

BAD BRAKES, FAST ENGINE GIVE MURPHY'S LAW FERTILE GROUND

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There is a Murphy's Law and it has plagued me my whole life. Of course I constantly tempt fate and create perfect conditions for the rule to take over. It started very early in my life and persists to this day. So to all of you out there who thought dropping a tree on my truck was just a fluke, think again.

My dad provided me with the opportunity and means for my first major brush with Murphy's Law. It usually involved his automobiles, so you already know the rest of the story. Oh there were the occasional fishing rods, guns and tools I trashed, but they did not compare to the rotten luck when I borrowed his car.

You will note I said "car" and not "cars." After three different mishaps with the same car, I called it quits and never asked to use it again.

On one occasion, I ran a huge spike through the tread and sidewall of a new tire, ruining it. Another time I backed it into an old homemade trailer and dented a fender. The last and final time convinced me to give it up.

I had an old '32 Ford with a rebuilt '36 Ford V-eight engine with a faulty windshield wiper motor. It was raining, my dad left for work on foot and his car was home in the yard. I asked mom if I could borrow the car to go to the auto supply store for the part. She acquiesced with the reminder to be careful with it.

The car was my dad's pride and joy and the best older used car he had ever owned. It was a four-door mint perfect '36 Ford V-eight that was described by my father thus: "Can you imagine a Ford car with a 100 hp engine?" That and the old mechanical brakes caused my downfall.

Rain made the road slick, a situation I had no, or little, experience with but was quickly acquainted with. Driving faster than road conditions warranted, a mailman ahead of me stopped to make a delivery and I was in trouble.

The road was narrow with no shoulder and when I braked to keep from hitting his car, I went into a skid. I did a full 360-degree skid hitting the three steel guide cables on both shoulders on all four sides of the car.

When I brought the car home and parked it in the drive, the taillight and its bracket hung dismally by the wiring down below the bumper. My dad never looked at the rest of the car. He walked in the house and I cannot begin to tell you what he told my mother we could both do with the car. No need for most of you to ask how my mother became embroiled.

I have had more than my share of fractured vehicles due to other people's mishaps. I like to think my earlier episode inured me for them and have left me relatively unruffled.

My first and most embarrassing was the result of loaning my boss's son our family car for the evening. He was working here in the area for the summer and I felt sorry for the poor kid with no wheels. I will spare you most of the details, but the car was totaled and I had no collision.

My daughter-in-law nearly totaled another, but the collision insurance defrayed nearly all of the cost. By then I had learned the value of insurance.

The one misfortune that stands out most vividly happened with a young local fellow who was working for me shoveling roofs. I had driven the 10 miles out to town to bring him to work. At the end of the day I was too tired to drive him home. He had a license but no vehicle, so I told him to take the vehicle straight home, park it and not drive it anywhere else.

At 2am I was awakened with a phone call and the sad tale of woe. He was crying and incoherent, but the first words out of his mouth were, "I rolled her, Mart." I replied, "Was anyone hurt?" When he said no I told him to go to bed and we would talk about it in the morning.

He had been partying with friends in their vehicle and got stuck out in the snowmobile trails. They returned to his home and took my vehicle to get it unstuck. They had all had too much to drink and he rolled my vehicle.

To make a long story short, he repaired the vehicle and we both learned a good lesson. I was fortunate, indeed, that none of the young people involved were seriously hurt. I would like to think I have learned to avoid Murphy's Law in the future, at least that aspect of it.