



# You Can Survive an ACCIDENT!

Text and Photos by Wayne Thoms

THERE are two ways for a stunt driver to come out of one of his "accidents." We don't want to waste any time even mentioning the wrong way. No stunt driver talks very much about it. What they do talk about and concentrate on is how to get out in one piece, and that is what we want to tell about so that anyone may apply their rules.

We will explain to you, the reader, how to apply some of their trade secrets to your everyday driving. If we can save one life or prevent one accident through our efforts, then we will feel repaid for our efforts.

Automobile stunt driving originated with the late Lucky Teter, back in 1934, at Wooster, Ohio, when he crashed an automobile over and over while remaining at the wheel. It was through his desire to do things with an automobile that had never been done before that led to the development of stunt driving to its present complex and scientific state. Ironically enough, it was an event which Teter originated in 1939, the ramp to ramp jump, which cost him his life on July 5, 1942. The reason is short—not enough speed.

It was his close friend and associate, Joie Chitwood, who carried on the stunt driving tradition, and after the war, when

the various stuntmen returned from service, they were gathered together under the Joie Chitwood Auto Daredevils' banner. Today, most of the stunt driving exhibitions throughout the country are part of the Joie Chitwood organization.

Let's meet a portion of that organization. In gathering material for this article we worked with the Joie Chitwood Gold Star Unit—met the drivers, talked with the ramp hands, and thoroughly bedeviled Till Taylor, who is the show's working manager. He keeps the acts moving, gives flag signals to the cars and drivers, sees that the proper apparatus is set up at the proper times, and generally takes the rough end of any troubles anyone may have, figuring a solution if he can.

"Now, just what is the secret of pulling off these stunts safely?" We posed the question point blank to Till, hoping to be shown some mysterious secret mechanisms which they had developed, or perhaps be introduced to the mathematical formulae with which they calculate the probability of successfully completing one of these stunts.

"I can't say there aren't any secrets in the stunt driving business," he replied, "because there definitely are."

He went on to explain that the secrets most certainly do

not lie within the realm of things that concern the average motorist in normal driving. They entail primarily the details of how to do ramp to ramp jumps. There are a very small number of good jump men in the country, probably not more than five or six, according to Taylor, and they keep the all important factors of speed, car weight, amount of gas, and the like to themselves. The ramp to ramp jump is definitely not a feat that you practice on and fail, ever.

The things that he could and did reveal, however, were of more than passing interest to me, and should be to everyone else who drives an automobile.

Stunt driving would be deadly without the safety belt. It is probably the most important single piece of equipment that the drivers use. Of course, a safety belt is only as good as its holding power. Any belt that meets the standards for aircraft will be more than adequate for automotive use. What is especially important, however, is the method of anchoring. Merely fastening it to the seat or to the floorboards is not enough! Ask any traffic officer how many serious accidents he has seen where the seats have pulled loose from their mountings completely. The belt must be anchored either directly to the frame or some solid portion of the car that is rigidly connected to the frame.

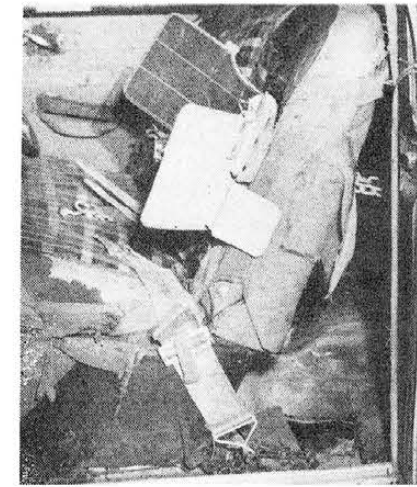
Remember, the seat belt will save you from rising up off the seat, or sliding forward in case of an emergency stop or collision. The upper thigh, around which the belt passes can stand a good deal more pressure than can the face when meeting a shatterproof windshield or metal dash. Let's face it. In a really serious accident you can't figure to come out unscratched. Just pause for a moment and reflect on the difference between a cut, bruised, or even a broken forearm, and the possibility of a facial rebuilding job with a few lifetime scars as reminders of one moment's carelessness.

Don't get us wrong. We certainly aren't advocating that you install safety belts and then proceed as though you owned the highway. Unfortunately, accident statistics are still with us and no amount of wishful thinking is going to erase them.

Safety belts have other virtues as well. There is nothing like the secure feeling that a belt gives when rounding a fast curve or just plain negotiating in traffic. No more of that slipping from side to side. Why not have all the advantages of bucket seats and still retain the seating capacity of the average bench type seat.

One very popular stunt that the Chitwood show features is known as Hi-Skis. It is performed with their new Fords, and the idea is to run one side of the car off a ramp and see how long the car can be held on two wheels at the greatest possible angle. Without belts this stunt would be precarious to say the least. The belts

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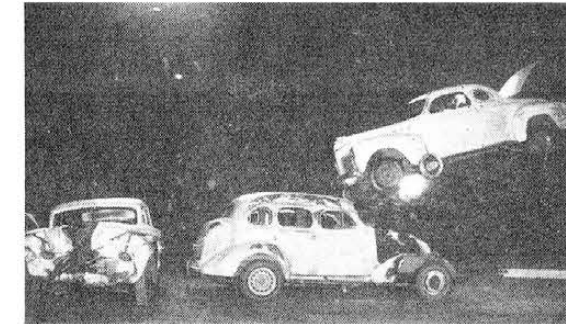
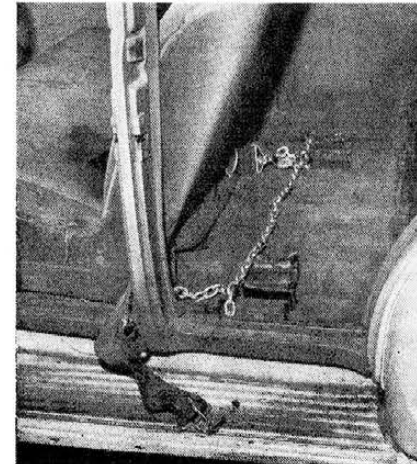


COMBINATION of seat and chest belts holds man safely in dive bomber car



JIMMY WILLIAMS is fastening the seat belt in a junk car preparatory to doing the auto demolishing roll-over stunt

SAFETY belt installation is not intended to be attractive—just solid and safe

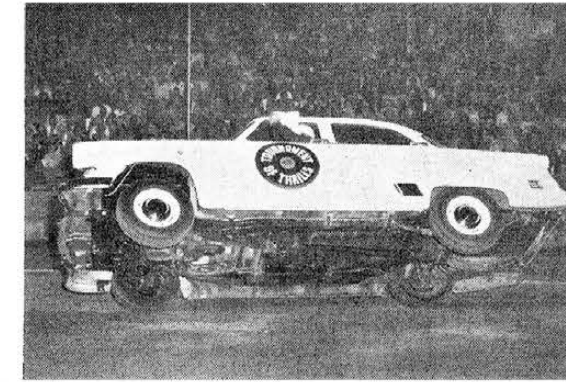


JIMMY WILLIAMS in the midst of Dive Bomber Act. Acceleration after leaving ramp has spun off wheel discs



HARRY WOOLMAN, above, too far over in an extreme Hi-Ski, starts to roll

UNDERSIDE of car as seen when Harry Woolman does his spectacular Hi-Ski



WOOLMAN does spectacular ramp to ramp jump. No mistakes allowed here





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(Continued from page 17)

enable the driver to maintain a firm and healthy position behind the wheel regardless of which side the car is tipped to.

Being over zealous to put on a good performance occasionally gets a driver a bit too far over, scraping paint from the bottom, and perhaps coming to rest on the side or the top. Occasionally some of the old-timers in the business, such as Harry Woolman, who started as a Hollywood stunt man some 29 years ago, end up in this position. Even though the audience loves this type of performance it generally creates considerable consternation among the management, for these cars are the ones which they use for transportation across the country and they must be in working condition.

Even the old junkers, which are picked up at local yards especially for each show, are fitted securely with belts. The installation isn't intended to look like much, but it is secure. Generally, holes are chiseled in the floorboards above the frame rails and directly behind the seat. A length of chain is wrapped around each rail and the belt bolted on.

In the Dive Bomber, which is probably the most spectacular of all the Chitwood stunts, an additional safety measure is used. When a car flies from a ramp through the air at somewhere around fifty miles an hour and literally dives headlong into three parked cars, the tremendous force developed would be too much for one seat belt. So, above the belt is a sort of chest harness, which could virtually eliminate fatal accidents. However, we can't quite see the day when one of these will be a common installation on a normal passenger automobile. The harness consists of a heavy leather belt which reaches from the drivers waist to his armpits. It is tied down with a chain which goes through the back of the seat and around the rear crossmember of the frame. Not much chance of that seat coming loose under any conditions. The object is for the driver to get as low in the seat as possible to lessen the impact because these boys hit with a real bang.

Before they crash any car, the Chitwood men remove every object which might cause them injury. In other words, everything which projects from the inside of the car. Door handles, window cranks, radio knobs, cowl vent levers, everything which can be pried or cut loose goes. If some of our photos disprove this, it's only because they were shot before the removal crew had a chance to really go over the cars. Of course, it is only common sense to remove anything loose which might fly around, such as a back seat which could gain fatal momentum.

The reason for all this attention to de-

tails is because facts and figures show that most injuries in automobile accidents come from the force of the impact being exerted at one point on the body. The human body can stand an unbelievable amount of pressure if it is spread over the body surface.

Fortunately, many of the domestic auto designers are beginning to take a few lessons from the experiences of the drivers. They are approaching the ultimate in smooth, uncluttered interior design, free of the deadly knobs and nasty interior projections that characterized so many of the models of a few years ago.

If all the foregoing has made you feel that we are crusading strongly for decreased damage on the highway, you are absolutely correct. Speeches, lectures, traffic safety courses, citations, and fines all have their place in traffic control. Unfortunately, we continue to read accident reports. They still happen. The only answer seems to be increased safety for driver and passenger and one of the simplest and most direct methods to obtain this would seem to be the use of safety belts. Obviously, they more than do the job for the Chitwood organization.

We know that engineers are currently working on devices that will keep us out of trouble in an automobile. Radar eyes to apply the brakes and highway lanes which actually take control of the car. These and many other miracles loom in the future. But until that golden age arrives, it's still your life. Take care of it.

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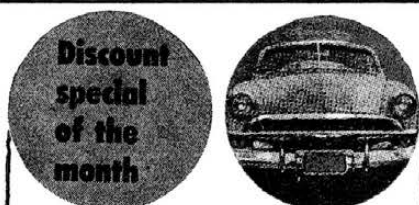
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