

**STUDEBAKERS ARE SURVIVORS AND SO ARE THEIR DRIVERS**  
**A CASE OF PTSD – PRETTY TOUGH STUDEBAKER DRIVER**  
**Keith Wahl, MD**



Studebaker, the only wagon company to convert to cars and be successful celebrated 100 years in business with the 1954 and 1955 Conestoga 2-door wagon. This Extremely rare model was made only two years. Ask yourself the last time you saw one at a Cars n' Coffee or a car show! I attended a recreation "New York to Paris Tour" sponsored by the local San Diego Antique Automobile and Horseless Carriage Clubs starting at a member's vintage restored home on Saturday October 7, 2017. I drove my Supercharged Avanti powered 1955 Conestoga Wagon. I intended to leave the tour in order to attend a surprise party for a friend in Coronado. I left our Lakeside stop and traveled south on my way to Coronado, California.

It was just about noon and I was at the Lemon Avenue bridge proceeding at 60-65 mph. I was in the far right #3 lane (#1 lane is near the center divider, #2 is in the middle). A car cut me off and I hit my brakes which locked up. I turned into the adjacent lane. The accident report indicated I veered to the right and then back across the freeway with over 200 feet of skid. My car turned sideways with the back end getting away from me so I was perpendicular to the direction of oncoming traffic. I got T-boned (no wonder I don't eat meat!).



The force of the impact sheared off the seat brackets and pushed the seat into the passenger door forcing it to open. I did not have my lap belt fastened. I was ejected from the vehicle as the car hit the center divider. I clearly remember seeing myself hit the ground with my head and right side of my body as I wondered if this was the end of my time on earth. I got up and walked away – road rash on head and right shoulder and back. I knew I was OK. That's me on the gurney looking out on the accident scene.



That I did not have my lap belt on likely saved my life -- because I would have had major chest and abdominal injuries from the impact into the door and floor. The pictures above and to the left tell the story. The car that hit me caused a chain reaction with two other cars. Both apparently totaled. My car rolled backwards into the door of a fifth vehicle which stopped at the side of the road.



My vehicle was a special model with a unique build (supercharged Avanti Engine). Every panel on the vehicle was damaged including front and rear chrome, windshield, cracked driver side door window broken (safety glass- no blowout)



The 55 Wagon had early and late year model windshield and door configurations. They were completely different, the later model having a curved windshield and a different wind wing -- so the doors were not interchangeable. You could either try to find an early model door or parts car which we were unable to do.



I found an Identical car with the same factory color (Pima Red and Shasta White) in Tennessee (an original Arizona rust free car. This “new” car is a running driver with a Chevy 350 Engine and 350 Transmission with air conditioning. It was shipped and the roof was damaged in transport!!



Through my Hagerty Insurance, I “totaled” my original vehicle and bought it back with the intent to swap all of the unique parts and sell off the Chevrolet engine and transmission. However, my new acquisition was such a good original car, I decided to fix both vehicles. Lucky for me I found the skill and talent of Mike Haynes who apprenticed at Rolls Royce and Jaguar in England. He is an expert artisan in old school metal repair. In seven months we were able to completely restore, rebuild, and repaint both vehicles.



Thinking about all the little things I did that day --ending up where I did on the freeway just at a time to set all the events in motion, I am thankful for that “Angel” on my shoulder. I sum it up with this aphorism-- **“MAN PLANS AND GOD LAUGHS.”** I am a lucky and grateful person.

Live every moment with gratitude. Cherish your family and friends. Be Kind. Drive safe.

Keith Wahl