

## DEATH ROW

**The A59 is Britain's most dangerous road, with 43 fatal or serious accidents over three years. Nine of our readers are condemned to die by the end of next week on roads just like it. Yet a few hundred thousand pounds would save some of those lives and many more to come. Tim Rayment investigates.**

He was the first person I met. Knocking on the doors of the dead is never pleasant, and I was putting it off. So I went to the pub. As I paid for lunch, conscience said it was time to speak to someone. "Is this a bad road, then?" Why do you ask, said the assistant manager. I write for a newspaper; I am looking for the most dangerous road in Britain. "You've come to the right place. This pub has been rebuilt twice because of accidents. And you may be interested in the stretch of road that killed my son."

Eileen Campbell works on the A59, a beautiful road that runs from one side of the country to the other, offering a moving window onto rural England at its finest. If you have not been there, you should. But take care on the 19 miles that start in Skipton and end in Harrogate. This fast but winding asphalt, with junctions that date back to the horse and cart, is the most treacherous we have. In fact, if any route has an A in it, pay attention. An analysis of motoring deaths and injuries shows that we do not understand the risks of driving. We worry about long motorway journeys. But it is on A-roads, often before you are out of first gear, that you are most in danger.

What happened to Eileen Campbell's son is one of several extraordinary tales that emerge if you ask a computer to work out where the risks are, then ask people to explain what happened. Kenneth Campbell was run over by a police car just off the A59. The officers waved witnesses away without taking names, moved their vehicle before independent investigators arrived, and three years later they have not expressed regret. These, then, are the facts behind the roadside flowers.

The A59 runs from Liverpool up to the Lancastrian city of Preston, before turning east to enter Yorkshire at the Pennine village of West Marton. It is the stretch through the Dales that interests us, a section whose very names - Wharfedale, Airedale, Ribblesdale; Embsay Moor, Bolton Abbey, Blubberhouses - evoke feelings of peace, like a tranquil version of the shipping forecast. According to an organisation called EuroRAP, however, the sudden thunderclap of crashing metal and crushed flesh is probable.

EuroRAP stands for European Road Assessment Programme, a sister to the scheme that has prompted dramatic changes in car design by awarding stars to cars. No car maker now would dare to market a model without four-star crash results. The new project shows that roads can be assessed too.

Junctions that are a death in waiting? Fast single carriageway where the barrier to a head-on crash is a line of paint? Non-collapsible street lamps? No star. True, 9 in 10 accidents are human error, but as cars improve and drivers slow down, attention is shifting to the highway. "It is no longer acceptable to have roads that are inherently dangerous," says Professor Angus Wallace, a surgeon who puts broken people back together.

We asked the AA Motoring Trust, organiser of EuroRAP, to examine the accident figures for Britain. We removed bikers from the equation, because on the roads that are riding heaven, they account for up to 96% of bad crashes. Then, if you take account of how busy each road is, by dividing the number of deaths and serious injuries in three years by the journeys back and forth in that time, you get the most hazardous primary route in the nation. You get the A59.

Robyn Lloyd, aged two, was a back-seat passenger when her father's car was hit from behind as he waited to leave the A59 for a minor road two days before Christmas. The Peugeot was flung into the path of a third car, which struck the side, crushing Robyn and her sister, Christi, then aged eight. The trainee teacher who started this chain of events told the inquest she was unaware of the Peugeot until she was 50 yards behind it, travelling at 50mph. Going to the scene, it is hard not to hold her responsible. But it was not all her fault. The turn-off is on a fast bend, with nowhere for Robyn Lloyd's father to wait safely for a break in traffic, even though the road could be widened. "I was just driving when the car appeared in front of me," said the teacher, who had not driven that stretch of the A59 before. Arrested for causing death by dangerous driving, she was fined £100 for lack of care and attention instead. Christi, who was not expected to survive the night, recovered.

Jesse Jackson was a front-seat passenger at another A59 turn-off where there is no room for an error of judgment. Like the Lloyds, his wife was waiting to turn right. Because of a momentary mistake, their car started to move into the path of a lorry laden with bricks. In a freakish accident, a brick sent flying by the truck's emergency stop came through the sunroof and hit the middle-aged musician on the neck, killing him instantly.

When I knocked at the home of Robyn Lloyd, it was the school holidays. This was the perfect place for a childhood: the semidetached house is one of many in Yorkshire that have a field behind the garden, in this case full of calves, plus homes nearby with many playing children. Over the threshold is a different story. Robyn was a characterful creature who went everywhere in a pink fairy outfit, seeming wise beyond her two years. Her parents separated two days before the anniversary of the crash; the marriage was ending anyway, but the death did huge damage. Jonathan Lloyd, Robyn's father, is a thoughtful man with a sad, wry humour. But the scale of his loss is obvious, and the effect on Robyn's mother, and the two other drivers, can hardly be

imagined.

Similarly, the widow of Jesse Jackson has moved, unable to live in the house she shared with her husband; seeking her, I met close friends who said she was starting to heal, but to approach her would do great harm. I left her alone. The third death in the past three years was of a biker, who collided with a car and died many weeks later.

Just three fatalities on our road in three years, I hear you say. Well, for every fatal accident there are 10 that cause serious injury, and as the living have more to say than the dead, it is time to meet them. So let us take a break with Betty Hebden, behind the counter in the cafe at the steam railway that takes tourists to Bolton Abbey. Is this a bad road, then? Betty is the quiet sort, whose life serving tea and scones does not bring her into contact with violence. Yet she knows two people who have been badly damaged on our 19 miles of road, with life-changing injuries that make you question if the survivor of the crash is glad to be alive.

Paul Scott is a walking miracle. He should be dead. He broke his neck, back and face - that's the short version - in a head-on crash at a closing speed of 120mph. He was so shattered that if he laughs, which is surprisingly often, he must remember not to shake a lot in case his head, which is held in place by a bolt, falls off. Yet he has made remarkable progress, going from someone who appeared to be dead to one who, in the safety of his home, can walk unaided. Doctors use him as an example of what can be achieved, to the extent that Paul says Hello! magazine offered £75,000 for his story. He declined, telling it here without payment to publicise the risks of A-roads.

There were portents. Once, on a trip into Harrogate, the young petrol-station manager told a friend to slow down for a narrow, winding section of the A59. The driver said he knew the road, only to hit a cliff on the right and bounce into the crash barrier on the left, ending up balanced on the edge with the back-seat passengers not daring to move in case the car tipped over. Paul's sister, Fiona, witnessed a similar event: she was overtaken on the same stretch by a driver who was unfamiliar with the road, rolled his car on the next bend and finished up suspended over the gorge.

That's enough for one family, you might think. But one November night, as Paul travelled home to Skipton, he met a young woman stationed at RAF Menwith Hill, the US-run spy station that is the biggest village in Britain not to appear on any road map. She was one of the 1,400 or so linguists, engineers, mathematicians and other staff who live at the base, using 23 giant "golf balls" and three satellite dishes to monitor communications. The balls look eerily beautiful. But the Americans use left-hand-drive vehicles shipped over from the US, and at night in a rural area there is little to remind them they are not at home. When they turn onto the A59 they need a sign reminding them

to drive on the left. There wasn't one.

Paul saw headlights coming towards him on the single carriageway; they belonged to the young woman, on the wrong side of the road. She was travelling at 60mph; so was he. It took 4½ hours to cut him out of his Vauxhall Corsa and three months to get him off life support. She said she was overtaking a lorry, but it was never traced.

At first he was not expected to live. Then he was predicted not to talk properly or walk. But he bears no bitterness and is not easily defeated. During that long first year, a rugby player was brought into hospital with a broken thumb; don't worry, said Paul, you'll be all right. The rugby player, facing surgery, forgot his troubles for a moment to ask Paul what was wrong with him.

A passing nurse gave the list: "He's only broken his back, his face, pelvis, arms, legs, ribs..." Not to mention the 4in of metal that support his spine, the damaged main artery, the acid from an abscess that has eaten into his heart and spinal cord.

His face was reconstructed brilliantly - the bones fragmented like cornflakes when the skin was removed, but photographs suggest he is actually more handsome than before. He is not the type to be depressed: he cried only when told he would be blind. And he is determined. When he found that life at the pace of other people was too fast, he decided to be independent. "My brother-in-law was pushing me around in a wheelchair," Paul explains.

"Only having partial sight in one eye, I'd go to a shop and if I wanted to see something I'd say, can we just stop - oh, never mind. Can I just have a look at - oh, never mind. I was being pushed so fast, unbeknown to my brother-in-law I was missing everything in life, being pushed in this chair. I thought: bollocks, I'm going to walk. I'm sick of this. Medical fact says I can't, but I'll prove 'em wrong."

It started with a few steps; now he walks without a stick. And the big, manicured garden at his adapted bungalow is all his work. He began by using a spoon, the only thing he could hold in his one good hand, to turn the soil as he was wheeled around the garden. Today, after asking surgeons to smash up and rebuild his hand to make it work better, he does everything. All that troubles him (and it really does) is that, with one eye, he cannot tell if he has cut the bushes straight. What bothers the onlooker is that this attractive, interesting man is lonely: he rarely goes out, and nobody visits other than his family. His life ended on the A59. Even now, there is no sign at the junction.

Paul Scott was a popular man who received 572 get-well cards. That's 572 people who knew to take extra care on our stretch of road. Even so, the Mercedes of his ex-girlfriend's parents was in a side-on crash

at the same spot three months later. "It's a winding, hilly section of road," says Paul. "And when you get up over the hill it's virtually straight. People pick up speed, not realising that there are country lanes jutting out. It starts to bend - that's when the damage happens."

There - and on the three-lane sections. Britain is not alone in Europe in having three-lane single carriageways on which overtaking traffic can crash head on, and our Roman road through Yorkshire has prime examples. The Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, who own 30,000 acres round Bolton Abbey, were the first people to sign a petition this summer calling for a cut in the 60mph limit at Beamsley Hill, a three-lane section where outsiders, who do not know the risks presented by junctions with minor roads, travel at up to 90mph. The hill has a sign that reads Road Blocked: it is intended for winter snows, and is supposed to be hidden for the rest of the year, but is used mostly to warn of the wreckage of traffic.

Lisa Salmon was on her way to Skipton when she ran out of road on another three-lane section of the A59. Overtaking a lorry that was climbing a hill in the crawler lane, just as the road planners intended, she must have missed the warning sign that the extra lane was about to end. The journalist was nearly at the brow when suddenly there as nowhere to go.

The lorry was still to her left as the road narrowed and she saw a refuse truck coming towards her. The truck drove over her Citroën ZX car. Like Paul Scott, she sustained terrible injuries.

She lost her good eye - the law of perversity dictated that her left eye, which had poorer vision, was undamaged - as her skull and face shattered like the shell of an egg. She broke her shoulder, fractured her neck, and snapped a leg in three places. Her brain and spinal cord were found to be unharmed, and today her head is held together by 40 plates and screws. But there is good news. After having her forehead, nose, eye orbits, cheekbones and jaw rebuilt, she has become a working mother for the first time: one child, Conor, was born a year and three weeks after the crash (impressive, given her injuries), but died in hospital at the age of two days - an experience worse than the accident. A second son, Joel, was born this year. Lisa's face still shows enough damage to draw public attention; we put her in touch with Paul Scott to see for herself what surgery can achieve.

Salmon admits she was a quick driver, and a careless one in that she would use her phone on the road. But she was cautious when it came to overtaking. And she was not a stranger. As Yorkshire bureau chief of the Press Association, she lived 50 yards off the A59 and she had gone along the 19 miles to Skipton several times. "I was paranoid about overtaking," she says. "I never took risks. But when a lorry is crawling up a hill, who wouldn't overtake when there are two lanes? Any other driver would have got squashed, just like I did. It's completely ludicrous that we can have a road layout like that." She is right. Go there today and

you will notice that under the new, safer road markings lies the ghostly image of the arrows that warned her in 2001 that her lane was coming to an end. They are at the brow of the hill and, even more amazing, there is a turn-off just beyond it, where a family like the Lloyds could be waiting. The old design is shocking to contemplate.

She has no memory of the impact, but it must be lodged in her brain: as a passenger, she is plagued by the sensation that something is about to come through the windscreen. "What happened to me would have happened to anyone," she says. "And probably will happen to someone again."

There have been no flowers on the A59 all summer. But if you want to know how lasting is the personal wreckage of a crash, a clue can still be found. Leave the route at the junction with the A65 and go east for 30 seconds. There, on a bad bend where the concrete fence posts have been renewed several times, you will see fresh flowers. It does not matter when you make the journey: the blooms, marking the death of a young builder called Danny Stanfield, will be there. They have been replaced every second Sunday for the past 10 years. The only time Andrew Stanfield, Danny's father, faltered in this tribute was when he could not bear to see that for the third time a car had left the road at the spot, crashing through the flowers. That there is still no cheap, energy-absorbing metal rail on the bend is a source of wonder.

Danny, the father of a toddler, was a playful young man, given to lifting his mother off her feet for a kiss, or moving her carefully placed ornaments when her back was turned. His wife has remarried and tries to get on with her life. His parents and sisters, however, are so affected by the death that at times, even though they have children of their own, they have not wanted to carry on. Ten years later, his mother is too distressed to join the rest of the family for our interview. "Friends of mine eventually get round to the subject," says Andrew Stanfield, a factory worker who retires in November. "They say, 'How long do you think you'll take flowers there?' As long as I'm alive I'll take flowers. That's where Danny died; that's where I want to go." Lesley, one of Danny's sisters, understands. "I feel it when I'm going to the airport," she says. "I'm churning.

I think you think you're leaving him behind." Andrea, his other sister, agrees: each visits the crash site immediately before a holiday, a preoccupation their young children do not understand.

None of this needs explaining to a group called Scard (Support & Care after Road Death & Injury), set up by Carole Whittingham after her son, Steven, was hit by a stolen car. This Yorkshire mother wanted proper penalties for people who kill with a vehicle, but as word of her spread, the campaign evolved into a national charity that helps anybody who needs it. Every volunteer on its helpline has lost a loved one on the roads.

Members visit schools and young offenders to bring home the consequences of a crash, accompany families to court and help to train the police in good practice when dealing with the aftermath.

They could start with the Ministry of Defence police at Menwith Hill. These are the people, while on a night patrol looking for peace protesters, who ran over Kenneth Campbell just off the A59. The coroner concluded that the young chef, who was walking home from a barbecue, must have lain down in the road. His family does not accept this. Challenging the verdict is difficult, however. The only witnesses to the accident, in a car coming the other way, were sent on without their names being taken.

Not only did the police fail to preserve the crash scene, for which they have been criticised by the Police Complaints Authority, but for three years the Ministry of Defence has refused to give the family a copy of the police investigation report, which is normally made available for a fee.

Only when The Sunday Times asked questions during the research for this article did the ministry say it would reconsider. Particularly hurtful to the family is that, when traced, one of the witnesses turned out to know Kenneth; had he stayed around, he could have alerted the family in time for them to spend some last moments with their dying son.

By the end of next week, nine people who are reading these words will be dead. That's nine Sunday Times readers killed on the roads, not the number from the population as a whole. What lies in wait for their families? Mandy Fox Roberts, whose daughter Hadara was knocked down in 1997, says that if the injuries are very grave, it is best if the reader dies before reaching hospital. Those are the lucky families.

Fox Roberts campaigned for speed cameras and central refuges near her home in West Yorkshire, to the south of the A59, to make crossing the road safer. Until Hadara tipped the balance, the number of dead was deemed inadequate. The day the scales shifted, Fox Roberts was on the scene within minutes: Hadara, 12, who had started a paper round to buy the designer trainers and jogging bottoms her family could not afford, was lying in the road having fits, with fluid flowing out of her ears.

Maternal instinct said she was going to die, so Fox Roberts lay in the road beside her, stroking her daughter's cheek, saying, 'You can go to your nanny now' - only to be gripped by a conflicting impulse, leading her to plead with Hadara to stay alive. She then went through a complex series of adjustments as she lay with her daughter in the road. "I remember saying, 'It's all right, Hadara. Nanny'll look after you.' Because she was very close to my mum. Then I thought, 'Hang on. My mum died six years ago.

I've got to accept this,' because I'd never accepted before that my mum had gone. But I had to do it, so it was like losing two people at the same time. If I didn't, who would look after Hadara? And I was fighting, 'Hadara, come on, you can beat this.' Then, 'No, Hadara, you can't. Go in peace, don't suffer any more.'"

When the police tried to prevent Fox Roberts getting into the ambulance, she took a swing at the officer; nobody was going to stop her travelling with her child. Because the girl was alive on arrival at hospital, the law required that her life was supported for 72 hours. "Try to imagine the beep, beep, beep of these machines for 72 hours," this mother says. "All you want is to have a last few hours in peace, to go on the bed and have a cuddle. But we couldn't get anywhere near her. There were tubes and wires everywhere. We could stroke her right foot." Then the days and nights end and you are free to bury your daughter.

Seven years later, Hadara is missed outside her nuclear family; her cousins still take her on holiday to Majorca, in the form of a photograph on their hotel dressing table. To her mother she remains 12, but to the cousins she is 19, just as they are.

Unlike hospitals, where the prospect of paying compensation leads to a defensive style of work, the county councils that are responsible for most of our roads are rarely sued. There is a difference, of course. The people who make mistakes in hospitals are not the patients. On the roads, the drivers make the errors themselves.

But it is not that simple. Some roads have far more accidents than others. And the fact that we overlook local authorities when apportioning blame for a crash means that a powerful incentive to improve bad roads is just not there. With 37,215 people killed or seriously injured on the roads in 2003, Britain has one of the best safety records in the world. But this is thanks to the high proportion of our driving that is done on motorways.

The excellence of motorways masks the poorer performance of other roads in the statistics, and it is on busy single-carriageway roads such as the A59 that six of our nine Sunday Times readers are going to die.

Thanks to its geography, Sweden does not have the luxury of a big motorway network, and to improve its overall record the country has been forced to alter ordinary roads. The town of Trollhattan, for example, irritated its 53,000 residents with two years of disruption for a redesign. In the year after the changes, not one person died in an accident in or near the town.

We can afford to do the same. In a survey of 27 councils published in November 2002, carried out by the County Surveyors' Society and the AA Foundation for Road Safety Research, nearly half the councils

questioned put the price of road-safety measures per life saved at less than £50,000, with almost all saying "less than £100,000". In comparison, Department for Transport figures put the cost of a fatality at £1,249,890, and that of a serious injury at £140,450. A crash barrier, of the sort that is missing where Danny Stanfield died, is £100,000 per kilometre (less for longer stretches) - an important figure when 500 people a year are killed by hitting trees. White lines are £1 per metre; safety improvements on a bend (anti-skid surface, improved signs, new road markings), £10,000. To convert a four-way junction into a large roundabout costs £500,000, but no such extravagance was necessary to save Robyn Lloyd: a wider road would have done the trick. This is not to suggest that Britain's road planners fail to do their best for our safety. But a pedestrian refuge to keep Hadara Fox alive would have cost £2,000.

Our section of the A59 had 43 fatal and serious accidents in the three years of the study. To bring this back to the average accident rate, which is a realistic target - you cannot make a twisting tourist route into a four-star design - would cost about £3m. At the average for routes studied by EuroRAP, the number of fatal and serious accidents would fall to 24. In other words, Paul Scott would still be housebound. But Lisa Salmon would have got away with it, and Robyn Lloyd would still be alive. We asked North Yorkshire county council about the A59, but it did not respond.

Perhaps Jonathan Lloyd should speak for the council instead. He is an A59 commuter; he has seen a crash every two months for the past three years, apart from the time spent recovering from his own broken bones in the accident that killed his daughter. On the Tuesday before we met him, he was waiting at the scene of a head-on crash just where Jesse Jackson died, and even as he waited he had to move out of the way of a lorry that was out of control.

The council has made some improvements, he says, pointing out the high-friction surface at one bend. But then he draws attention to a junction with a ludicrous layout, where side impacts are a certainty. As soon as he explains what he means, the dangers become obvious - but they are far from evident to a motorist approaching the junction at 60mph, and sure enough, we are nearly involved in such an accident ourselves minutes later. If North Yorkshire county council would like to know about the site, I am sure that Lloyd would tell them.

One afternoon I drive the A59. At 50mph, heading towards the ravine section, I am a rolling roadblock for traffic. Those behind want to go faster, but writing about safety makes you see potential accidents, and 50 seems fast enough to me. A 4x4 overtakes, and just gets past before a lorry coming the other way. Next to overtake is a Renault Clio carrying three young men. The Renault, now in front, brakes suddenly for that A59 speciality, a junction with a minor road. I brake too. Behind me, a Vauxhall Astra, also carrying three people,

swerves as it brakes. Which was more important here, the road or the driver? If you are dead, it does not really matter. But there is no sudden thunderclap today; nobody crashes, and nobody is hurt. Just give it time.