Skunked

Due to their fondness for asphalt, deer cause more human deaths annually than any other creature, and over the course of a 40-year career on the road, I was proud to say that I never filled my deer tag by hitting one on the highway. I may have accidentally flattened my share of snakes and squirrels (who hasn't?), but I'd never run over anything bigger than a rabbit.

I've driven the wild country from the badlands to the Big Bend country, from the Everglades to the Okanogan without ever hitting an armadillo, reindeer, cat, yak, Hereford, PETA member, wild hog or domestic dog. Although I must admit I was tempted by the cat and the PETA member.

I'm proud to say I'd never dented my bumper on anything. Notice I used the past tense. In the last six months I've done $8,000 of damage to my car by hitting a pudgy and pungent polecat, and a deer with Boone and Crockett numbers. Both accidents were at night and both happened not far from my house, proving once again that most accidents really do happen within 25 miles of home.

Even if I could have recovered the bodies for a proper burial, they would have had to have been closed casket funerals because their bodies were so disfigured. May they rest in pieces.

The deer and skunk paid the ultimate price for their jaywalking and my one-man killing-machine escapades are not something I feel good about. In the case of the poor deer, which I got a real good look at because his face hit my windshield 18 inches from my own, he truly did have that "deer in the headlights look." His face still haunts my dreams, and I have flashbacks when I drive by the accident scene. I may need therapy.

My Buick Lucerne, which I love dearly, almost had to be totaled and was only saved at the last minute because some key parts were able to be located in a distant junkyard. As it was, I needed an all new front end, all because of one $8,000 deer.

As bad as the deer episode was, the skunk collision was worse. Both the skunk and I froze just milliseconds before impact, and I remember thinking, “Nice kitty, please don’t do it.” But the stinky cat did!

I had to pull off to the side of the road because my car was making strange noises after the impact. With my dress clothes on, I tried not to breathe as I got on my back and looked under the car. Mother nature did not cooperate by turning on her night light, but I could barely make out parts of the dead polecat hanging from the fan blade, putting to rest the theory that a skunk can’t spray while hanging from its tail.

The only solace was I remembered that my favorite author, J. Frank Dobie, wrote that a hydrophobic skunk couldn’t spray. At least I wasn’t going to get rabies!

I think you can imagine my discomfort as I worked in the aromatically-challenged environment to fasten the plastic underbelly of my car back together again. It was some of the fastest mechanic work ever done, and if you think NASCAR pit crews are fast, you should have seen this Pitts stop!

After driving 20 mph to an all night convenience store, where there was more light, I was asked to vacate the premises by the owner. My wife did the same thing when I finally limped into home.

I have a “Theory of Threes” in that I believe bad events always happen in clusters of three. This means that I am due to hit a cow or a horse next. The way I see it, I only have two options: I can either walk everywhere I go or I can sell my wildlife-killing, roadkill-creating car. Therefore, I would like to take advantage of the fact that this column appears in papers across the country and offer up this free classified ad:

“Unlucky Car For Sale: It may not have that new car smell, but I guarantee it will still turn heads. Frequent recent maintenance with many all new body parts. Bumper sticker reads, “I don’t brake for wildlife.” Car is cheap and attractive. (Suicidal wildlife find it really attractive.) A really good deal for someone with a poor sense of smell.”

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