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The Love Bug

A recently published book entitled *Is Your Volkswagen A Sex Symbol?* by Jean Rosenbaum recalled this case to mind and provided the impetus needed to sit down and write it up for publication.

In a majority of cases handled by the Medical Examiner's Office, the scene is the most important aspect of a death investigation. In this particular case, the scene is everything; and once again, we have graphically illustrated the fact that we know very little about some aspects of human behavior.

Case Report

On his day off, this 40 year old airline pilot left home about 6:00 a.m. and told his wife he was going pistol shooting in a rural area of the county.

The subject was an Air Force veteran who had been a pilot during the Korean War. He was married and the father of two small children. There was no known psychiatric history and no known deviate behavior.

At about 7:30 a.m., a fisherman happened upon the scene of death (Figs. 1 and 2). The police were summoned to the scene and they, in turn, called the Medical Examiner who arrived at approximately 9:00 a.m.

The subject was found apparently crushed against the left rear fender of a 1968 Volkswagen sedan. The car was at the end of a secluded road where there was a large turn-around area. The left front door of the car was open, the ignition on, and the motor running. The car had an automatic transmission which was in low gear; however, the car was not moving. The steering wheel was securely lashed in the extreme counterclockwise direction and secured by the subject's belt which was connected from the steering wheel to the passenger's handle on the right side of the dashboard. On the right front seat was the subject's watch and cigarettes. His .22 caliber pistol was found underneath the driver's seat. Tire tracks in the loose gravel indicated the car had been moving in concentric circles (see Fig. 1).

The trunk of the car contained the subject's clothing, as well as a plastic zipper pouch containing locks, bolts, a length of chain, and wrenches. A padlock and key were found on the ground beside the body and another padlock was found on the ground 20 feet from the body.

The body was in full rigor when first examined and was securely held against the left rear fender of the car by heavy link chain. The body was completely nude except for a chain harness and was covered with large discrete and confluent skid type abrasions.

The harness worn by the subject was constructed of link chain. There was a moderately tight loop around the neck bolted in front, the chain passed down across the sternum and

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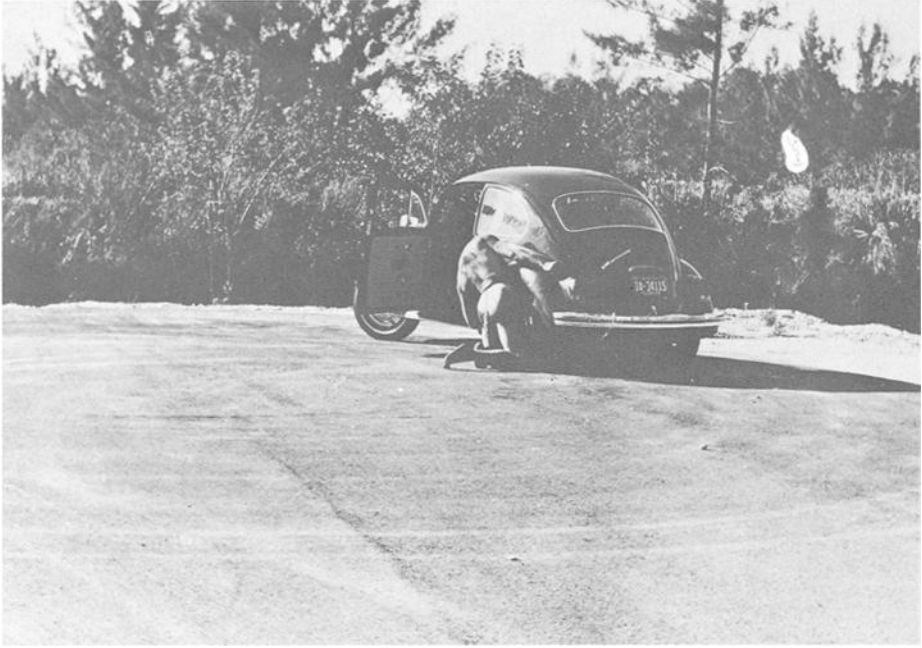


FIG. 1—*View of the scene with concentric tire tracks.*



FIG. 2—*View of the body showing chain harness and chain attached to car bumper.*

abdomen, then passed around the waist to form a second loop. From the chain around the waist, strands of chain passed through each inguinal area, passed into the gluteal fold, and were secured to the chain around the waist in the midline of the back (see Fig. 2). The harness was very similar in construction to a parachute harness.

Anteriorly from the chain around the waist was attached a 10 foot length of chain, which was secured to the rear bumper of the Volkswagen. The chain attached to the car bumper was wound around the left rear axle of the car five times (see Fig. 3) and it was by this length of chain that the subject was held firmly against the left rear fender.

The autopsy revealed findings consistent with an asphyxial death and there was a negative blood alcohol.

Reconstruction of the events leading to the subject's death indicate that after removing his clothing and donning the chain harness, he attached himself to the back bumper of the Volkswagen by the 10 foot length of chain. Then with the car in low gear and the steering wheel in a fixed counterclockwise position, the car slowly ran in concentric circles. It is not known whether the subject simply jogged after the moving automobile or allowed himself to be dragged. However, the tire tracks in the loose gravel were not significantly obliterated as one might expect if he had been dragged for a long distance by the moving car.

When the subject tired of this form of exercise, he apparently approached the car with the intent of taking it out of gear or turning off the ignition. At this point there was a serious "pilot error," for he neglected to detach himself from the chain on the bumper of the Volkswagen before he approached the car. As he approached the car, the chain attaching him to the bumper became slack and the back wheel of the car rolled over the



FIG. 3—View of chain wound around the rear axle.

chain. The chain then began revolving onto the back axle. The subject must have realized his plight almost immediately and possibly sustained many of his abrasions fighting for his life against the ever shortening chain. Ultimately however, the chain wound completely around the axle and the subject was asphyxiated against the rear fender of the Volkswagen.

Background investigation revealed that the subject's wife knew about the chain harness, which had been custom made and recently acquired; however, she did not know for what use it was intended and had never inquired.

Summary

Herein is reported a strange case of autoerotic asphyxiation by automobile.