

Man faces charges after driving wrong way on I-84

By PHIL WRIGHT
STAFF WRITER

Cody Vela of La Grande was returning home Thursday with his girlfriend and their five children when he saw the dark pickup bearing down at them on Cabbage Hill.

"I was like, what the heck is that? Was that guy in the lane?" he recalled Monday. "It takes you second."

The 6-mile-long grade on Interstate 84 east of Pendleton spans three lanes along the climb into the Blue Mountains.

Vela and his family were heading east in their SUV in the far left passing lane, the same lane the Toyota Tacoma occupied. Vela estimated he was going about 70 mph and the pickup was zooming along at 80-85 mph.

"Luckily, we didn't have anybody to the right of us in the second and third lanes," he said. "I told everybody hang on."

Vela crossed out of the way and watched the Toyota Tacoma zoom by and noted the driver, a man, was the lone occupant. Vela said he was able to pull over about a quarter-mile later and called 911. He said he overheard another dispatcher talking to another motorist about the same wrong-way driver.

Brad Samuelson of Pocatello, Idaho, may have been the first to call 911



A dark-colored Toyota Tacoma truck travels the wrong way in the eastbound lane of I-84 near milepost 224 in this image captured on Brad Samuelson's dashcam Thursday afternoon near Pendleton.

Courtesy photo

about the wrong-way driver.

Samuelson, a pilot car driver, said he left a manufactured home in The Dalles that day was heading up the big hill in the far right lane when he came around a blind corner near milepost 224 and saw the Toyota pickup moving the opposite direction in the far left lane.

"At first it didn't even register because he passed me on my left," Samuelson said. "Then I went, wait a second."

He got on his CB radio

and asked other drivers if he saw what he thought he saw. Truckers confirmed it, he said, and one claimed the pickup driver had a bottle of whisky to his lips.

Samuelson said he pulled over as soon as he could and called 911, then realized how close a call this was.

"Just moments before that, I was in lane 1," he said.

Samuelson's dashcam captured video of the pickup at 3:36 p.m. going west in the eastbound fast

lane. He provided the video to the *East Oregonian*, which shared it on Facebook and with other company newspapers.

State police trooper Jeremy Gunter responded to the calls about the wrong-way pickup and found it near milepost 219, where other drivers forced it to stop after a minor collision.

The driver, Kenneth Oscar Field, 50, of St. George, Utah, appeared impaired, according to state police, and Gunter

arrested him on accusations of driving under the influence of intoxicants and booked him into the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, for the DUI, reckless driving and four counts of reckless endangering. Each reckless endangering charge relates to someone who had to share the road with Field.

More charges could be coming. Gunter contacted the *EO*, which provided him with Samuelson's contact information. Samuelson said he talked to state

police and handed over a copy of the video.

Kristi Flanagan is glad she started her drive Thursday from Pendleton to her home in Baker City as late as she did.

Flanagan, whose daughter is a student at Blue Mountain Community College, said she was ascending the curves of Cabbage Hill when she saw the pickup parked on the left shoulder of the eastbound lanes.

The pickup was nose-to-nose with an Oregon State Police car and pointing downhill. Flanagan said she was curious because the pickup seemed to have been heading downhill when it stopped.

It wasn't until Friday morning, when she saw the Facebook post on the *Baker City Herald's* page, that Flanagan realized what had happened not long before she passed that pickup. Flanagan said that's quite likely the lane she would have been driving in — going the opposite direction.

"There's usually trucks in the right two lanes," she said. "Thank goodness we weren't going up 20 minutes earlier."

Vela said he was glad state police took the driver off the road. Samuelson expressed a similar sentiment.

"I've never encountered anything like that," he said, "and I'm just glad no one was hurt."

Jayson Jacoby of the *Baker City Herald* contributed to this story.

Two unrelated arrests have cattle connection

HERMISTON HERALD

The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office reported making two arrests this month with a connection to cattle.

Deputy Trevor Limburg was on patrol Sunday on Powerline Road near Umatilla when he observed a truck hauling a trailer with cattle inside.

The sheriff's office reported the truck and trailer "was weaving heavily all over the road across both lanes."

Limburg stopped the rig and contacted the driver, Alberto Frias Madrigal, 50, of Hermiston.

He showed signs of alcohol consumption, the sheriff's office reported, and Limburg smelled the odor of alcohol coming from him.

Madrigal also performed "very poorly during the field sobriety tests," according to the sheriff's office, and Limburg arrested him for driving under the influence of intoxicants.

Madrigal's family member arrived to retrieve the truck, trailer and cattle. Limburg cited Madrigal for the DUI and reckless driving and released him to the relative.

The sheriff's office also reported a deputy nabbed a man who was trying to steal a cattle chute.

Deputy Cody Marcum on Friday, Nov. 1, took a report involving the attempted theft of a hydraulic cattle chute from a farm supply business near Hermiston.

An employee arrived at about 7 a.m. on Nov. 1 and found two men wearing black ski masks in back of the business who had attached the large cattle chute to a hitch on a small, 2008 Nissan Versa sedan. The employee told the suspects to stop, and they unhooked the cattle chute and sped off.

But the witness jotted down the Washington license plate on the car and gave a detailed description of events to the deputy. The sheriff's office checked records and found the plate

number did not belong to the Nissan, while the correct license plate for the car was an Oregon plate belonging to Eric Nava, 24, of Hermiston. Nava also matched the employee's description of one of the suspects.

A Hermiston police officer Monday stopped Nava's vehicle and contacted the sheriff's office. Deputy Nathan Rankin arrived and noticed the bogus Washington license plate inside Nava's vehicle. Nava gave his consent to search the vehicle, and Rankin found a black ski mask along with drug paraphernalia.

While Nava denied any involvement in the crime, according to the sheriff's office, he could not explain the items in his vehicle. Rankin booked Nava into

TRCI inmate dies in custody

HERMISTON HERALD



Kessler

An inmate died in custody Thursday evening at Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla, according to the Oregon Department of Corrections.

Stephen Kessler, 76, passed away in the infirmary.


The Oregon State Police have

been notified.

Kessler was in the facility's hospice program.

Kessler entered DOC custody on Oct. 1, 1982, from Multnomah County with an earliest release date of Oct. 1, 2052.

TRCI is a multi-custody prison in Umatilla that houses approximately 1,800 adults in custody.



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Karen King
Pendleton, Oregon

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