

Tesla driver killed while using Autopilot loved fast cars

July 2 2016, by Mark Gillispie And John Seewer



This still image taken from a video published on YouTube on Oct. 15, 2015, shows Joshua Brown of Canton, Ohio, in the driver's seat of his Tesla Model S with no hands on the steering wheel while he demonstrates the car's self-driving mode. Brown was killed on May 7, 2016, in Williston, Fla., when his car hit a tractor-trailer while it was on the Autopilot system. (YouTube via AP)

Joshua Brown, the first U.S. fatality in a wreck involving a car in self-driving mode, had an adventurous streak with a "need for speed" but also was a brilliant innovator and beloved neighbor, say those who knew the Navy veteran.

Brown was "like a little kid" when he brought home his Tesla Model S sedan late last summer and always willing to take anyone for a ride, said Richard Tichenor, a neighbor.

The 40-year-old single man lived in Canton where he ran a wireless technology company. He bought his modest home four years ago for \$40,000—a little more than half the sticker price of a new Tesla Model S.

Brown died May 7 in Williston, Florida, when his car's cameras didn't make a distinction between the white side of a turning tractor-trailer and the brightly lit sky while failing to automatically activate its brakes, according to statements by the government and the automaker.

Terri Lyn Reed, a friend and insurance agent in northeastern Ohio who insured Brown's business, said he loved motorcycles and fast cars.

"He had the need for speed," she said. "Kind of a daredevil, loved the excitement."

Brown nicknamed the car "Tessy" and praised its "Autopilot" system. He posted videos online touting its capabilities, saying in April it avoided a crash when a truck swerved into his lane. "Hands down the best car I have ever owned," Brown said.

His driving record, obtained by The Associated Press, showed he had eight speeding tickets in a six-year span. The most recent ticket, in 2015, was for driving 64 mph in a 35 mph zone. The records also showed Brown was licensed to drive a motorcycle, though the tickets don't say what vehicle was being driven at the time.

Stan Staneski III worked two years for Brown putting in wireless networks. His boss and friend liked to go fast, but "was always a very

safe driver," said Staneski, of Denver, Pennsylvania.

"I mean, I never once felt scared or threatened while riding with him," he said.

A Navy SEAL for 11 years, Brown left the service in 2008. A lot of his innovations came out of what he learned in the military, Reed said, describing him as incredibly intelligent.



In this 2015 photo provided by his neighbor, Krista Kitchen, Joshua Brown stands by his new Tesla electric car near his home in Canton, Ohio. Brown died in an accident in Florida on May 7, 2016 in the first fatality from a car using self-driving technology. According to statements by the government and the automaker, his vehicle's cameras didn't make a distinction between the white side of a turning tractor-trailer and the brightly lit sky while failing to

automatically activate its brakes. (Krista Kitchen via AP)

Brown founded his wireless company in April 2010, a couple of months before he was caught going 80 mph in a 55 mph zone. He built the business installing Wi-Fi networks at campgrounds and cruise line terminals from the ground up. He told a customer his company would be bigger than cable giant Comcast Corp.

"He wasn't in it for the money," Reed said. "He wanted to make things better for people."

Sometimes he would travel on business in a motor home, and he loved the outdoors and camping. He'd share stories about his adventures and jumping out of airplanes in the military. Neighbors recalled how Brown would wake up early during winter storms and clean their street and driveways before city snowplows arrived. Friends said he never met a stranger.

Next-door neighbor Krista Kitchen said Brown once took her and a friend for a ride in the car and then surprised her friend by turning over the wheel to him.

"He was just flabbergasted, but that's just Josh," she said.

Brown took meticulous care of the Tesla and enjoyed seeing what it could do. But he also wanted to know its limitations and make sure it was safe, she said. He was on vacation in Florida with his parents when he was killed, she said.

Reed said she didn't know her friend had been driving a Tesla until she heard about the crash. But, she said, "It doesn't surprise me he was

utilizing technology at its best."

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Citation: Tesla driver killed while using Autopilot loved fast cars (2016, July 2) retrieved 30 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-07-tesla-driver-autopilot-fast-cars.html>

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