

‘Giant’ Lessons From a ‘Rebel Without a Cause’: Remembering James Dean, 60 Years After His Fatal Auto Crash

Despite Gains in Auto Safety Since 1955, U.S.
Drivers Between the Ages Of 20 and 24
Remain at High Risk

September 29, 2015

SHARE THIS



DOWNLOAD TO PDF

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New York Press Office: (212) 346-5500; media@iii.org

NEW YORK, September 30, 2015 — Sixty years ago this week, teen idol James Dean died at the age of 24, after crashing his sports car at the intersection of California Routes 46 and 41. He was reportedly driving 85 mph; his death remains a grim reminder of how youth and reckless driving will always be a deadly combination, according to the [Insurance Information Institute](#) (I.I.I.).

“In a general sense, U.S. highways and cars are far safer in 2015 than they were in 1955,” said Michael Barry, vice president, Media Relations, I.I.I. “Yet, only two years ago, U.S. drivers aged 20 to 24 had more motor vehicle deaths per 100,000 people than any other age group, according to the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#).”

There were 38,426 highway fatalities in the United States in 1955, according to the National Safety Council (NSC). While that number is unlikely to be exceeded in 2015, the NSC reported recently that the current rate of U.S. highway fatalities in 2015 is at a pace to make it the deadliest year since 2007.

Dean (1931-1955), who had just come to prominence after starring in the film adaptation of *East of Eden*, was driving a Porsche along with a passenger near Cholame, California (San Luis Obispo County), when his vehicle collided with another car at dusk on Friday, September 30, 1955. Dean died from a broken neck and extensive internal and external injuries; his passenger and the other motorist survived. Donald Spoto’s *Rebel: The Life and Legend of James Dean* (HarperCollins, 1996) hints at the longevity of the career which may have awaited Dean. Indeed, in 1955 he was profiled in *Look* magazine alongside two other up-and-coming performers—Julie Andrews and Shirley MacLaine!

Today, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among 15 to 20 year-olds, according to the National Center for Health Statistics and the I.I.I. hopes the tragic loss of the talented and charismatic Dean serves as a cautionary tale to young drivers and their parents.

The following tips can help keep young drivers safe:

- 1.** Focus on obeying speed limits, never drink and drive, and avoid all distractions while behind the wheel (e.g., texting while driving).
- 2.** Buy a safe car. The vehicle should be solid, easy to drive and provide broad protection to its occupants. The I.I.I. offer guidelines on [how to shop for a safe car here](#).
- 3.** Explore whether your state has a graduated drivers license (GDL) program. GDL programs allow teenaged to gain driving privileges, over time, such as driving at night.

For a personal take on the death of James Dean, read I.I.I. [chief actuary James Lynch’s latest Terms + Conditions blog post](#).

RELATED LINKS

Issues Updates: [Auto Crashes](#); [Teen Drivers](#)

Facts and Statistics: [Highway Safety](#)

Topics: [Auto Insurance](#)

Video: [Air Bags](#)

The I.I.I. has a full library of educational videos on its [You Tube Channel](#). Information about I.I.I. mobile apps can be found [here](#).

THE I.I.I. IS A NONPROFIT, COMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATION SUPPORTED BY THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY.

[Back to top](#)