

## Chapter Three

# HOT PURSUIT

There are few aspects of police work that consistently create more controversy than high-speed pursuits. When something goes wrong during a car chase, some in the media are quick to condemn the police while ignoring the fact that all too often there is no practical alternative. Unfortunately, no one has ever come up with a workable solution to the problem. The issue continues to receive regular and hostile exposure in the media as each incident makes headlines for two to three days and then fades away, only to be resurrected as background for the next pursuit accident story.

Those who would abolish police pursuits choose to ignore the fact that many dangerous criminals use vehicles as a means to escape arrest. If police are denied the option of chasing these suspects, then it becomes a simple matter for the crooks to increase the speed at which they travel during their getaway, thus virtually guaranteeing themselves immunity from capture.

Of course, many chases involve only minor infractions of the law. Typically an individual who has had a few drinks too many is caught speeding: if he decides he does not want to pull over and face the consequences, the chase is on. Critics of the police argue that in these instances the offender should be allowed to proceed once the vehicle's license plate number is noted. Theoretically, the driver can then be served with a summons at a later date, once the name of the registered owner is obtained from the Motor Vehicle Branch. This is not as simple as it sounds, because, in reality, once the pursuit is broken off, the probability of successfully prosecuting the individual driving the car is almost nil.

Often getting close enough to a speeding vehicle to read its license plate is not as easy as it sounds, since it is necessary to greatly exceed the offender's speed just to catch up. So even this plan necessitates a pursuit, however brief, in order to succeed. If the car subsequently turns out to be stolen, and car theft is definitely a growing concern these days, authorities have effectively forfeited any opportunity to bring the thief before the courts by prematurely halting the chase.

Some critics believe that police officers don't need to chase speeding cars because they can use their police radio instead. According to this argument, there is a viable alternative to high-speed pursuits so they should be banned outright. Even some policemen have repeated this stupid cliché to the media, leaving the public with the mistaken impression that police can avoid pursuits simply by keying their microphones. No one ever elaborates on what is supposed to happen next, although the cop presumably uses his radio to have another car apprehend the suspect vehicle, using some different but unspecified method that is safer than a high-speed pursuit. An alternative cited by some experts is the use of roadblocks.

In twelve years of police service, I have only heard of one chase that was successfully terminated with a roadblock. In that particular incident, a

fleeing vehicle chose to attempt his escape by way of the Lions Gate Bridge toward the North Shore. Our members were able to alert the West Vancouver Police in time for them to block off all three lanes of traffic at mid-span. As the suspect proceeded northbound over the bridge, he was greeted by West Vancouver officers with shotguns. The only way he could escape was to jump into the harbor, which was hundreds of feet below. He chose to surrender.

One factor that proponents of the roadblock method ignore is that in a city like Vancouver, there are an infinite number of escape routes available to a suspect attempting to elude capture. There are usually only a few police units involved in most chases, so there is little chance of setting up an effective roadblock in time. Even if the police are lucky enough to cordon off the right roadway, it is easy for the suspect to drive onto the sidewalk or boulevard, bypass squad cars and spike belts, then continue on his merry way.

It would be simpler if police were permitted to use lethal force to terminate a potentially disastrous chase in order to prevent a tragedy that might involve innocent citizens. In that case, roadblocks only have to slow the progress of a speeding vehicle so that it can be disabled with a shotgun blast fired at the wheels. It is unlikely, however, that politicians would authorize such drastic tactics.

In short, roadblocks seldom work in a city environment. On the other hand, police patrolling highways may be able to use their special spiked barriers in some roadblock configurations if they have enough time to set up.

It is easy to explain why high-speed chases occur; it is difficult to justify the consequences when innocent people get caught in the middle. I have seen what happens when things go wrong during these incidents. The resulting carnage is difficult to forget. I know someone who was seriously injured as a result of his inadvertent involvement in a police chase. He happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when a policeman from another municipality attempted to pull over a vehicle which had passed him at high speed. Somehow the police unit collided with the bystander's car while trying to catch up with the violator. The violator got away. The bystander was less fortunate. He sustained serious injuries as a result of the collision, and now his life will never be the same.

I participated in many high-speed chases during my career, and I also experienced one police pursuit from the perspective of a frightened citizen caught in the middle. I was driving through another municipality one evening, en route to work, when I heard the roar of a car's engine through my open window just as I approached an intersection. Although the light was green for me, I instinctively slammed on my brakes. I came to a stop just as a car roared through the red light from my right, narrowly missing my front bumper by about a foot.

The driver, perhaps realizing at the last second that he was going through a red light, panicked and slammed on his brakes in the middle of the intersection. It was just enough to cause him to skid sideways in a cloud of tire smoke. He apparently changed his mind when he realized that he wasn't going to hit me, floored the gas pedal and continued on his way. I didn't get a good look at the license plate or the driver, so I was of no use as a witness.

I looked quickly to my right. Seeing nobody coming, I continued on my way after checking whether the light was still green. I just managed to clear the intersection as an unmarked police car roared through the red light, chasing the vehicle that had almost hit me. Some unmarked cars hide their sirens behind the radiator grill, making them less effective. Nevertheless, I should have seen it coming, and I didn't.

It was a valuable and enlightening experience for me. In fact, it helped to explain the stupid behavior of some of the motorists who ignored my emergency lights and sirens during chases. Quite often things happen so quickly that the average citizen just doesn't have time to react to the sound of sirens coming their way. My own close call certainly reinforced my healthy respect for the potential danger to the public during a high-speed pursuit.

I would love to provide an answer to the problem of police pursuits, but there is no easy solution. If police are forbidden to chase speeding cars, a number of new and equally dangerous scenarios will soon develop as crooks take advantage of a foolproof means of escape simply by using stolen, high-powered vehicles during the commission of crimes. Then nothing short of a serious motor vehicle accident will impair their chances of making a clean getaway.

The only alternative with any potential for success is the use of helicopters. These aircraft, along with pilots to man them, would have to be on standby at all times to assist in chases. This would be a very expensive proposition. For that reason, I suspect police helicopters will never be seriously considered by Vancouver, which has never been accused of being overly generous with equipment for its emergency services. Of course a helicopter can only monitor the progress of a speeding vehicle. It is still necessary to bring it to bay, and that invariably still involves a high-speed pursuit.

I saw a picture of one ingenious solution to the high-speed pursuit dilemma. A long-barreled .45 revolver had been incorporated into the dash of a mid-60's Texas Ranger police car, positioned so that it sat at hood level, pointing directly ahead through a small hole in the windshield. A policeman in a chase could merely reach over to his right and fire off six rounds into the suspect's trunk.

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My first high-speed chase involved an impaired driver. My training officer and I found him speeding along Kingsway one night. He accelerated away from us when we tried to pull him over with our red and blue lights. It was a very short chase because seconds later, the driver lost control of his vehicle. He was trying to turn off onto a side street and plowed into a curb instead. No one was hurt, although he demolished his car's undercarriage, leaving the car a total write-off. After refusing a breathalyzer, he went to jail for the rest of the night.

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Within a matter of days we had another short chase. My training officer pointed to a car stopped at an intersection. All I could see inside the passenger compartment was the top of a child's head, barely higher than the steering wheel. His driving was not bad considering that he could hardly

reach the pedals. He was arrested after a short foot chase, but because he was a juvenile he was released to his parent's custody.

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In the early hours of the morning, my partner and I left the West End to arrest a suspect in East Vancouver, well outside the boundaries of our assigned area. We monitored the East End radio channel, in addition to our own channel, during our passage through the area. As we approached our suspect's address, we overheard cars from South Vancouver switching channels to warn the East End radio operator that they were in pursuit of a stolen car, heading our way at a high rate of speed.

The stolen vehicle crossed East Broadway and neared our location at Nanaimo and First Avenue. We waited at the intersection after the pursuing unit radioed that the suspect vehicle was now eastbound on First from Commercial Street. We watched as the car and its two young occupants sped through a red light in front of us, still traveling eastbound and probably heading for a nearby entrance to the highway. Since they had left their original pursuers far behind, we decided to follow them.

The stolen car was an older Chevrolet, very popular with car thieves since it is easily hot-wired and the worn ignition switch can be operated by almost any Chev key. This car had a very powerful big-block engine, so we had trouble catching up to it. Had they taken the highway, they could have outrun us for sure. Instead, however, the suspects drove off the road into a field only a hundred feet short of the Highway One turnoff. The car bogged down in mud, so the two crooks abandoned it and fled on foot.

My partner and I, along with another officer who pulled in behind us, ran after them. The slower of the two suspects crossed the field and ran behind a house. My partner took one side of the house and I took the other. We tackled our suspect in the middle of the backyard. After a short struggle, we handcuffed the young car thief and turned him over to the police unit assigned to the call. The other suspect was soon apprehended nearby and placed in the wagon with his accomplice.

The Chevrolet turned out to be hot-wired, as evidenced by the tangle of loose ignition wires we found hanging under the dash. There were also three stolen car stereos in the back seat. The two suspects had a long history of stealing cars and had been involved in several previous car chases.

A Mountie from a neighboring detachment dropped by to help. When he heard the stolen car's engine roaring at full throttle, he checked under the dash and discovered the gas pedal jammed against the floorboard. The suspects had left the car in gear after it became mired in the field. It then dug its rear wheels deep into the soft ground until finally coming to rest on the frame. The vehicle continued spinning its tires at full throttle until the Mountie finally unraveled the spliced ignition wires to shut it off.

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It would be fair to state that policemen have little affection for the City Hall bean counters responsible for purchasing police equipment. One year, an anonymous bureaucrat decided that our department should try out police cars with six-cylinder engines. Normally, our fleet uses eight-cylinder engines that are barely adequate to move full-size police cars through normal traffic.

It did not take much common sense to understand that an under-powered vehicle just would not cut it in the real world of police work. Those of us who had to work in these cars knew the experiment was doomed to fail from the start.

Unfortunately, even though the six-cylinder cars were clearly unacceptable for police service, we were left to drive a number of dangerously-under-powered patrol cars for several years until they finally fell apart. In fact, one of these cars left the patrol division prematurely, after a frustrated policeman put the transmission in neutral and left the gas pedal on the mat until he finally heard terminally-destructive noises from under the hood.

Another policeman and I were assigned one of the six-cylinder cars during a particularly chilly night shift. We found it very difficult to pull over even routine speeders with this car. Because it accelerated so slowly, we had to reach inordinately excessive speeds just to catch up and then slam on the brakes at the last second to prevent overshooting the speeder. In the eight-cylinder police cars it was relatively easy to accelerate to the same speed as routine violators, clock them for several blocks, then pull them over safely.

Just before breakfast time we observed a taxi driving southbound on Oak Street. The cabby was obviously speeding, and we guessed he was on his way to a taxi stand in a nearby municipality to end his shift. I was driving, and decided to do a U-turn and issue him a speeding ticket.

The U-turn was uneventful, but accelerating up to his speed seemed to take forever. Meanwhile, the cabby saw us turning around and decided to make a run for it. After twenty blocks, we were still not close enough to get a look at his plates or his cab number. By the time we reached the Oak Street Bridge, our speed was just starting to match his, but I had to back off a bit because there were ice patches and I was afraid of losing control. Despite reducing my speed, I almost spun out as we turned at one of the bridge exits.

We were two blocks behind when the cab finally turned down a side street and ducked into a parking lot. By the time we followed him into the lot, the cab we'd been chasing was somewhere in the middle of dozens of other identical taxis. They were all parked in rows with their engines running because the drivers were changing shifts. I was, to put it mildly, a little upset when I stormed into their office and demanded to know the identity of the driver I had just chased all the way from Vancouver.

Everyone shook their heads and claimed to have no knowledge of any car chase. Several of the drivers exchanged knowing smirks which just infuriated me even more. I informed them in no uncertain terms that I would find the culprit, no matter how many of the company's drivers I had to ticket. One driver subsequently approached us outside and pointed out a cab he believed had just pulled in. He seemed a little unsure of himself, so we decided not to follow up the information. I drove off, licking my wounds and swearing vengeance against the cab driver and the city bureaucrat responsible for buying the six-cylinder car I was driving.

I phoned the police officer responsible for taxi permits in that municipality and requested that he check into the matter for me. By a happy

coincidence, my first traffic stop the next night happened to be the same cab pointed out to us the evening before by the only cooperative cabby. This time the taxi driver jumped a red light when he saw there was no traffic coming and sped off down Granville Street at almost double the speed limit, oblivious to our presence behind him.

As I awarded him a matching pair of tickets, the cabby complained in a whining voice that the cops were always picking on him just because he was on parole for manslaughter. I knew the extra points from our encounter would probably lose him his license because he had already accumulated a long list of traffic violations since his recent release from jail. I was not surprised to get a phone call from the taxi squad the next day, telling me their sources had confirmed that this parolee was also the individual who had outrun me in the car chase. They canceled his taxi permit and ended his short but eventful career as a taxi driver for good.

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Perhaps the most frightening chase I was ever involved in started with a broadcast that one of our cars was pursuing a green, older model Buick Riviera down East Hastings Street toward the skid road area. The speeds didn't sound excessive at first. When I heard that it was headed my way, I decided to sit at the intersection of Campbell and Hastings and wait for the chase to come to me.

At the intersection I momentarily considered doing a U-turn and then building up some speed in his direction of travel so I could take an active role in the pursuit. Before I could do so, the vehicle being chased came toward me over the Hastings viaduct with its lights out. It is difficult under the circumstances to estimate just how fast the car was going, but my best guess is that he was doing well over a hundred miles per hour when he went through the red light I was stopped at. I was able to recognize it as a green Buick Riviera, but I could not make out the plate.

If I'd done the U-turn as soon as the thought occurred to me, I would have pulled directly into the Buick's path and it would have rammed me broadside. I could not possibly have survived the collision because of the incredible speed at which he was traveling. There weren't any police cars following him at that point because he was moving so quickly, and I didn't bother to take up the chase either. The Buick disappeared into the night.

I did, however, broadcast for the other cars to stay safely out of his way. At that speed, no one could hope to catch him anyway. Hours later, we managed to find the Buick, dumped on a side street. Unfortunately there was insufficient evidence to lay charges against the individual we believed had been driving during the chase. I took the liberty of rearranging his spark plug wires while I had a look under the hood, so I doubt he ever used this car to outrun the police again.

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Not every stolen car stop turns into a car chase. Early in my career, while patrolling the West End one morning, I noticed a car with Alberta plates cruising the area. I'd seen the same car parked in front of my next-door neighbor's house recently. I'd begun to suspect that the person who was renting the house was dealing drugs after watching a steady stream of

addicts visiting him at odd hours. I ran the plate on my computer and it came back as having been reported stolen.

The driver pulled over as soon as he heard my siren. I arrested everyone in the car, including my neighbor. The driver readily admitted that he alone was responsible for stealing the car back in Alberta. I released my neighbor after searching his house for further evidence. I almost had the opportunity to arrest him again a few months later, when the drug squad dropped by my house to ask if I wanted to join them in a search warrant attempt next door. Unfortunately, I was out of town at the time, but the raid was very successful. The heavy traffic I'd noticed in and out of the house at all hours dropped off dramatically after the occupants were all sent to jail.

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At the beginning of my career, I used to check numerous license plates over the radio during my shift, which did not exactly make me popular with some of the male radio operators. Most were policemen on light duty who couldn't type and had difficulty entering the queries properly into the computer.

I was working the wagon one afternoon when I noticed a white convertible driving down Dunsmuir Street. The driver looked suspicious so I checked the plate to see if the car was stolen. The query took so long to process that I finally gave up. When the car turned left onto a side street, I stayed on Dunsmuir, a one-way street.

Seconds later, the radio operator informed me that the car had been reported stolen. I knew if I tried to circle around in rush hour traffic I'd never see him again, so I turned on the emergency equipment and did a quick U-turn. That was no easy task in the paddy wagon, because there were cars stuck in traffic all around me. I had to fight my way back against the flow of one-way traffic, while simultaneously trying to broadcast my location so a backup unit could attend.

In the process I wrapped the microphone cord around the steering wheel and shifter so tightly that I had to bend over to speak into the mike. The stolen car was also bogged down in heavy traffic, so I was able to pull in behind it a block later. Instead of sitting tight, the driver calmly emerged from the car with a "Who, me?" expression on his face.

Now I had to untangle the mike, put the gearshift into park, switch my siren off and work my way out of the driver's seat. At the same time I was also struggling to remove my service revolver from the awkward and outmoded holster that had been issued to me when I joined. Its leather cover completely concealed our weapons so that liberal Vancouverites would not be offended by the sight of our naked revolvers, but the design didn't function very well when you wanted to pull your gun in an emergency. Fortunately, the suspect only tried to talk his way out of the charge, rather than running or fighting for his freedom. He surrendered peacefully when his bluff was called.

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One of my favorite cases involved yet another car, this one a brand new Corvette driven by a clean-cut gentleman from Quebec. I pulled him over on Granville Street near the mall, just after three in the morning. He

was polite and cooperative, but I still had a feeling he was up to no good. When I checked his Quebec license and registration over the radio, I could find nothing out of the ordinary. My special interest at that time was checking Vehicle Identification Numbers, the unique serial numbers which are displayed prominently somewhere on or near the dash of most cars, usually on an engraved metal tag. I checked the Corvette's VIN on the computer, and it seemed to be legitimate.

It was a quiet night, so I had a chance to do a thorough job of checking out the car and its occupant. Although the driver displayed no visible signs of nervousness when I started paying extra attention to the Corvette's VIN, my instincts told me to keep looking. Something about the VIN tag did not seem right when I looked at it from outside the car. It was difficult to examine closely because, on the Corvette, it was positioned on the inside of the driver's side windshield post. My suspicions were confirmed when I used my knife to poke away at the numbers on the tag. Although it was supposed to be made from metal, part of it peeled away easily. The plate was covered with a strip of plastic Dyno tape, complete with an imprinted VIN which was only slightly different from the real one underneath it.

I placed the driver under arrest as everything about his story began to unravel. With the help of the Quebec Provincial Police, we learned that his driver's license, registration and insurance had all been stolen from motor licensing offices back east. When we fingerprinted him to determine his real identity, we discovered that he was a member of a notorious Quebec motorcycle gang. According to the Quebec police, he and his associates had stolen numerous expensive cars from car dealerships. They then transported the cars out west where they were sold as slightly used cars at bargain prices, usually to unscrupulous customers willing to overlook their suspicions. This Corvette, in fact, had been ordered by a Quebec policeman and stolen before he could take delivery.

The suspect eventually pled guilty to Quebec charges of auto theft, but not before one of the stolen auto squad detectives and I were flown to Quebec for the preliminary hearing. The situation we encountered in Montreal was difficult to comprehend. The people seemed less friendly than those I'd encountered while hitchhiking through Quebec in my youth. Only a few of the people we dealt with could or would communicate with us in English, although they were not overtly hostile toward us. The court system in B.C. seemed totally different to what little we were able to understand of the Quebec justice system.

It was fascinating to watch the court staff there try to put together a judge and court recorder who would admit to speaking sufficient English to understand our evidence. The stiff penalty finally handed out to the car thief, in part because of his horrendous record, well compensated us for the lengthy ordeal of the court case.

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I arrived at the scene of a serious accident moments after it occurred. A young man driving a stolen car had decided for some reason to try to outrun the police. In the process he ran a red light. The occupants of the

vehicle he struck broadside in the intersection were obviously badly injured, so we called for emergency ambulances to attend the scene. I looked inside what remained of the car he hit, and what I saw was like something out of a horror film. I made sure the car thief, who did not appear injured, also had a good look inside the car. Both occupants of the second car later died as a result of their injuries.

One of the passengers in the stolen car had a head injury that was pumping blood all over her blouse, so I placed a pressure bandage over the wound to stop the bleeding. I suspect she didn't even notice me, because she was hysterical and seemed to be extremely traumatized by the experience. It was truly a tragic incident. I'm not sure what, if anything, the police could have done differently, but I did a lot of soul-searching after this one.

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Another car chase that ended unhappily involved two young men in a sports car. They had been out on the town that evening and became involved in a noisy dispute with several prostitutes at a skid road street corner. A neighbor called 911 to report the disturbance. As the police arrived, the young men immediately piled into their car and left the scene in a cloud of tire smoke. Apparently they tried to make a sharp right hand turn at high speed onto a dark side street, in order to elude the police. They lost control of the car instead. It spun and landed on its side, throwing one of the occupants, the only one without his seat belt fastened, through the open roof.

He crashed through a plate glass storefront window, sustaining serious head injuries in the process. I went into the store to check him out and found him lying on his side. There were dangerous shards of glass hanging just over our heads, so I grabbed a cardboard box and used it as a shield to protect us. There was no indication that he was dying at first, although there was some blood on his face.

Since I could see that he was still breathing, I knelt down beside him and said the usual ludicrous thing you say to seriously injured people. "You'll be okay. Don't move. An ambulance is on the way." A more experienced diagnostician standing nearby in a police uniform snorted in disagreement and walked away to check the other occupant.

At that point my patient emitted a death rattle, a sound that is difficult to describe but which seemed to me like someone gasping and at the same time swallowing for air that just wasn't there anymore. Blood suddenly began pouring out of several different openings from his skull and he died moments later. The victim was almost certainly brain-dead the moment he went through the window, according to the ambulance attendants.

The second occupant of the Corvette was not charged with any criminal offense because there was no evidence he'd been driving during the chase. I offered to drive him home on my way to notify the victim's next of kin. The young man was still in shock over his friend's death and had not been of much help to the investigators when they interviewed him immediately after the accident. He took an instant dislike to me, and eventually bailed out of my police car as we drove across one of the major

bridges. I was relieved to see that he did not immediately jump off the bridge, and I left him there to make his own way home on foot.

Notifying the next of kin in this instance was one of the most difficult tasks I ever handled. The survivor had informed us that his deceased friend was the only son of a widow who had a history of heart attacks, so I arranged for an ambulance crew to come with me to the house while I broke the bad news to her. I did not think it would be right to burden her with details of the last few minutes of her son's life, so I simply told her that her son had died in a car accident.

These sudden death notifications are at times almost as hard on the policeman making them as they are on the next of kin. There is no way you can prepare yourself for the ordeal. In this case, the grieving mother took the news surprisingly well, although she was obviously heartbroken. I called her daughter and asked her to come over to take care of her mother, so I also had to tell her about her brother's death when she arrived.

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A chase with a happier ending started just after midnight and wound its way from southern Vancouver to the East End. The members initiating the chase were following a stolen Corvette down side streets at high speed until it stopped momentarily as the passenger jumped out. The car then accelerated away from them again. One of the pursuing policemen, a recruit just out of the academy, chased the man on foot while his partner continued the car chase.

The speed they were traveling remained relatively high, despite the fact that the Corvette had two flat tires, the result of brief excursions off the roadway. Driving on the wheel rims did not seem to slow him down. When it appeared that the chase would be moving into an adjoining municipality, the RCMP working that area were notified by our radio operators.

The Mounties are very professional in the performance of their duties. They can always be counted on for prompt and able assistance, and they didn't disappoint us that night. One very determined Mountie parked his car on the boundary between our municipalities and waited patiently for the stolen Corvette. An effective roadblock would have been impossible to arrange at this location, but he didn't need any other cars for what he planned. With perfect timing and skillful driving he faked a move backwards as the stolen car approached, leaving just enough room in front of him for the vehicle to pass. As the car thief accepted his invitation, the Mountie surged ahead and tapped the Corvette's rear fender, sending it airborne over a curb.

The stolen car landed on the boulevard with enough damage that it was finally immobilized. Its driver still had some fight in him, however. He bailed out and started running through a nearby park. A female Mountie covering the chase observed the suspect running away and drove through the park after him. He was in no mood to surrender, so she pulled up beside him and skillfully bunted him into orbit with the back fender of her police car. By the time the suspect stopped rolling across the grass, one of our police dogs arrived to chew on him. After that ordeal, he seemed almost relieved to be taken into custody.

Fifteen minutes later, as soon as things had settled down at the arrest scene, someone realized that the recruit chasing the Corvette's passenger was still not accounted for. We rushed back to the area where he'd last been seen to start a search. We knew he had no portable radio with him; it was still in the police car.

I drove down dark side streets, and after several anxious minutes of searching, finally located the recruit. He was proudly standing at curbside with his handcuffed prisoner at his feet. He had the happy look that police dogs get when they catch a crook and want that all-important recognition from their master for a job well done. It turned out that he'd had no problem capturing his suspect after a short foot chase and a brief struggle. He had then just waited there patiently with his prize, confident that a police car would show up sooner or later.

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One of the most incredible chases I ever observed began one weekday evening when an East End patrol unit attempted to pull over a Dodge sedan. The car bolted, and the pursuing members called for "Code Four," which gave them priority on the radio channel in order to broadcast the pursuit.

Judging by the broadcasts, it sounded to me like the vehicle was traveling at a relatively high rate of speed. Since much of the route they traveled was through residential side streets, it was clear that the chase would have to end quickly, one way or another, before somebody got hurt.

I followed the progress of the pursuit as they sped through the East End. I stayed clear of the action until I heard the only police unit still in the chase broadcast that he was westbound and about to cross one of the major thoroughfares. At the time I was a block away on the same street. As a result, I was a spectator to the unusual end of this chase. The suspect vehicle, with a marked police car locked onto its rear end, blasted across the main street at well over the speed limit. They left a trail of smoke and assorted car parts in their wake. I watched a civilian car proceeding down the thoroughfare hit the rear bumper of the suspect's Dodge as they met momentarily in the intersection. Both cars continued on without stopping. The innocent citizen never did report the collision to the police.

I pulled in behind the cavalcade. The two cars, still locked together, continued down a crowded side street which was just wide enough to allow one-way traffic. I knew they couldn't keep this up for long, so I was not surprised when the two cars finally veered into a parked van. There was a horrendous crash, and both vehicles were demolished as they crushed one side of the van.

The incredible spectacle unfolding in front of me was so fascinating that I neglected to apply my brakes as quickly as I should have. My brakes locked up but it was too late. I remember seeing the policeman brace himself for the impact as I plowed into his car's back bumper at slow speed, causing minimal damage. As the two of us hauled the suspect out of the smoking ruins of his car, we discovered, much to my amazement, that nobody was hurt.

The suspect's only comment to police about the incident was that he had been in car chases all over Canada and the United States and had never

run into a policeman who could drive like that. He'd had the misfortune to be followed by one of our more tenacious members, a good, aggressive street policeman who seldom lost a car he was chasing. Under normal circumstances, the suspect would probably have been successful in eluding his pursuers. I know I couldn't have caught him. He eventually received a year in jail after a dangerous driving conviction.

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I would never buy a used police car. They take incredible punishment during their years of service, primarily because most policemen treat them as disposable tools of the trade, readily expendable if the situation merits it. While exploring a remote path in Stanley Park one night, I managed to get a brand new unmarked car stuck on top of a fallen log. It took us over an hour to pry it free. By that time we had managed to tie up our entire shift to help push us, as well as two tow trucks which both managed to dig themselves axle deep in the mud. One tow truck driver was trying so hard to help us that he rammed a tree in the process and demolished his passenger side door.

My favorite story about damage to a police car happened well before I joined the department. It apparently began when a policeman skidded out of control on black ice during a quiet night shift. He sideswiped a pole, causing damage to one side of the car. Concerned that this act of negligence would hurt his promotional chances, he woke up a friend who owned a body shop and informed his radio dispatcher that he'd be tied up for a while. By the time his night shift ended, he and his friend had repaired the damage and slapped on a new coat of black and white paint. According to legend, nobody ever noticed the repair job, and the story only emerged after a long evening at the bar.

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A particularly quiet rainy evening was interrupted by a broadcast that one of the public transportation supervisors was reporting that his car had just been stolen. He'd left his keys in the ignition while he was out assisting a bus in the skid road area. I started in the direction of Hastings Street, anticipating that the suspect would head toward the West End.

Within a matter of seconds one of our units spotted the stolen car heading westbound on Hastings through heavy traffic. As the car approached the intersection of Cambie and Hastings, it was blocked by cars stopped at a red light. A police car pulled in behind it.

Coming from the opposite direction, I stopped beside it to assist in the arrest. For some reason I felt a little uncomfortable about the look of this particular suspect. As a result, I made the decision to draw my service revolver in case he was armed.

I needn't have bothered. The driver looked at me contemptuously when I pointed my revolver in his direction as several other police officers ordered him to exit the stolen car. He offered us his right middle digit in reply, then raised the driver's side window and meticulously locked all the car's doors.

I could see him looking for a way out, and I realized there were several scenarios that could potentially cause us a lot of trouble over the next few seconds. If the civilian cars blocking his progress from the front

pulled out when the light turned green, we could quickly find ourselves involved in a high-speed pursuit. In any case, if he turned his wheels to the right and pulled up onto the sidewalk in order to bypass the traffic jam around him, we would be off to the races again. Several of us approached the stolen car at the same time. Something had to be done before it was too late.

I got to the driver's side first. I had never broken a car window before, so I decided that a considerable amount of force would be necessary since safety glass is stronger than normal glass. I put my revolver in its holster and grabbed my three-cell flashlight. Using a full roundhouse swing, I closed my eyes and struck the window with all my strength.

When it shattered it showered broken glass all over the thief and the inside of the car. When I pulled the door open, he still refused to give up without a fight. At first we weren't able to force him out of the car, even with several officers pulling him in different directions. He was finally taken into custody after someone realized that the thief still had his seat belt on.

He was not hurt by the shattered glass or by our exertions during his arrest. Because he had a long history of mental illness, he was eventually returned to a hospital for treatment. After he was taken into custody, I discovered one of the disadvantages of this dramatic method of pulling people out of stolen cars. I had tiny razor cuts all over my right hand from glass fragments. Police work goes much more smoothly in television shows, and the cops on TV never seem to get cut up during an arrest.

\* \* \*

"Four Alpha Fourteen, Code Four! We're in pursuit of a hit and run vehicle, westbound on Hastings from Campbell."

A sunny winter Sunday afternoon was soon enlivened by the sound of a car chase over the radio. Officers on routine patrol observed a battered Datsun rear-end another car in the area of Clark and Hastings. The Datsun didn't bother to stick around, even though the damage was relatively minor. The driver simply backed up and then sped off in the opposite direction, refusing to stop when the police pulled in behind him with its emergency lights flashing.

The chase proceeded through the waterfront area and took a bizarre twist when the suspect sped through a parking lot situated beside the harbor. It was full of policemen's personal cars because this was the only downtown parking lot available to us at the time.

I followed the pursuing units to the waterfront area and monitored the progress of the chase through the lot. Miraculously, despite his erratic driving style, he didn't hit any of our cars. However, as the suspect headed out of the lot, he sideswiped a police wagon that tried unsuccessfully to roadblock him and then continued on his way. I considered positioning my police car to block his passage, but decided against it at the last second when it became clear that he intended to ram anything in front of him. There was also a police car right on his tail, too close to stop if the suspect hit me. I decided it just wasn't worth the hours of reports that would have followed, although in retrospect I probably should have tried it anyway.

Next he tried to make his escape down the railway tracks beside our lot. He may well have seen cars in movie chase scenes that successfully negotiated railway tracks, but he was no stunt driver. The chase ended when he high-sided his car on the rails after traveling less than twenty feet. He was surrounded by blue uniforms before he could attempt to escape on foot. The suspect, a long-time drug addict with a lengthy record, had stolen the car just before the chase began.

\* \* \*

Just as we started our morning coffee one Sunday day-shift, our radio operator informed us that an RCMP member from North Vancouver was chasing a motorcycle toward our end of the Second Narrows bridge. A motorcycle has several distinct advantages in a car chase, and the driver of this one obviously knew what he was doing. After a series of maneuvers, which included a U-turn in the middle of the bridge, he finally managed to escape.

The Mountie in pursuit gave his operator a brief description of the motorcyclist, who was wearing a distinctive red rain jacket. This information was, in turn, passed on to us via our radio, in case he decided to drive through Vancouver later. Unfortunately, the Mountie was unable to give us a license plate on the bike because he couldn't get close enough to see it during the chase.

It was a quiet morning, so I decided to sit on our side of the Second Narrows bridge in case the motorcyclist attempted the crossing again. I reasoned that no one would be awake that early on a Sunday morning unless he had an important commitment. For instance, if he had a job to report to, there was always a chance he might be foolhardy enough to retrace his original route after laying low until the excitement died down. His only alternative would be to double back across the Lions Gate bridge, which was at the other end of the city.

Traffic was light, so I had no difficulty eliminating the first few motorcycles that drove past as potential suspects. After sitting there for half an hour, I watched a motorcycle cross the bridge at a speed well below the posted limit. The driver was close to the vague description we'd been given, except that he was not wearing a red rain jacket. He pulled over almost immediately when I activated my emergency equipment. It had been raining all morning, but this driver wore only a denim jacket for protection against the elements.

He was nervous at first, although he was polite and cooperative. He denied involvement in a car chase, and had almost convinced me that he was innocent until I noticed a bulge under his denim jacket. As he sat astride his bike, I unbuttoned the lower half of his jacket and pulled out a full set of red rain gear. The motorcyclist then decided that he did not wish to comment further, so we waited impatiently for the RCMP officer who had initiated the chase to attend so he could identify him.

The Mountie arrived two minutes later and immediately confirmed that I had stopped the right man. He considered laying criminal charges for dangerous driving against the suspect, who was still not admitting anything, but in the end decided that a criminal charge would be too difficult to prove.

Instead, the Mountie laboriously wrote the unlucky motorcyclist a ticket for each offense he had committed during the chase, a grand total of eight different tickets. The biker was quite upset and indignant. Although he complained bitterly to us about the injustice of it all, he never once tried to deny the allegations.

\* \* \*

One of our police cars was hit from behind by a speeding motorcycle that had been attempting to elude other officers. The impact of the bike left a deep indentation in the car's trunk, almost as if it had backed into a pole at freeway speeds. The biker's helmet crumpled the car's roof almost all the way to the driver's seat. The damaged car sat in the police garage for several days with the wrecked bike positioned at the original point of impact. After examining the wreckage, it was easy to understand why the motorcyclist's injuries ultimately proved fatal.

\* \* \*

It was just after midnight when I parked my marked car east of Main Street on Terminal Avenue, a business area with a long, straight road that resembles a drag strip. As I wrote a report, I heard a super bike leaving the intersection of Main and Terminal in a big hurry. Super bikes are the powerful, high performance motorcycles that can accelerate to well over a hundred miles per hour in the quarter mile. I put my car in gear, ready to follow him if he decided to run. His front wheel actually left the ground as he accelerated, but when he saw me looking at him, he instinctively backed off the throttle.

After hesitating for a moment, however, he changed his mind again and accelerated away from me. I pulled out after him, but he quickly reached incredibly high speeds and I soon lost sight of him. I terminated the chase and gave our radio operator a description of the bike and rider in case any other policemen happened to be in the neighborhood. Although another officer observed the biker and tried to catch him, he was also outrun.

The motorcyclist had another close encounter before he finally made good his escape. One of our police dogs happened to be out of the car tracking on an unrelated case when the biker roared down a narrow street, heading directly toward him. The dog's handler barely managed to drag his animal off the road before the bike raced past, narrowly missing them both. After that, he disappeared for good.

\* \* \*

Several of our units were chasing a motorcycle through heavy traffic in the vicinity of the old Expo 86 site one afternoon. When traffic blocked the intersection ahead, the suspect started driving down the sidewalk, forcing some pedestrians to jump out of his way.

He would have escaped, but the intersection he chose to disrupt was manned by a Reserve Policeman directing traffic. The officer had already endured a great deal of abuse from the public that night. He had no police radio with him, but he could hear the sirens and see the flashing red and blue lights of our police cars as the biker left them behind in snarled traffic. It would have been safer for the Reserve Policeman just to jump out of the path of the speeding motorcyclist, but after a difficult evening of dealing with

impatient and downright negligent motorists, he decided that this jerk on the motorcycle was the last straw.

Wielding his flashlight, which has a red cone on the end for directing traffic, he waited to make his move until the bike was beside him. Then he deftly clubbed the biker off his mount, knocking him to the ground. As soon as other policemen arrived on the scene, he immediately resumed his duties directing traffic as if nothing untoward had happened. The biker, a penitentiary escapee described as armed and dangerous, was soon handcuffed and returned to jail.

\* \* \*

Motorcycle accidents are all too common these days, as more and more drivers with minimal experience push the envelope while piloting machines capable of outperforming some race cars. I've seen more than my share of demolished bikes and shattered bodies at accident scenes, and like most people who have owned a motorcycle, I've had a fairly serious accident myself. As a firm believer in freedom of choice, I do not agree with banning high-powered super-bikes as some would advocate. However, I would certainly be in favor of a mandatory comprehensive training course for everyone buying their first motorcycle. There are just too many serious accidents involving super-bikes where low odometer readings indicate novice riders.

One accident I attended illustrates just how dangerous super-bikes can be in the hands of inexperienced riders. It occurred along an overpass on the boundary between Vancouver and Burnaby. Although it happened during the day, there were no witnesses. The first impact was with a guardrail. Some of the driver's severed fingertips were found there. Further down the road there was a trail of clothing and body parts that led to the victim's shattered corpse. He ended up on the pavement beside the demolished bike.

To the best of my knowledge investigators never determined what actually caused the accident, although it was obvious that it occurred while the machine was traveling at a very high rate of speed. I took two enduring images with me from that scene. One was of a cheerful Mountie, present because we ultimately determined that the accident had occurred in his jurisdiction instead of ours. He stood over the body, one foot on each side of the torso, and bent over almost double to carry out the necessary search through the victim's pockets for identification papers.

I also remember interviewing the woman who discovered the accident. She was calm at first, but her composure deteriorated markedly after she averted her eyes momentarily and noticed a piece of the victim's brain on the pavement nearby. She made a determined effort not to look at it again, but I noticed her cringing every time her eyes subconsciously began to stray back in that direction.

\* \* \*

We passed one of the skid road bars just in time to observe a Pinto fly out of the parking lot without any lights on. It then drove eastbound on Cordova at high speed. The driver ignored our emergency equipment for the first two minutes. We were about to declare a full-scale chase over the radio but the car suddenly pulled over.

The sole occupant, a rather attractive young woman, hesitantly stepped out of the Pinto. She was more than a little unsteady on her feet, but what really got our attention was the fact that she wore a skimpy outfit and flaunted her wares unashamedly. She was very friendly at first; she explained that she worked as a stripper at the bar she'd just left. She admitted having a few drinks after her shift ended, although she vehemently denied that she was too drunk to drive.

When we informed her she was going to have to pay a visit to the breathalyzer room downtown, her mood changed suddenly and the smile turned into a fierce snarl. The sultry, seductive pose disappeared altogether, and the fight was on. It was a vicious struggle while it lasted. I was the recipient of a well-aimed knee to the groin as I tried to handcuff her. We eventually convicted her of impaired driving.

Two years later, I stopped the same stripper for speeding again. She hadn't been drinking this time, so we had a much more pleasant conversation, at least until she remembered who I was. She still went to jail, however. This time it was for several speeding tickets she had neglected to pay.

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In the early seventies there was a notorious Vancouver youth who regularly stole Corvettes and then drove around the city looking for a police car. He would then pull up alongside the car and attempt to provoke the officers into chasing him, knowing full well that, because he was a juvenile, nothing would happen to him in court if he got caught. Apparently many of the policemen he approached simply ignored the young man, and he eventually went on to bigger and better things in the world of crime.

\*\*\*

We do not get much snow in Vancouver, but when a storm does hit the area, many of our citizens do their best to contribute to the notoriously high accident statistics our province is burdened with. The natural beauty of a snowstorm seems to fill most drivers with awe and reckless abandon. When coupled with inexperience, this exuberance creates mayhem.

I was once involved in a car chase during one of the worst snow storms I ever experienced as a policeman. I followed a small pickup truck south on Oak Street from 41st after its driver refused to pull over. Road conditions at the time were terrible, but fortunately there was only light traffic ahead of us. The idiot driving the pickup kept opening his door and leaning half way out, almost as if he intended to shoot at me. The speeds he reached were not excessive, although his driving was very erratic. I kept my distance, not wanting to risk getting shot if indeed that was his intention. I guessed from what I'd already witnessed of his driving ability that he would skid off the road soon anyway.

After avoiding several near accidents, the pickup truck started building up a head of steam as it approached the Oak Street bridge. Once across the bridge, there was nothing to stop him from running all the way to the United States border. He must have had second thoughts about deserting the warm hospitality of Vancouver, however, because after crossing the bridge he suddenly decided to do a U-turn. I watched in amazement as he swung his

car sideways and successfully plowed through a deep mound of snow that separated the divided highway. He then started back the way he'd come. There was no way I was going to lose him now, so I closed my eyes and duplicated his maneuver, hoping that there were no guardrails hidden under the snowbank.

As we headed back to Vancouver, he suddenly stopped his car in the middle of the highway, emerged from his cab with a dog and sat down in the snow to play a game of fetch. When I approached him, it soon became obvious that he was in a world of his own, although he was capable of conversing in a limited fashion. As we handcuffed him, he talked about space ships and interplanetary travel through time warps. I didn't find any weapons. We discovered that he had recently been released from a mental institution and had not been taking his medication since leaving the hospital. We arranged to have him recommitted for the Christmas holidays.

\* \* \*

The first serious motor vehicle accident I witnessed occurred well before I became a policeman. My job that summer was to deliver interdepartmental mail around the province for the government. I was driving down a rural highway one morning when I observed cars parked along both sides of the road ahead, a sure sign that an accident had just happened.

Of course I pulled over as well, being just as curious as everyone else. There was a car in the ditch with an injured man still propped up against the steering wheel. The windshield was starred where his head had impacted, and it appeared that the vehicle must have rolled over at least once before finally coming to rest on its wheels.

There were at least fifty people gathered around the car when I arrived. They were all standing there quietly, watching the injured driver as if waiting for something to happen. I wandered over to the car, certain that somebody must have already called for an ambulance by now and thinking that I should do something for the victim. As I looked in through the window, the man turned toward me, looked me in the eye, and then collapsed sideways onto his seat. There was blood everywhere. Since I had no first aid training at the time, I quickly decided that there was nothing I could do for him except get him expert help.

I asked the crowd if anyone had left to phone for an ambulance. Everyone ignored me and continued gawking at the wrecked car while talking to one another in hushed voices. I hopped in my car and drove a couple of miles to the nearest residence to use the phone. I called the RCMP and asked them to send an ambulance. As I was about to hang up, I asked the officer how many people had already phoned about the accident. He replied that this was the first he'd heard of it. I found out the next day in the paper that the driver died at the scene.

I know that most of the people who stood there and watched that man die were decent citizens who would never dream of hurting anyone directly, yet they were either too stupid or too thoughtless to make any effort to help. Was it because they needed someone to take charge, someone to tell them what to do? I saw that often during my career as a policeman. Society has

created a solid base of very civilized, very pleasant individuals who act, for the most part, like dumb cattle waiting to be herded.

\* \* \*

I attended a pedestrian accident during the Christmas holidays after a middle-aged woman was struck by a car as she staggered across a busy thoroughfare. I saw something pink protruding from her skull as the ambulance crew placed her on a stretcher. It was part of her brain. To me that was a good indication she was not long for this world, even though she was still breathing. I chalked the outline of her body onto the pavement after she was moved into the ambulance, and then directed traffic so the Accident Investigation Squad could take measurements at the scene.

She was pronounced dead later that evening. The driver who'd hit her was quite upset about killing the unfortunate woman, although he was relatively sober and unusually cooperative. He was even honest enough to admit that he had been traveling perhaps five miles an hour over the speed limit when she'd stepped out in front of him.

I believe there was nothing he could have done to prevent the accident. The investigators issued him a ticket as a result of his statements to them about exceeding the speed limit. Since an inquest into her death was not held, a traffic ticket was probably the fairest method of exposing the facts of the case to public scrutiny.

The woman, it turned out, was a drug addict who had been drinking quite a bit that day. She was under a court order not to visit her children, but apparently she had decided to disobey the order because she was crossing the street in front of their residence when she was struck.

We were all called to court when the driver disputed his ticket. I suspect most of the members present were indifferent to the outcome of the trial. I, for one, was hoping he would get off. After all, offenders who actually tell the truth when asked how fast they were traveling at the time of an accident are extremely rare. I very seldom wrote tickets to violators who politely and truthfully explained their side of the story to me when they were pulled over.

A conviction for this offense would also hurt his chances of winning a civil suit launched against him by the dead woman's family. I couldn't help feeling a little bit sorry for him as he sat there in front of a judge in traffic court. The fact remained that he was only there as a result of his own honesty, because without his statement, there was probably not enough evidence to convict him of speeding.

I was on the stand to give my limited share of the evidence for only a few moments when it became clear that his case was going well for him. Up to this point, the judge seemed very sympathetic to his cause, and the prosecutor was only going through the motions. Then the defense lawyer, for whatever reason, began playing a very sarcastic Perry Mason role toward the prosecution witnesses. He made a very insulting attempt to show that I should have been giving the victim first aid instead of chalking her outline, even though there was clearly nothing I could have done that the ambulance staff weren't already doing for her. The judge had a reputation for fairness, but he was obviously growing more and more upset as he listened to the

lawyer's stupid tactics. He tried several times to dissuade the defense lawyer from continuing down the cynical path he'd chosen.

The defense lawyer ignored the judge, and eventually his client was found guilty. Although there was more than sufficient evidence presented at the trial to convict him of speeding, my bet is that this judge would have found a way to acquit him had the lawyer not been so obnoxious. I saw the accused crying after the verdict was announced, and, not for the first time, I regretted being a part of a very imperfect system.

\* \* \*

The radio suddenly came alive, on what had otherwise been a routine evening in the West End, when a motorcycle policeman requested that an emergency ambulance attend a motor vehicle accident he had just witnessed. We were nearby, so we decided to cover him. As we entered the block, we could see what appeared to be a very serious accident ahead. There was already a crowd gathered at the scene. Strangely, the motorcycle cop was just standing there doing nothing as we drove up.

The scenario that greeted us simply didn't make sense at first. A new, high performance Mustang, its engine still roaring and its rear wheels spinning impotently, was sitting on top of an upside-down Datsun sedan. A very frightened lady sat bolt upright in the driver's seat of the Mustang, staring straight ahead as if she still intended to continue her journey toward the second story of a building that stood directly in front of her windshield. There was a young child with a bored expression on his face sitting in the passenger seat. Neither appeared to be injured.

After removing her key from the ignition, we assisted the two of them down from their runaway steed and attempted to find out what had happened. She was of no help at all because she didn't speak English, and the child was too young to talk. A witness from an apartment that overlooked the accident scene eventually approached us to explain what had happened.

The lady had pulled out of a parking spot on the second floor of a parkade that exited onto the street by way of a steep ramp. She apparently floored the gas as she left the lot, roared down the ramp and struck the driver's side door of an unoccupied Datsun parked at the curb. Her Mustang somehow ended up parked high and dry on top of the overturned Datsun. No Hollywood stuntman could have duplicated the results.

\* \* \*

Even the most serious of police officers can usually find an element of black humor in the calls they are assigned, although admittedly some incidents are just too depressing to think about. A cop's bizarre sense of humor is a defense mechanism, a device used to convey an account of his work experiences to other policemen without appearing too morbid.

One incident with a lighter side occurred years ago on East Broadway when an outlaw biker in the center lane sped past one of our paddy wagons. The motorcyclist grinned in the policeman's direction and extended his middle digit as a sign of his lack of respect for authority. The biker then gunned his motor to draw attention to his gesture, but neglected to watch for traffic ahead in the meantime. As a result, he collided with a truck that

stopped suddenly in front of him. The truck was damaged, but not beyond repair. The biker's injuries were fatal.

\* \* \*

Police-involved motor vehicle accidents are, unfortunately, all too common. Each shift may include up to ten hours behind the wheel, so most policemen accumulate a lot of driving time over the years. When you consider the extra demands placed on them by the excessive speeds and unusual maneuvering required during some types of police work, a certain number of accidents are unavoidable. I was involved in several minor collisions during my career, including two in the space of one week that involved the same paddy wagon. Fortunately, no one was hurt as a result of my accidents.

I have vivid memories of a run I made en route to a serious call one noon hour. I was the front seat passenger in a marked police car driven by somebody I only worked with once. As we entered a busy intersection with lights flashing and siren wailing, we T-boned a city bus that was proceeding slowly through a good green light. Nobody on the bus was hurt.

I was still sitting in the car with my fingers dug deeply into the dash in front of me when the bus driver, a very attractive young lady, leapt out her door to survey the damage. She stared in disbelief at the conspicuous black and white police car embedded in the side of her bus. After ten seconds of shocked silence, she burst into tears. We learned later that it was her first week as a bus driver.

\* \* \*

My last accident on the job was perhaps the most ironic. I was driving down Hastings Street in the skids when I overheard a description of a possible impaired driver in a Firebird. According to the radio operator, he had last been seen in Burnaby, westbound on Hastings. Apprehending the drunk driver was actually another team's responsibility, although the description was repeated over our radio channel because of his direction of travel. As I signaled to turn down a side street, I turned to my partner and joked, "I guess we'd better get out of his way!"

Immediately after those words were uttered, there was a tremendous crash behind us and our marked police car was pushed violently into the intersection. It was the same Firebird. The report that he was an impaired driver had certainly been accurate. In fact, he was so drunk that he fell out of the car as we opened his door to remove him. He had a very high breathalyzer reading and was later convicted of impaired driving.

Arresting impaired drivers becomes more and more complicated every year. Dealing with drunks is often an unpleasant experience anyway, but on top of that there are invariably complications and problems involved with the charge. Increasingly restrictive procedures make an impaired driving arrest extraordinarily time consuming. When there is a manpower shortage on the street, an officer knows that while he is spending several hours processing an impaired driver, there may not be enough cars available to answer serious calls. In fact, if the police arrested every drinking driver they stopped, very soon there wouldn't be enough room in the jails to hold them all.

There are other options available to the police, so discretion is frequently exercised. If there is a sober passenger in the car, he or she can replace the driver behind the wheel for the rest of the trip. If the driver is at all sensible, and not quite intoxicated enough for a charge, his license can be suspended or he can be sent home in a taxi.

Despite the fact that driving while impaired is currently unfashionable in today's society, anybody with police experience knows there are still plenty of drunk drivers on the roads just by watching for certain erratic driving patterns. Although there may be fewer arrests recently, I think statistics that claim to show an overall decrease in drunk driving are, at best, misleading. When a law becomes difficult to enforce properly, it tends to be utilized less and less.

\* \* \*

My award for the impaired driver who sobered up the fastest goes to the young man who decided to show a hitchhiker how fast his Datsun sports car could travel through Stanley Park one night. The road he picked to demonstrate his driving prowess winds its way around the park, with trees lining one side and a harbor on the other. I was called to the sea wall near a particularly dangerous corner after a report of a car sinking in the water there.

Two very cold and very wet individuals met me on the sidewalk and pointed out to sea about a hundred feet. I could just make out a pair of headlights still shining dimly under six feet of water. Neither occupant was injured, so I drove them back to the West End where they could catch a cab home. The driver appeared to have sobered up by the time I dealt with him. Since he had apparently dived underwater several times to rescue his trapped passenger, I let him go with only a ticket and a stern lecture.

The next day I asked one of our accident investigators to meet me at the scene. After examining the area carefully, he was able to show me exactly how the car had left the road and gone airborne. He found a dent in the sidewalk where a wheel rim had bottomed out, and a grease mark on the sea wall where the oil pan had scraped across it. From there the Datsun had been launched airborne from the sea wall, coming to rest on its roof in mid-harbor. As for the remarkable distance the car traveled through the air until it finally landed in the water, the investigator believed that was due to the extremely high speed it had been traveling before leaving the road.

\* \* \*

I arrested my share of impaired drivers during my twelve years as a policeman, including one I followed as he drove unsteadily along a sidewalk for half a block, swerving carefully to avoid newspaper boxes and lamp standards. When I stopped him he refused to believe that he hadn't been driving on the road, and he acted insulted when I accused him of drinking too much.

However, there was one drunk driver I encountered near the beginning of my career that I decided not to charge. I arrived at the accident scene and discovered that the morgue wagon had rear-ended another car with enough force to rupture its fuel tank. There were no injuries. Since the morgue employee was standing unsteadily in the middle of a pool of gasoline

trying unsuccessfully to light his cigarette, I began to suspect he might have been drinking that day.

I knew the man only from talking to him at several sudden death calls. I'd been impressed by his cheerful demeanor. He seemed like a genuinely nice person, although I'd heard rumors he had a serious drinking problem. I suppose anyone who earns a living picking up decomposing bodies could be excused for using alcohol to insulate his sensibilities from overexposure to the gruesome nature of his work. On the other hand, if he continued to drink and drive, he would eventually create more work for himself, if not his successor.

I spoke to the driver of the car he'd hit and told him that I was inclined to give the morgue employee a break this time, but only if he agreed with me that it was appropriate to do so. Rather than taking the employee downtown for a breathalyzer, I explained that I planned to suspend his license and give him a ticket for causing the accident instead. The other driver also felt sorry for the morgue employee, and after thinking about it for a few seconds he agreed that this seemed fair to him and shook my hand.

As I explained the situation to the morgue employee, I noticed he had not been alone in the wagon at the time of the accident. His passenger, a corpse zipped inside a body bag, had landed on the front seat with its head on the floor and its feet in the air. We disposed of that problem by having the tow truck drop the body at the city morgue on the way to the wrecking yard.

I had a long, serious discussion with the morgue employee about this accident. By the time I left him, I was convinced he had learned his lesson once and for all. I never saw him under the influence of alcohol again. In retrospect, I believe I did the right thing that day, although if something had gone wrong I would have been looking for a new job. After all, of the many thousands of people I caught breaking the law, I only charged a few of the worst and most flagrant offenders. The rest I just lectured and warned.

Years later, in another jurisdiction, something obviously went very wrong with his life. He died alone in a motel room. It was a sad ending for an interesting character who had a unique sense of humor.

\* \* \*

I liked to write tickets for jaywalking because it was a good way to get to know the active criminals in the high-crime areas. They served no other useful purpose. In the skids almost everyone ignored the traffic lights and crossed the street wherever they pleased. These offenders were well aware that nothing would happen to them if they tore up the jaywalking ticket, unless they happened to do so in front of the policeman who had just issued it. In that case they earned an additional ticket for littering, which was also ignored by the justice system.

Pedestrians were knocked down by cars on a regular basis in the skids, primarily because many of the people there were drunk when they tried to jaywalk. Tickets had no effect on these horrendous statistics because only well-to-do citizens with a guilty conscience ever paid the fine. Many pedestrians met their fate on the pavement of the 100 East Hastings, a block with more than its share of beer parlors and drunks. On one particularly bloody evening, less than an hour after one ped-struck had been bandaged

and sent on his way to hospital to die, another drunk was hit by a car at the same location. He landed squarely on top of the blood and discarded bandage wrappers left behind from the first accident.

\* \* \*

I attended one accident which I guessed would prove to be fatal after one quick glance at the driver. He had driven his car over a highway guardrail at the East First Street overpass, finally coming to rest on an embankment after plowing through a grove of trees. The driver's twisted body was jammed between the front seats, and his head rested on the back floor. The car was totaled and he looked like he would soon be joining it.

The fire department arrived and immediately went to work to free him from the wreckage. First they tried using a long metal bar to pry out the smashed front windshield. That effort went well until they realized they were inadvertently using a particularly sensitive part of the victim's unconscious body as a fulcrum. He didn't show any sign that he objected to the abuse, so it began to look more and more like a "fatal" to those of us watching from the sidelines. The ambulance attendants cut all his clothing off and attached a neck brace. He was not out of the woods yet, because even with the front windshield removed, they still didn't have enough room to pull him out of the car on a backboard.

Consequently, the firemen sent for the Jaws of Life, a sophisticated hydraulic device used to forcibly remove car roofs. Immediately after they fired it up, a fitting came loose. The device then sprayed the car and its occupant from stem to stern with hydraulic fluid during the thirty seconds it took them to fix the problem. By the time the roof was removed and the unfortunate victim was finally extricated, I had already written him off.

I talked to the officer assigned to the call several hours later, fully expecting to hear that the errant driver was no longer with us. I was surprised to learn that after a thorough examination, the hospital was ready to release him in the morning. Other than some bruising around the area that had supported the pry bar, he did not have a single injury. A test of his Blood Alcohol Count revealed that he had been extremely intoxicated when he catapulted over the guardrail. The only aftereffect of the incident would be a massive hangover the next morning.

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