

# Cement Truck Versus Car

*Crushing metal slides 65 miles per hour down the Interstate.  
Grind, push, drag, and spin. I wonder, "Will it never end?"*

Cruising on the interstate highway in the right lane of three headed west, we are oblivious to impending danger. Slowly pass a large truck that is driving in the center lane, we suddenly hear a loud sheet metal thump. The rear end of our full-sized Lincoln Continental makes an immediate, uncontrollable move to the right. In an effort to change from the center lane to the right lane, the eighteen-wheel cement truck we are almost past has slammed our left rear passenger door with his right front tire. Our trunk containing three sets of golf clubs for our 9 AM tee time destination had been just slightly in front of his right rear view mirror.

With the rear end punched to the right, our car moves into the center lane sideways in front of the truck. Seated beside the driver, a retired U.S. Navy ship captain, I watch as he struggles to correct the skid by turning the wheel to the right with seemingly no effect. Both he and the backseat passenger are on the action side of the collision. We have not been kissed by a common cement mixer. The powerful long front end of the tractor of the imposing truck was designed to pull a trailer with 36,000 pounds of concrete for interstate roads or cement bridge construction.

As I look up to the left I see a seven-foot high radiator grill attached to a **Kenworth** tractor that is pushing us sideways down the interstate by pressing its powerful nose against our driver and rear passenger doors. The reality of the situation leaves me feeling insignificant and terribly vulnerable. Suspended in time, it is all I can do to simply absorb what is actually happening.

The sounds of metal against metal seem to go on forever. The car finally swings free of the nose, moving to the truck driver's side of his tractor. We now face backwards down the highway. After grinding against the left front wheel of the tractor, the car slips back the left side to grind against the left rear dual tires of the tractor.

We seem pinned to the truck's dual tires. Worrying that the back of the trailer could easily jack-knife into us before things stopped moving I think, "Will it never end?" We finally spin away slowly enough to slide backwards across the left lane and almost into the concrete center barrier.

Everything stops. Absolute chaos spins to a halt. The car stops, including the engine. The interstate traffic that could have broadsided us stops. My heart stops, or so it seems. It is over.

True to his ship's captain persona, the driver calmly starts the engine and drives the car across all three lanes of the interstate and into the grass beside the pull-off lane. As I exit the car and gain my land legs, the smell of rubber draws my attention to our still heavily smoking car tires. My side of the car remains unscathed. Walking to the other side of the car reveals the ravaging impact of cement truck metal and tires. The entire left side of the car, from the front bumper to the rear bumper is battered and ripped, yet none of us is hurt, and none of the car's passenger area glass is broken. Our driver calls the police, then his wife. "Are you shaking?" I ask. "No," he calmly replies. I can only figure that it must be his U.S. Navy training.

I watch as the truck driver pulls off the road in front of us. Just in case, I jot down his license tag number. Traffic starts flowing smoothly again as life for everyone else returns to normal.

The truck driver says he looked in his right rear-view mirror, saw nothing and turned toward the right lane. He felt a thump, braked, and looked to his right mirror again to see what he had hit. When he looked forward again he saw two men looking up at him from a car he was now pushing sideways down the interstate highway.

He continued to brake hard and pulled to the right lane slowly to avoid jackknifing the trailer. His moving right is what resulted in our car moving from the front of his tractor to its left side. With an expression of relief, the truck driver reflects on the scene and notes that he is happy that the truck was not loaded. An 18-ton load would have greatly increased his stopping distance.

The car is obviously bound to be a total loss for insurance purpose, but is still drivable with a slight alignment problem, so we are able to get home. The doors are jammed on the impact side, but we are able to unload our golf clubs from the trunk. When my wife asks me if it seems surreal, I quickly replied, “No. It was real – much too real.”

As I rethink the situation, a few observations come to light:

**1.** Avoid driving in a large truck’s “blind spot,” just in front of his right rear view mirror, especially if you may have gotten there by passing him on the right, since he might be unaware of your presence.

**2.** If you think you will always see an accident developing and react well accordingly, don’t depend on it! ALWAYS expect the unexpected!

**3.** During an accident your mind is receiving so much sensory input that your self-preservation mode doesn’t kick in. For instance, I did not think to reach up and stabilize myself by holding the assist handle on the ceiling near the right front door, or to get into the fetal position to avoid flying glass or a crushed roof in the event of a car rollover.

**4.** Cars are replaceable. People aren’t! **Wear your seat belt!**

**5.** When the going gets rough and dicey, the cool thinking of a U S Navy ship captain is reassuring.