

Ralph's Accident Reconstruction Newsletter: Volume 8, Number 7—Fall 2009

From time to time, a client will call and ask, “Do you go to <insert name of some place not close to Atlanta>?” In general, I’ll go anywhere a client will pay me to go to investigate something I’m qualified to investigate. But work is not as simple as it once was.

Not too many years ago, I could put all the materials I needed to do field work for 95 percent of my jobs in one catalog case, which, back in those days, I could carry onto an airplane. Steel tapes, camera, film, flash attachment, batteries, legal pad, pens, tools, etc. They were all in there. In past decades, I have traveled as far south as Key West, as far north as Milwaukee, and as far west as Los Angeles.

Now, my camera case alone weighs 52 pounds. It contains 2 SLR digital camera bodies, 2 fast (f/2.8) zoom lenses, a fast close-up lens, the most powerful dedicated hot-shoe flash Canon makes for those cameras, and other odds and ends—\$10,000 worth of camera stuff. Oh, how I wish I could still shoot film! My camera case and the case for my Bosch Crash Data Retrieval System cables are shown below; and those are but two of the items I routinely carry with me. Three years ago, I traded my Dodge Dakota extended cab truck for a Chevrolet Avalanche, because I could no longer fit everything I needed to carry in the Dodge. And I just bought a one-ton truck! So, for nearly every job I do (there might be the odd exception), I must drive. There’s no way that I would even think of entrusting \$10K in digital photographic equipment to baggage handlers! I recently did a job in Memphis. Two vehicles and a scene to examine; I drove and had to spend one night.



Indeed, I’ll go wherever you want, but it may take me a while. My billing rate is such that I can often do a complete job as well as or better than many other persons or firms for less total cost. I am certain that you won’t find people flying anywhere with the quality of equipment that I routinely use. And some of my competitors routinely send crews in pairs, regardless of the urgency or perceived hazard.

While I was in Idaho to purchase my “new” used truck, in the converted ambulance chassis, I just happened to drop in on the International Association of Accident Reconstruction Specialists (IAARS) conference held in Boise, Idaho, from September 14 through September 17 of this year. ☺ I wish that I had been able to spend some time exploring Yellowstone after the seminar, but driving a twenty-year-old, 10,500-pound, top-heavy vehicle with which I had no prior experience on a 2200-mile journey seemed like a task to which I needed to devote all my attention. So I got to Conyers in four tedious days without touring Yellowstone.

This conference was a surprising success, considering the general state of the economy and the severely depressed reconstruction field; most of my fellow practitioners report that their business is substantially diminished. Yet we had 66 in attendance, and the programs were outstanding. As has become common at such meetings, there were staged collisions.



This shows the result of the first staged collision, which involved two geriatric police cruisers. It fortunately happened to be a perfect example of a center-of-mass-to-center-of-mass collision, easy to evaluate but difficult to stage. This collision occurred at relatively low and documented speeds and was used to demonstrate the validity of several aspects of accident reconstruction, including the reduction of effective drag factor for offset motion.

There were a number of staged collisions between a motorcycle and a car. The motorcycles carried mannequins to simulate riders. Although it was agreed that the post-impact trajectories of those mannequins would not be identical to the trajectories of human riders, they were still some interesting staged impacts.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this conference, at least to me, were some presentations by Dr. Frank Navin, a Canadian who has been actively involved in accident reconstruction from an academic standpoint all of his professional life. His presentations at the conference, including some experiments which were conducted at this conference, addressed the topic of relating scientifically developed drag sled values of coefficient of friction to the effective rate of deceleration of a