

Massive pileup on mountain shuts down I-84



Antonio Sierra/East Oregonian

Emergency crews respond to the scene of a mass crash involving dozens of vehicles Monday, Feb. 21, 2022, on Interstate 84 about 21 miles east of Pendleton.

Series of crashes involve nearly 100 vehicles, numerous injuries

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The freeway reopened eastbound about 12:30 a.m. Feb. 22, and westbound at about 6 a.m.

The OSP, local law enforcement, fire and medics from agencies throughout Umatilla and Union counties responded, along with help from Walla Walla County in Washington. Pendleton Fire Chief Jim Critchley said the wrecks stretched for a mile. The Hyatts described the response as impressive.

PENDLETON — The Hyatt family on Monday, Feb. 21, was heading west on Interstate 84, bound for their home in Yelm, Washington, when they became involved in one of the biggest traffic smash-ups in Eastern Oregon in years.

Marjorie, a kindergarten assistant; her husband, Carter Hyatt, a vocational therapist; and their son, Jacob, a sophomore in high school; were returning from a trip to Utah, where they were a part of their daughter's engagement, including picking out her dress and ring.

"We had a wonderful weekend," Carter said.

On the way back in their Nissan Pathfinder, they stopped in Boise to spend the night of Feb. 20 with Jacob's brother, then headed out the morning of Feb. 21 for the final leg of the trek home.

Marjorie was asleep, Jacob was in the backseat watching one of "The Lord of the Rings" movies and Carter was driving. He said they were going to stop at the rest area at Deadman Pass, near milepost 229, when he saw jackknifed semitrailers on the road ahead.

"I kind of swerved," he recalled. "I was able to miss a couple of cars and trucks."

But he tapped the breaks, he said, and lost control of the car.

The front of their Nissan smashed into the rear driver's side of an Amazon semitrailer. The collision tore apart the front of the car, and the engine ended up on the asphalt.

But the Nissan's safety features worked well, Carter said. The air bags, seat belts and crumple zones protected the family.

"We're all pretty much fine," Marjorie said.

The Hyatts were part of a series of crashes that began at around noon near milepost 230 and involved as many as 98 vehicles, according to press releases from the Oregon Department of Transportation and Oregon State Police. And while the total number of injured was unknown, OSP as of late Feb. 21 had not reported any fatalities in the pileup that stretched for a mile.

Interstate 84 shuts down

The mass crash shut down the westbound and eastbound lanes of the freeway in Eastern Oregon. Eastbound was closed Feb. 21 between Exit 216, 6 miles east of Pendleton, and Exit 265 at La Grande, while westbound was closed to between Exit 374 at Ontario and Exit 216.

Responding officers were notified of additional crashes while they were arriving, and then once on scene, officers could hear crashes occurring behind them, according to a press release from the OSP. The Hyatt's heard those crashes, too.

"Bam, bam, bam," Carter Hyatt said. "They just kept hitting."

Marjorie said the sounds were unnerving. They stayed in their vehicle, even without heat, for protection.

Capt. Merle Laci with the La Grande Fire Department said two ambulances and one rescue rig were on scene from Union County, with crews from Union and Island City fire departments on standby. The La Grande Fire Department sent eight personnel to the scene.

As of 3:35 p.m., rescue vehicles and ambulances from the La Grande Fire Department had returned to the station, according to Laci. La Grande Fire Department confirmed they had transported three individuals from the scene to Grande Ronde Hospital.

Nick Oatley, spokesperson with Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, confirmed the Hermiston-based fire department also responded, but he did not have specifics on how many personnel were on scene. Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston, reported it did not receive any crash victims.

Hospitals at the ready

Elaine LaRoche, incident commander at Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, activated the hospital's incident command system, according to a press release from Mardi Ford, public information officer.

"We are preparing to support any patients sent our way with emergency services and medical care," Ford said in the release. "We do not have any news on distribution of patients to be sent our way. However, we are prepared to assist in this emergency. We are cooperating fully with all regional partners, including our media contacts, to do what we can to keep everyone informed. Our primary mission, however, is to provide emergency services and medical care to patients in need. Once we know more,

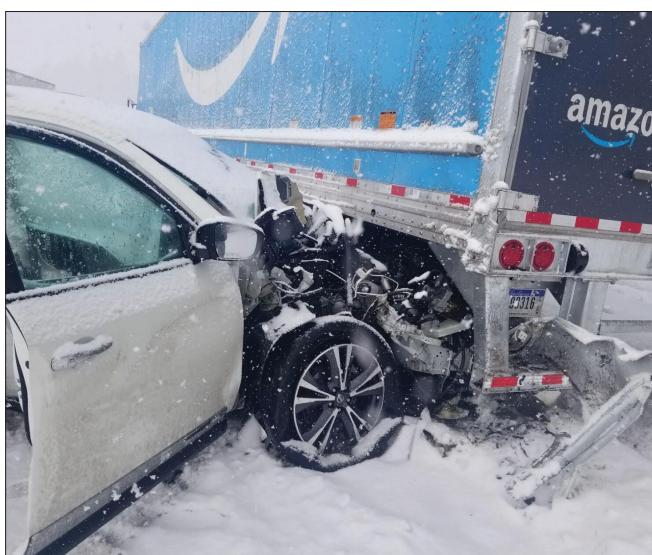
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RECE NELSON

While they missed the playoffs by just a couple points, the Joseph boys basketball team turned in three gutsy performances last week at the Old Oregon League District Tournament. Reece Nelson was among the standouts. He averaged 11 points in the three games, a team high, on 12-for-22 shooting, and had the best performance when he scored 20 points, including 15 in the second half, on 8-for-11 shooting, and eight rebounds in the Eagles' game against Powder Valley on Feb. 18.

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Carter Hyatt/Contributed Photo

This Nissan Pathfinder belonging to the Hyatt family of Yelm, Washington, crashed Monday, Feb. 21, 2022, into the back of this Amazon trailer on Interstate 84 about 21 miles east of Pendleton. The crash was part of a series of wrecks that stretched for a mile on the westbound side. The Hyatts were unharmed in the crash.



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