

Look out! The physics of road safety

WITNESS STATEMENTS

Below are two witness statements relating to the accident, provided by Police Scotland. The witness names and their statements have been invented, but they are based on a real collision recorded by the police.

In each case you will need to decide if the witness's story is entirely true, or whether the witness got confused in some of the details. It is an offence to intentionally give wrong information, but we are sometimes very bad at recalling every detail.

WITNESS 1

John Brabham (age 23), 48 St Steven St, Dumfries

Witness states:

About 10.20 pm on Saturday 2 November 2017, I was driving my Ford Focus motor car, Reg. mark ROY 50C, west in Calder Place, Dumfries. I was alone in my vehicle and returning to my home address. I remember that it was dark and raining heavily at the time of the crash, I had my headlights on and my wipers were going at full speed. The street lighting was on and general visibility was quite good. I was driving west at about 30 miles per hour [48 km/h].

About 100 metres in front of me I saw a pedestrian who was dressed in black. He looked as if he had just come from the Red Lion pub in Calder Place. He was standing on the pavement on the opposite side of the road to me and I got the impression he was about to cross the road. He was staggering slightly. At that time there was nothing coming from the east and so he stepped out into the road and started to cross the road from my right. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, a car approached him at high speed. It had its headlights on so the driver must have been able to see him. The car was going in the opposite direction to me. It never seemed to slow down at all and just hit him and threw him high into the air. He did a kind of somersault and then landed on the road. The other car stopped but the driver of it got out and ran away in the opposite direction from me. He was wearing jeans and a red hoodie. He looked to be in his late 20s. I think I would recognise him again if I saw him. I got out of my car immediately and did my best to give the guy first aid. I phoned for the ambulance and police and they arrived a short time later. There were other people nearby who must have seen the same thing as I did.

I think the driver of the car was to blame as they were going far too fast for the road conditions that night.

Supporting material for:

Hargreaves J (2018) Look out! The physics of road safety. *Science in School* 44: 34–39.
www.scienceinschool.org/2018/issue44/roadsafety

WITNESS 2

Douglas Bell (age 62), 14 Jardine Way, Dumfries

Witness states:

About 10.20 pm on Saturday 2 November, 2017, I was walking along the pavement in Calder Place just at its junction with North Street, Dumfries. I remember it was a cold dark night and it was raining heavily. Although it was dark there was street lighting on and you could see most things around you because of that. I had just been to the pub and was heading home. I was on my own.

As I said I was walking along Calder Place and had just reached North Street. I saw a man come out of the Red Lion pub which is just on the opposite side of the junction from where I was walking. He was wearing dark clothing and looked as if he had been drinking too much. He was staggering about on the pavement when I first saw him. He immediately stepped off the pavement and on to Calder Place as if he was going to cross the road to the opposite side. I don't think he looked to see if there was anything coming.

I saw a car approaching him from the west. It had its headlights on so he must have been able to see it but he just continued crossing. The car looked to me as if it was going quite slow and really the pedestrian should have stopped what he was doing and walked back onto the pavement where he came from. The thing is he did not he just continued. The car also continued on its way. I think the driver of the car must have thought that the guy would stop crossing but he didn't. Then all I heard was a bang and saw the pedestrian being thrown into the air. The pedestrian landed on the ground on his back. The car stopped but the guy who was driving it got out of the car and ran away down the street. He looked to be a fairly young chap. He was wearing jeans and a bright red coloured hoodie. He ran back in the direction he came from. He was running too fast for me to catch him. I can't imagine why the driver ran away because I did not think he was doing anything wrong. He certainly did not seem to be speeding to me. I ran over to the pedestrian and was joined by a car driver who had also seen the collision. I did some first aid and the other guy phoned for the emergency services.

I think the pedestrian was to blame for crossing the road when a car was coming.

Supporting material for:

Hargreaves J (2018) Look out! The physics of road safety. *Science in School* 44: 34–39.
www.scienceinschool.org/2018/issue44/roadsafety