

# Along for the Ride

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## Along for the Ride

I stared down at the bulky keys in my hand, not wanting to climb up into the thing and start it up. Hell, I didn't even know how to start it. It was twice as large as anything I had ever driven before. A mammoth, tri-axle Ryder moving truck.

"Are you sure?" I asked. "I've never driven a diesel before."

"Of course you can. You're licensed for it. And you know how to drive stick."

"I don't even know how to start it."

"Carl'll show you how. Don't worry about it. I have faith."

As I stared up at the huge Ryder rental truck, faith was completely non-existent. It was intimidating, but if Steve, the shift supervisor, believed I could drive it, I could drive it. I wasn't going to disobey a direct order.

I had just finishing up a midnight to eight am shift, but Steve believed that I had enough time to run up to Phillips with a load of 28x40 wallcoverings that needed diecut. Ten minutes up, twenty minutes for them to unload, ten minutes back. No problem, no overtime.

I shrugged and walked back into the shipping office where Carl, our resident jokester and usual driver, sat reading a newspaper. His truck was still being loaded for a jaunt to Maryland.

Dietrich walked by, waving, his cigar dangling from his lips. "Dee truck ist looded," he muttered in his thick German accent. He seriously believed he had been King Arthur in a previous life, which was just one of the odd things about Dietrich. The other was that he was a trained chef. I knew I didn't want him preparing anything I ate.

“Steve says you’re to show me how to start the Ryder,” I yelled in to Carl. He looked up at me through his spectacles and smiled. Carl was always smiling. Except when he was swearing a blue streak. It was usually one or the other. Carl enjoyed fucking with the police. He was a legend at Steckel for outrunning a cop in a Honda Civic owned by the company. The tale went that he blew through a speed trap on Centerville Road, ran the stop light at Harrisburg Pike and drove directly into the Loading Dock, leaping out of the car and slamming the garage door shut before the cops giving chase blew by on State Road. Legendary.

“Sure, whatever,” he said as he got up, tossing the newspaper onto the desk. We walked to the Ryder truck, all one and half tons of it – before loading that is – and he sat me in the driver’s seat.

“You disengage this,” he told me. “Flip this, make sure it’s in neutral, foot on the brake, yank this and push this button...” The vehicle sputtered and roared to life. I mentally did a checklist, and hoped I remembered it all. I wouldn’t but I thought I could stumble my way through it. “Just remember one thing.” Carl was suddenly deathly serious. “Take it slow. Real slow. This isn’t a car.”

I nodded and took a deep breath, buckling my seat belt and dropping it into gear. Carl jumped down and slammed the door shut. I released the break and slowly backed out the clutch, allowing it to ride out as it idled. I drifted in a straight line to the plant’s exit, watching traffic as it bustled up and down State Road. 7:30 am. Heavy traffic. Twenty seconds passed. Then I saw the gap. Plenty of time for me to ease this beast out, turn left and head north.

Remembering Carl’s words, I released the brake and slowly eased the gas pedal down. I turned the wheel to the left, feeling the right front tire hit the newly paved road, pushing the cab to the left, then to the right as the Ryder pushed up onto the road. The cab swung to the right... and kept on going up.

It was about that time that I realized I was tipping over. I hadn’t even gone twenty feet. The Ryder rose up high as I continued to turn left, the front left tires leaving the ground. I remember thinking, ‘this ain’t right’ followed quickly by ‘oh shit, Henry’s going to kill me!’ Henry was the owner of Steckel Printing at the time.

The Ryder finished its left turn and landed on its side, bam. Off the road. Out of traffic. Glass shattered but the seat belt kept me in my seat – mostly. The truck’s engine immediately died. Suddenly there was silence.

What the fuck just happened? I popped the seatbelt, knowing I should get out as quick as possible. First things first. Engine? Not running. Go! Get out. I fell down through the cab, landing in broken glass and then climbing back up and out through the open window on the driver’s door. I crawled out, looked down and saw a woman in scrubs staring up at me.

“Are you alright?” she yelled up. “I’m a nurse!”

“I’m fine,” I replied as I jumped down. I stared at the truck. What the fuck?

Traffic hadn’t stopped, only the few that had seen the accident. People were running from the plant, crossing over State Road. Carl was laughing his ass off as he walked around the fallen truck with several press helpers and pressmen. “Fall down,” he laughed. “Go boom! I told you to go slow.”

“I did!” I said emphatically.

“I know,” he chuckled. “I watched it all from the shipping dock.” He rolled up the back of the truck. “Oh. Well, there’s your problem.”

“What?” I asked, staring at the massive pile of paper. “I don’t see what you mean.” All I saw was a fire hydrant that had pierced the metal wall of the Ryder truck. It tore a two foot hole in the side, skidding such a short distance proving I hadn’t been moving fast. Luckily I hadn’t sheared it off otherwise all of the wall coverings would have been lost in an explosion of water.

“Looks like someone loaded the truck with all three skids in a row rather than blocking them two in the front and one behind.” I looked behind me at the voice I didn’t recognize. A UPS guy stood there in his brown outfit, just shaking his head in disbelief. “If you hadn’t dropped it here, you’ve rolled clear down the hill as you got onto 283. You’re luck you’re alive.”

“Thanks.” I stared at the UPS guy, having never seen him before in my life and all I could do was shake. Shock was beginning to settle in. Someone from shipping backed up another Ryder truck and several press helpers began restacking the thrown around

wall coverings. In all, only a few hundred were lost out of the forty thousand that lay in back of the truck.

Steve, the one who had 'faith' in me, escorted me across the street and into the administration offices. He was understandably pissed, but when it came out that the accident occurred not due to my driving, but by a combination of the back of the truck being improperly loaded and the newly paved State Road, things were brought into perspective. After being questioned by the police, who I believe were greased into submission, Henry came in and just shook his head slowly. "You okay?" he asked in his quiet dignified way.

"Yes. All I could think about as I was flying through the air was that you were going to kill me."

He smiled. "Wasn't your fault. Just glad you're okay. Go home." He could have ranted and raged, it would have been his right, but he didn't. Always kind that way, Mr. Henry Givler was. It was one of the personality traits that endeared him to me.

By now it was after 8 am and my shift was over. That wasn't the only auto accident I'd get into that day, but that's another story. I walked back to the 628 press, grabbed my keys and tried to ignore Al's taunting, chanting "Roll it! Roll the Ryder truck! Heh, heh" in classic Beavis and Butthead fashion. "Roll it! Roll it! Roll the Ryder truck!"

I should have been pissed at Dietrich. His lackluster loading skills could have ended me up in the hospital. I wasn't reprimanded in any way and I don't know if he ever was. I was just happy to get out without being arrested or having management pissed at me.

I was, to my knowledge, the only person who ever rolled a Ryder moving truck in the space of less than a hundred feet from a dead stop. It's an accomplishment that I'm not proud of, but it makes a damn good story.