aren't sure if he'll be partly disabled for the rest of his life.

The AEAN records a BAC of 0.133, but the hospital won't release the BAC figure for the AEAR.

Elsewhere, a DC3 and a DCFN stop at a local supermarket one evening and pick up some items for an upcoming underway period. They leave the market at 0015, with the DCFN riding on the car's hood (lying stomach-down, facing the windshield). Everything is OK until the DC3 hits a speed bump at about 20 to 25 mph in the parking lot. The DCFN then falls off and hits his head, suffering massive head trauma, a broken ankle, and a loss of consciousness.

The DC3 immediately stops the car, checks on the DCFN, and calls the ship's quarterdeck to report the incident and to ask for assistance. Min-



utes later, two police units, responding to a different call, notice the DC3 standing over the DCFN. Emergency units are dispatched. A breathalyzer test shows the underage DC3's BAC is below the legal limit; the DCFN's BAC isn't checked because of his condition.

The DCFN is taken to a local hospital, where he undergoes emergency surgery. Afterward, he remains comatose. Four days later, when all family members have been notified of his condition, the DCFN is removed from life support and dies.

What do they call such stupid stunts? The most common term is "car surfing." It first became popular with teenagers in the mid-1980s, as they sought to mimic scenes from the films "Footloose" and "Teen Wolf." A rash of mishaps followed, and the activity disappeared for a while. Young people resumed the daredevil acts, though, with the advent of such popular movies as "The Matrix," the stunt TV show "Jackass," and the video game "Grand Theft Auto."

This high-risk behavior takes other forms, too. Some participants kneel on a car's rear bumper and hold onto perhaps a spoiler, while the car zips

down the street. Car surfers also sometimes ride a skateboard or in-line skates after latching onto the back of a moving vehicle.

Why do young people do this crazy stuff? For some, it's just another way to get the adrenaline pumping. For others, it's to show off for their friends. While admitting to the dangers of car surfing, one teenager said he probably just would laugh if a friend grabbed hold of his car. "Us kids are stupid," he remarked, adding, "I'm not going to tell someone not to do it. I'll beep my horn and keep going."

Serious injuries or death are distinct possibilities anytime someone goes car surfing. As an ER doctor noted, the human body isn't built to go 50 mph while standing on a car's hood, being towed on a skateboard, or hanging onto a car's bumper. Just about every part of the body is at risk, with the central nervous system most in jeopardy. "If a fall from the car doesn't hurt you," said the doctor, "there's always a chance another vehicle might hit you. Going 25 mph or more while doing such sports as biking, skateboarding or skiing should satisfy the needs of thrill-seekers. Car surfing, on the other hand, isn't much of a sport—it's stupid."

Speaking of stupid, here's one more tale that should have you shaking your head in disbelief.

A PO3 and four other Sailors load a government light-service support vehicle (LSSV) with

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supplies for an MWR event. The load consists of display items to showcase Navy diving, a dog-tag machine, various T-shirts and hats to sell, and a cooler that contains various snacks and beverages, including beer.

All five personnel then attend a previously scheduled luncheon at a local pizza parlor, where two of them each consume two glasses of beer. The PO3 and other two Sailors each drink lemonade. When the luncheon is over, all five climb into the LSSV and head to the MWR event, with the PO3 driving—"smart move," you're probably saying, but read on. I promise you'll have second thoughts.

En route to their destination, the group stops for fuel and snacks and to change drivers. The PO3 tells the others he intends to have a beer from the cooler. Some of them see him at the cooler, but none see him actually drink a beer.

When they all climb back into the vehicle, the PO3 sits in the right-rear passenger seat. The group travels about another four hours before one of the Sailors says, "I could go for a beer."

The PO3 responds, "I could do a mission impossible."

The other Sailor shoots back, "Bet you a buck you won't."

At that time, the PO3 rapidly starts exiting the vehicle through his window, while the LSSV is traveling 75 mph. He is reaching for the cooler in the back when he loses his grip and falls, hitting the highway. The driver stops, and two Sailors begin CPR, as another one calls 911. Emergency personnel arrive moments later and call for a life

flight. Before the victim can be taken away, though, he dies at the scene.

What leads people to make errors in judgment and do such dangerous acts? Studies have shown that incorrect decisions are made mainly during a driver's first years on the road. Let's face it—people of all ages occasionally have crazy ideas. The telltale difference lies in how or if we respond to those ideas. It's common knowledge that most youths lack the ability to control their impulses, behind the wheel or otherwise. With experience, though, comes appreciation for the consequences of our uncontrolled actions.

These studies also have found a relationship between risk-taking in driving and one's perception of the risks involved. Individual drivers are apt to rate risk-taking according to the faith they have in their ability to cope safely with different dangers. Thus, a key factor can be a young driver's exaggerated belief in his/her mental skills and ability to control the vehicle.

An important point to consider here is what can happen when people get behind the wheel. If they pursue their baser impulses while in control of a one- or two-ton, gas-powered guided missile with power windows and a CD player, nothing or no one is safe. ■

## An Easter Miracle

By Brion Hall,  
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**O**n Easter Sunday, my girlfriend and I were coming back to Topsham on Interstate 95 from visiting her parents. It was a dry and sunny afternoon. We were south of Bangor, just past Pittsfield, when a car passed us doing between 90 and 100 mph.

As the car came back into the travel lane, it went onto the shoulder, then off the road. Anyone who ever has traveled that section of I-95 knows that the roadway is elevated about 15 to 20 feet. The car went down the bank into a drainage ditch, where it hit water that sprayed as high as the trees.

The car then hit a piece of exposed granite ledge, causing it to cartwheel end-over-end about 20 feet high in the air. The car must have flipped six times before it touched the ground again, then just disappeared into the woods, still tumbling end-over-end.

My heart was in my throat. I remember thinking, "There's no way anybody could have survived that." It was like the high-speed chase and wrecks you see on the TV show "Cops" or, better yet, a NASCAR crash, with pieces of car going in every direction.