

The Montgomery Sentinel

Travel Tales

Great Race Hero Saves Two Lives and a 1955 Buick on Terrifying Mount Washington (Part 3 in a 3-part Series)

by

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You don't want to tangle with Mt. Washington, in central New Hampshire. The highest wind speed ever recorded on Earth was on top of Mt. Washington -- a gust of 231 miles per hour. Its height is 6288 feet, the highest mountain in the northeast US. It has some of the worst weather in the world, and over 150 people have been killed on the mountain, mostly through falls, hypothermia, and skiing accidents. Surprisingly, only three have died driving on the steep, narrow, twisting eight-mile Auto Road that goes to the top. One was a passenger in 1880 in a stage coach which overturned, due to a drunken driver. Another was a woman in 1984 whose brakes failed. The last was a motorcyclist in 2009 who went off the road and hit a tree.

Lots of vehicles are banned from even attempting Mt. Washington, including Lincoln Continentals, Acuras, Hondas and Saturns made before 2009 – due to brakes that tend to overheat; and H-1 Hummers, dually pickups, large trucks, RVs, trailers, and any vehicles more than 85 inches wide. Even cars with overweight passengers (over 900 pounds total in a standard car) may be banned! No mopeds, scooters or bicycles are allowed.

The road is truly terrifying in places, since there are no guardrails of any kind, in some places there are 1000-foot cliffs, and there is a two-mile-long slippery



The 1955 Buick Estate wagon having no trouble getting up Mt. Washington -- but watch out!

gravel stretch. Passing any car headed in the opposite direction on the narrow road is alarming, and scraping past an on-coming car when your wheels are an inch from the edge of a cliff is absolutely horrifying.

But all that didn't stop about 25 intrepid Grace Race participants from attempting the mountain, an optional leg on the 2018 rally. At least three cars had minor problems, due to engine overheating or brake issues, but there was only one major incident. That was almost deadly, and it would have been the first fatal accident in the 33 year history of the Great Race – probably the safest motoring event on Earth.

Team Henderson, consisting of driver Scott Henderson and daughter/navigator Mallory, made it up Mt. Washington and visited the gift shop and museum on top. The Hendersons own a lumber business and auto museum in Mobile, Alabama. They headed down the mountain in their beautifully restored aqua 1964½ Ford Mustang, ahead of their friends Carl Schneider and Jack Juratovic in their 1955 Buick Estate wagon, and behind a large modern SUV.

What happened next was caught on the Henderson's GoPro car-mounted camera. (See <https://www.facebook.com/HendersonGreatRace2014/videos/2011356065794388/>)

The Buick's brakes failed, and it started accelerating uncontrollably down the steep gravel road. Buick navigator Juratovic called out "No brakes" as they passed the Mustang on the strictly-no-passing road. Driver Schneider in the Buick realized that he had to slow or stop the Buick, or else they would go off a cliff ahead, so he intentionally drove his classic station wagon into a large hillock of stone, going about 35 mph. At first this seemed to work, as the car reared into



The Buick crashes onto its side but is not out of danger on Mt. Washington

the air and slowed, but then the car lurched onto its right side and started to slide down the gravel road. Before it could stop, the Buick hit a small bump and flopped back onto its wheels, then started rolling again. Now there was nothing in front of the Buick except a cliff edge, about 100 feet away. And still no brakes.

Back in the Mustang, Mallory Henderson had been yelling, "Oh my God, Daddy, they're going to hit!" Scott Henderson realized what was happening and raced

ahead of the Buick as it hit the rocks, rolled over, flopped back, and started its deadly roll again. Scott quickly turned his Mustang left into the stone hillock and blocked the Buick, which collided at low speed with the Mustang's left rear quarter, and finally stopped. Two lives and a classic Buick were saved.

Amazingly, after the Buick's brakes were repaired, both cars were fully driveable and made it down the mountain unassisted. That's Detroit metal for you!



*Scott Henderson of Mobile, Alabama,
hero of the 2018 Great Race*

Scott Henderson was the hero of the day, and was deservedly given the Tom McRae Spirit of the Event Award at the 2018 Great Race closing ceremony in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Tragically, Scott died of cancer just months later, in October 2018.

Lew and Susan Toulmin rallied their 1968 "Bullitt" Mustang in the 2005 Great Race. They plan to drive the Mustang down the entire Blue Ridge Parkway and Natchez Trace to Mississippi and Alabama in 2020.

Words above: 747

Photos, captions and credits:

1. Car number 11, the 1955 Buick Estate wagon driven by Carl Schneider and Jack Juratovic, heading up Mt. Washington before the accident. (Credit: Tommy Lee Byrd)
2. The 1955 Buick Estate wagon intentionally hits a rock hillock, to stop its descent, after its brakes failed on the steep Mt. Washington descent. (Credit: Team Henderson)
3. The Buick does not stop, bounces off the rocks, and begins turning onto its right side. (Credit: Team Henderson)
4. The Buick rolls onto its side and slides down the gravel road on Mt. Washington. (Credit: Team Henderson)

5. The Buick flops back onto its wheels, and with its brakes still inoperative, begins to roll toward the cliff, only 100 feet away. (Credit: Team Henderson)
6. The aftermath of the accident and save, with the Buick (left) stopped by Scott Henderson in his 1964½ Mustang (right), which pulled in front of the Buick and blocked it. (Credit: Tommy Lee Byrd)
7. The 1955 Buick Estate wagon, showing the scrapes in the paint and metal where it slid down the mountain on its side. Note that the car is still completely driveable. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
8. The 1955 Buick Estate wagon at the lunch stop after descending Mt. Washington, showing the scrapes in the paint and dents in the metal where the car slid down the mountain on its side. (Courtesy photo)
9. The 1964½ Ford Mustang of Scott and Mallory Henderson arriving at the lunch stop after descending Mt. Washington, showing a small scrape and dent just above the rear wheel. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
10. Scott Henderson, who saved two lives (and a classic Buick!) by his quick thinking on Mt. Washington during the 2018 Great Race. His aqua 1964½ Ford Mustang is on the right. Henderson was a lumberman who owned an auto museum in Mobile, Alabama. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
11. Scott Henderson and his daughter/navigator Mallory arrive in Gardiner, Maine in their 1964½ Ford Mustang, the evening stop after descending Mt. Washington in New Hampshire. Despite the accident, the car was completely driveable. (Courtesy photo)
12. A replica of the famous “Blues Brothers” movie police car begins the dangerous descent down 6288-foot Mt. Washington in New Hampshire, during the Great Race. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
13. Two classic cars competing in the Great Race pass each other on the Mt. Washington Auto Road. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
14. Car number 24, a 1937 Ford Tudor with classic teardrop eyes, begins the dangerous descent down 6288-foot Mt. Washington in New Hampshire in the 2018 Great Race. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)
15. The 100-mile view from the top of Mt. Washington in New Hampshire. Car 55 in the Great Race is a 1955 Chevrolet 210, driven by Larry Tribble and Rock Rooney. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)

16. Logo of the Mt. Washington Auto Road, which leads eight miles up to the top of the highest mountain in the northeast United States. Over 150 people have died on the mountain, but only three in vehicular accidents. (Credit: Lew Toulmin)

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#end of Great Race 2018 3-part series#