

Dead Horse in the Middle of the Road

It was a dark and stormy night, (It really was, honest). My wife and I had stayed later than we planned at my parents in Chester, a small logging town in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

It was snowing when we started our drive to Sacramento but turned to light rain as we dropped into the Central Valley near Chico turning south on 99. My 240Z was humming and I figured we should get home by a little after 2:00 am.

As I moved into the left lane to pass what looked like an old Desoto. I was intrigued by the tail fins that reminded me of my uncle's old car up in Canada. As I glanced at the driver the Desoto exploded. The front end of the Desoto went up and the hood flew back, then a horse's head appeared for a millisecond as I swerved to avoid it... then everything was gone. I pulled back into the right lane and slammed on my brakes. I looked in my rearview and there was nothing there. Then the screams started.

It wasn't people screams we heard, it was a horse scream. A tandem pair of horses screaming. I grabbed my flashlight out of the glove compartment and Jan and I ran back. There was a horse pulling itself by its front legs into the left lane. It was obvious its back was broken. A second horse was about twenty feet away answering the stricken horse's screams.

I ran to the Desoto whose lights were out, and shined my flashlight into the interior. There was an older man holding the steering wheel, a woman was in the passenger seat and two kids in the back. The driver opened the door and out came a cacophony of Spanish. The man was talking, the woman was yelling and the kids were screaming.

The injured horse had stopped trying to pull itself and was lying in the northbound lane. It was breathing very hard and making guttural sounds.

About that time a man came out of the house across the road. He had a flashlight. I asked if he had a gun so we could put the poor horse out of its misery. He said no, he didn't. He did say he had a sharp butcher knife and that maybe we should cut the horse's throat.

He ran back to his house and after calling 911 came back with the knife. Meanwhile I told Jan to go turn the emergency flashers on for the Z.

The man from the house went over to the horse to cut its throat, then looked at me and said he couldn't do it.

I had done it with deer before, but never anything as large as a horse. As I approached the horse and its labored breathing, its eye seemed the size of a saucer. As I searched the neck for the artery I had a flashback to a critically wounded soldier in Vietnam. It was the same look of fear and confusion. I sliced the horse's neck.

The man from the house said the horses belonged to his neighbor and that they were often out and that he knew something like this would happen sooner or later.

As he left to go over to the neighbor's house I looked up the road and saw headlights and they were moving fast. I knew they couldn't see the dead horse in their lane since the Desoto's lights were out. Just my car and its emergency flashers. I hoped that was enough, but soon realized the car wasn't slowing down.

When the Volkswagen bug hit the horse the car went airborne, flew over the horse like a weird version of a ski jump. Sparks flew as the car landed back on the road. Both of its front wheels collapsed as it skidded into the south bound lane and came to a stop.

I ran to the Volkswagen to see if anyone was hurt as two long haired young men got out of the car. The pungent smell of marijuana exited the car with them. The driver was panicked. "Who did I hit"? "Oh God, did I kill someone"? I tried to explain to him that he had hit a horse... "Oh my God, I killed a horse"! I told him, well no, the horse was already dead. "Oh my God, I killed a fucking dead horse".

I told him if he had any dope in his car he should get rid of it since the police had been called and should be here any minute. Then I looked up.

Lights. Another car was coming from the south, moving fast, heading for what was left of the poor horse.

We started waving our flashlights, the lights kept coming. About fifty yards or so before the horse they locked up their brakes and skidded to a stop just before hitting the mangled corpse. Out of the pickup truck came two cowboys. Exiting with them was the bitter sweet smell of alcohol. The passenger of the Volkswagen announced that he and his friend had hit the horse, but that it was already dead. The cowboy driver turned to his friend and said, "These fucking hippies killed the horse, let's kick their ass." Then I looked up.

Lights coming from the north. Truck lights. In the way is a dead Volkswagen whose lights had been knocked out. Behind the Volkswagen is a Desoto whose passengers had gotten back in when the cowboys began to threaten the hippies. In the northbound lane is a mangled horse and a pickup truck. The pickup lights were on.

I look toward the oncoming semi and notice my wife is looking inside the Volkswagen oblivious to the oncoming sixteen wheeler barreling down on her. I yelled, "Jan, get out of there"! She takes one look at the truck and leaps into the ditch on the side of the road.

The truck driver locks up his brakes and comes to a stop about ten feet short of the Volkswagen puts on his flashers and gets out of the truck. I walk over to him and briefly explain the situation and that we need to get back and stop the drunken cowboys who are now pushing the stoned hippies around. Then I look up.

Lights coming from the north, flashing lights. Finally, the police. A California Highway Patrol. He quickly assesses if anyone is hurt and needs an ambulance. I explained basically what happened. The truck driver gets a chain out of his truck, ties it around the horse and directs the cowboys to use their truck to pull the horse to the driveway of the horse's owner.

Meanwhile another CHP officer arrives and starts taking statements. They send the cowboys on their way since they're not really involved, had sobered up a bit and had yet to hit anyone with either their truck or their fists. Tow trucks are called, the trucker goes on his way, and the man from across the street and his wife gather the Mexican family and takes them into their house.

My wife is pissed at me. Apparently when I yelled at her she took a leap off the road and landed chest high in the ditch full of stagnant water and mud. I tried to explain that all I could see in my mind was a semi truck and trailer plowing through the Volkswagen and her lying mangled beside the horse and me having only a now dull knife. She failed to see the humor.