

The Shocking Story of a Driving Fool



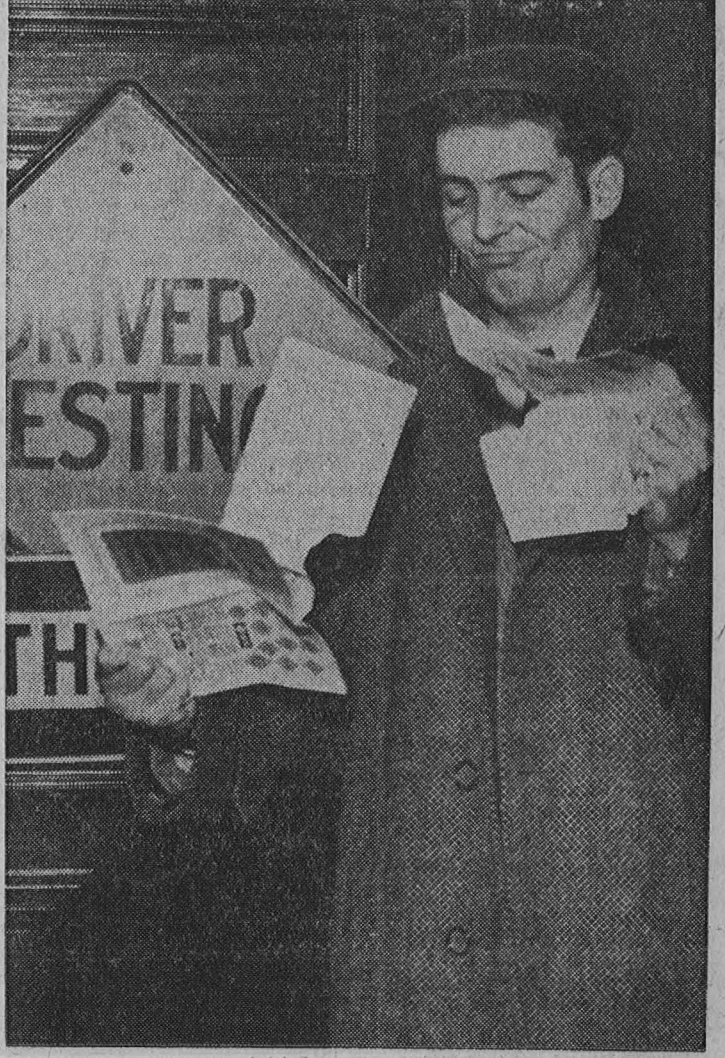
He was told to slow down . . .



. . . but he was defiant.



Safety Chief Baillie warned him . . .



. . . but he scorned the warning.

Slaughter on the Highways

Last Year's Traffic Toll
121
(final count)

This Year's Traffic Toll
123
(more will die)

Manitoba drivers have written a black record

By PETER DESBARATS
(Tribune Staff Writer)

Today marks the opening of Safe-Driving Week in Canada, a campaign with special significance for this province. With one month to go, Manitoba drivers already have chalked up their worst year in history.

So far this year approximately 123 persons have died in traffic accidents in Manitoba. This tops the previous record of 121 deaths in 1954. And if drivers here continue on their usual, not-so-merry way, another nine deaths can be expected this month during the "festive" season.

'Tis the season to be jolly, according to the old carol, but according to statistics it's time for some serious thinking. One man who intends to implement thought with action is R. B. (Bob) Baillie, Manitoba's commissioner of motor vehicles and director of its highway safety program.

Extra Teeth

Mr. Baillie, whose point system of rating drivers today keeps some 7,500 dangerous motorists off Manitoba roads, plans to put a few extra teeth into his program during the coming week.

He told The Tribune he is "seriously considering" doubling the normal suspension periods of drivers who come before him this week. This means a dangerous driver whose licence would normally be suspended for one month would receive, if his case comes before Mr. Baillie during Safe-Driving Week, a two-month suspension.

"The driver control program has worked well during the past six years," Mr. Baillie said. "Results should be even better if we tighten it up."

In the light of this year's record death toll, Mr. Baillie's remark about "better results" may seem overly optimistic. But a closer look at statistics reveals an important fact.

While the province's general death and accident toll has risen to frightening heights in the past 11 months, Winnipeg's record has shown a steady improvement.

In 1950 there were 14 fatal accidents in the city. Last year there were 13 and this year, to date, there have been only 11. The number of non-fatal accidents shows a similar reduction, from 972 in 1950 to 879 in 1955 to a current total of 808.

Different Story

Statistics for the province, outside of the city, tell a completely different story.

In 1950 there were 38 fatal accidents in the province. In four years the figure almost doubled, to 68 fatal accidents. This year's toll, to date, is 74. The number of non-fatal accidents has also jumped in the past six years from 792 in 1950 to a current mark of 739 for this year.

The difference lies in the driver licensing and control program started in Winnipeg in 1951 and in Brandon last spring. So far more than 21,000 drivers in the Greater Winnipeg area have been tested and the cost per driver per year, about 50 cents, has paid big dividends in safety.

Records of the tests show that 51 percent of all drivers fail their initial road-test and 62 percent fail their vision and knowledge tests. For many drivers the failure simply betrays a lack of preparation. The majority pass later

tests after learning through experience that getting a driver's licence is a serious business.

An equally valuable part of the program is the point system, in effect throughout the province. Under this system drivers with poor records have their licenses suspended for varying periods according to the number of demerit points on their cards.

The point system has shown that 15 percent of all drivers in Manitoba can be classified as "questionable, problem or dangerous". Today more than 3,000 Manitoba drivers are classified as "dangerous".

Once the point system was established the main job was to prove that drivers it classed as "dangerous" were really a menace on the road. Mr. Baillie recently completed statistics for 1955 which conclusively back up his system.

Problem Drivers

They showed that problem and dangerous drivers, who represent about two percent of the total number of those licensed, were involved in approximately one-third of all fatal accidents that year.

For the average driver, with no previous record, the rate of involvement in fatal accidents is 2.1 per 100,000. But for every 100,000 questionable drivers, 6.5 are involved in fatal accidents. And the rate jumps to 63.3 for problem drivers and 59.4 for dangerous drivers.

Evidently one of the more effective ways of cutting accidents is to see that more of these problem and dangerous drivers are suspended for longer periods. This is what Mr. Baillie seriously considers doing, on an experimental basis, during Safe-Driving Week.

Incidentally, one of the more encouraging bits of news revealed in Mr. Baillie's statistics is the improvement in teen-age drivers. The number of teen-agers involved in accidents in 1955 was 17 percent lower than the corresponding 1953 figure.

Mr. Baillie's figures show drivers divided into eight age groups. The group with the best driving record (75 years and over) is in No. 1 position and the group with the worst (from 20 to 24 years) in No. 8 position.

Value Proved

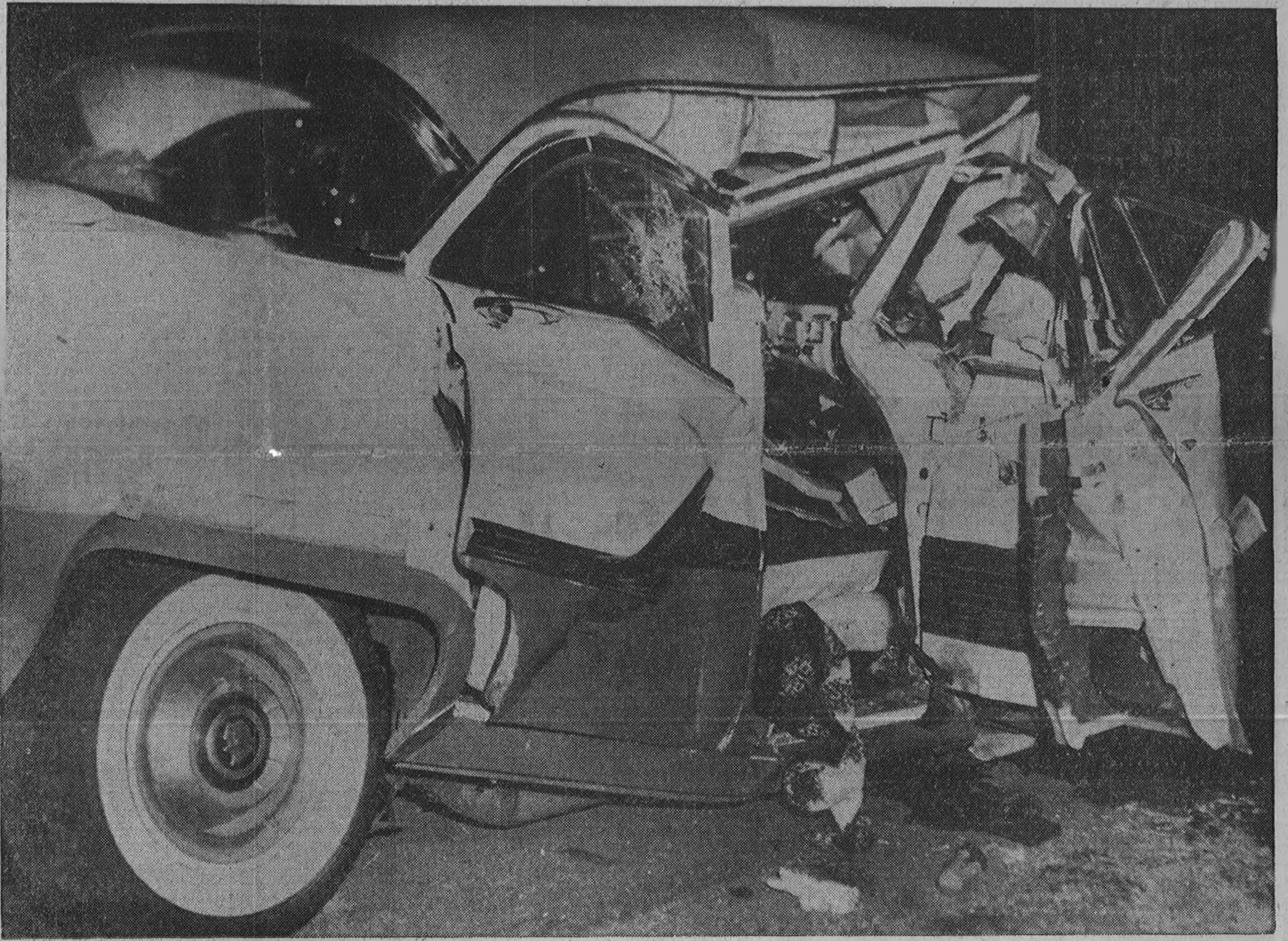
From 1952 to 1955 the teen-age group (from 16 to 19 years) moved from sixth to fourth position. These youngsters conclusively prove the value of driver testing and Mr. Baillie hopes, as they grow older, to see a corresponding drop in the accident rates of the older groups.

Manitoba can be proud of some progress in accident prevention. But there is still much to be done. This year's record fatality toll alone should be enough to make Safe-Driving Week a province-wide project.

The Canadian Highway Safety Conference, sponsors of the Week, predict that 75 people will die in traffic accidents in Canada during the seven-day campaign. Manitoba's estimated quota is three deaths.

But this is one time the "experts" hope to be proved wrong, and they give a sure-fire recipe for seeing that they are. During Safe-Driving Week then want everyone to:

- Walk and drive safely.
- Observe the letter and spirit of all traffic regulations.
- Back the attack on traffic accidents.
- Study and talk about our Canadian highway traffic problems to your friends.



And now all the warnings in the world won't help him a bit. The body has been taken away.

The most perilous job

Bill Wilson works in the most dangerous place in Canada. Last year more than 2,700 Canadians died in the same spot — one every three hours every day. And more than 65,000 Canadians were injured in the same position.

This year, in Manitoba alone, approximately 123 persons have died sitting in or close to the spot where Bill Wilson works — behind the wheel.

As a truck driver, Mr. Wilson rides the most perilous route in the country. Traffic accidents last year were the greatest single killer of persons between the ages of three and 40 years.

Mr. Wilson's job isn't getting any safer. Despite a drop in the number of accidents in Winnipeg in recent years, the province's death and injury toll has risen to an alarming high.

In 1950 there were 38 fatal accidents in the province, outside the city of Winnipeg. This year the total for the same area is 74, with a month still to go.

Miraculous

With these figures in mind, Bill Wilson's record of 15 accident-free years of driving on Manitoba highways seems almost miraculous. If more drivers followed his personal safety code, there might be an equally surprising drop in the number of highway deaths and injuries.

But Mr. Wilson's first "rule of the road" isn't particularly flattering to other motorists — "Always treat them like darn fools."

The veteran truck driver never

relies on anyone's judgment but his own. If another driver wants to argue about the right-of-way, he lets him have it. Mr. Wilson gives everybody else on the road lots of room to make mistakes.

He can't stop other drivers from killing themselves. But he makes sure they don't take him with them.

"Winnipeg drivers have improved a lot in the last few years," Mr. Wilson agreed. "I have particularly noticed the way most of them make signals now. Five years ago you never knew what the fellow ahead was going to do."

Worst Drivers

The safety-conscious driver's personal experience backed up statistics showing increased accidents on provincial highways.

"Country drivers seem to be getting worse every year," he said. "City drivers, used to driving in heavy traffic, know how to cope with other cars. But country drivers don't make allowances for the increased number of cars on the highway today."

"They come bumping down

Safety Drive

QUEBEC — Quebec provincial police are to conduct an all-out campaign, including the use of plain-clothes constables driving unmarked cars, to reduce highway accidents during National Highway Safety week Dec. 1-7.

the road from the farm and shoot out onto the highway without a second look. That's what scares me most. I've seen a lot of accidents happen just because somebody refused to look before he leaped."

As a truck driver, Mr. Wilson has a healthy hatred of those who try to pass his big transport without any clear idea of what's ahead.

"Just last spring," he said, "a young fellow driving with one hand on the wheel and his other arm around his girl came shooting past me on a curve without even seeing another truck coming the opposite way."

"He bounced off the side of the truck and ended up in a field beside the highway. Luckily they weren't injured badly, but in cases like that there doesn't seem to be any other reason than sheer recklessness."

His Pet Beef

Another of Mr. Wilson's pet beefs is the country driver who meanders along the highway at 30 miles per hour, leading a parade of irritated motorists.

"Speed, as long as it's not excessive, isn't the cause of many accidents," he said, "but the slow driver is a real menace. He rarely hurts himself but he causes more accidents than most fast drivers."

It's impossible to blame Mr. Wilson for never trusting anybody, after 15 years of tangling with "darn fools" on provincial roads.

It might be more sensible to imitate him.



Trucker Bill Wilson has had 15 accident free years.