

Carelessness factor in train-auto accidents

Motorists unaware of crossing danger

By JIM WRINN
State and National Editor

DURHAM — Six days a week, engineer Joe Harris Jr. pilots his train to Burlington and back hoping another day will pass without a grade crossing accident.

"The cars will pull right out in front of you and never see you," Harris said recently as he tugged on the throttle, moving 311 tons of train out of the Durham rail yards.

Harris' train, a short local freight, regularly encounters cars and trucks charging across its path. The morning *The Daily Tar Heel* recently rode with Harris was no different.

Less than a mile out, Harris, blowing the locomotive's horn, watched as a compact car sped across a downtown Durham crossing, its warning lights flashing. "Even if I threw the train in emergency (braking), we'd still roll a quarter of a mile," Harris said, raising his hand in disgust. "People just don't realize that a train can't stop as fast as a car can."

Harris said once he was traveling at 25 mph on a train which was hit by a car. "We had 30 cars that day, and the whole train went by the car before we were able to stop."

On his local freight, recently, with seven cars in tow, Harris said that moving at top speed — 49 mph — an accident could still be fatal to motorists.

And although no one has been killed while Harris was at the throttle, he said he has been involved in several accidents. "There was the grader we hit in Durham about five years ago," he said. "He was sitting in the middle of the tracks. And there was another accident in Greensboro, but thank goodness I've never had a fatality."

While Harris may have never had a death, other engineers have not been as fortunate.

Thirteen North Carolinians involved in train-vehicle accidents lost their lives in 1981. But according to Charles A. Speed, executive director of North Carolina Operation Lifesaver, those deaths could have been prevented by simple common sense.

"The words are 'Stop, Look, Listen' and I'd like to add 'Live,'" Speed said recently. Of all the types of highway accidents, railroad crossing accidents probably are the most easily prevented.

Congress made a step toward prevention in 1973 with passage of the Highway Safety Act. Under the act, North Carolina received about \$5 million annually from the federal government. The money was used to improve almost 700 grade crossings: gates, flashers, and extra lights were added to many of the state's 5,493 public crossings, said Emmett Stafford, grade crossings signals engineer for the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

However, the great expense involved — almost \$50,000 per crossing — limited the amount of work which could be done, so only 1,376 crossings have gates or flashers —



Automobile driver risks crossing in front of a train near Mebane, N.C. ...engineer says many motorists don't think of the danger involved

about 25 percent.

The rest is up to motorists, Speed said. "Statistics show that about 40 percent of the people killed in grade crossing accidents die at crossings with signals, so many just aren't paying attention to their driving," he said.

Carelessness behind the wheel results in most highway accidents, and crossing accidents are no different, he added. About one-third of those involved in grade crossing accidents run into the side of the train, and 75 percent live within 25 miles of the accident site.

"The key to all this is that people are not mentally and physically alert," Speed said. "And you can't drive without thinking, that's for sure."

That's the main reason behind North Carolina Operation Lifesaver, which was begun in 1979 as a cooperative between the state and its railroads in an effort to educate people about the hazards of railroad crossings, he said.

Injuries and fatalities fell drastically after the program was begun, Bill Garmon, chairman of Operation Lifesaver, said. "Any accident is extremely sad, so we're trying to explain the seriousness of the problem," he said.

Speed elaborated: "One of the biggest problems we have today is that people have their radios and stereos turned up and their windows up," he said. "They can't hear the warning whistle or the train coming."

Another problem is that many people learn when the trains usually run and then don't pay attention when they're going across a crossing," he said. "If they're not looking for a train, and it's late, they may find themselves in an accident that shouldn't have happened."

"I think about it each day. Looking at a crossing, you just don't want to see a car. Even when a crossing gate is down, some of them will just zoom right on around," Harris said as the train rolled on.

"We haven't seen the school buses yet," Harris said as the train rounded a curve which led to a rural crossing. "They're the ones I'm always most worried about. I hope they'll stop and look before they cross."

Friday afternoon near Jacksonville, N.C., 41 children were injured when their school bus was struck by a train. Buses concern Harris the most, he said. He watched for

them at each crossing. "If only they'll wait before going across," he whispered.

Cars pulled up to crossings as we left Durham behind; some stopped, while others darted in front of our train.

About two years ago, before Harris took the run out of Durham, one motorist did just that at the Homestead Road crossing near Chapel Hill High School; the motorist was killed when he pulled in front of and was struck by an early morning train.

According to the Chapel Hill Police Department, although there are more than 10 grade crossings in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro area, accidents are rare since trains run slowly and infrequently on the line.

But Harris, a regular on the Carrboro run, said his train usually had to stop before crossing East Main Street in Carrboro so a brakeman could flag the train across.

"Some days in Carrboro, people will just look at you when the train's about to go across the street," he said. "Then they'll go right on across in front of you."

Harris' train moved along at a much faster pace on the main line. Near Mebane, a truck almost made the papers as it bumped across the tracks directly in the train's path.

Road Foreman of Engines Samuel Carter, riding the locomotive, saw the tractor-trailer pull up to a crossing about 300 feet in front of us.

"He's going on across!" Carter shouted to Harris, who threw the train into emergency braking at 49 mph.

The conductor and brakeman braced for a collision as our train slid into the crossing, missing the truck by a matter of feet.

"I didn't think he was going to get across," Harris said. The train, now 10 cars long, sat motionless, several hundred feet past the crossing.

As the train crew inspected for damage, Harris and the train's conductor watched for the truck which had pulled away. "I'd like to report that man," Harris said. "Every day it's the same thing."

At Burlington, Harris turned his train and made for Durham. As on the morning run, we saw several cars crossing in front of us. "It really scares me," Harris said. "I don't know why anyone would pull their car out in front of an object that's twice as big as they are."

BRIEFLY

The Associated Press

RAI F.I.G.H. — Gov. Jim Hunt is expected to ask the Legislature this week for more money for community colleges, microelectronics and upgrading writing, science and math instruction in public schools.

He also will ask legislators to do whatever they must to find money to match federal highway funds, probably by raising the alcohol tax, sources say. A budget provision is expected to make the committee that administers a new health insurance plan for state employees and teachers a free-standing panel outside any state department because of recent complaints about a backlog in processing claims.

Hunt will outline his ambitions for the next two years in his State of the State speech, to be delivered today at 7 p.m. before the General Assembly.

WASHINGTON — The first impact of the \$169 billion Social Security rescue plan endorsed by President Reagan and leaders of Congress could be felt by retirees this summer, while workers would start paying higher payroll taxes next January.

The "extraordinary" compact, as Alan Greenspan called it after securing a 12-3 ratification vote by his National Commission on Social Security Reform, will bail the old age trust fund out of the crisis confronting it in the 1980s by generating \$169 billion in new revenues or savings over seven years.

Barring severe economic conditions, the compromise also would help keep the system in the black for at least 50 years, some experts said Sunday. Congress must first pass any changes in the Social Security act.

NEWARK, N.J. — Justice Department lawyers sent to examine New Jersey prosecutors' complaints about the FBI's chief Absecon informant came away convinced he could not be trusted to tell the truth, according to govern-

ment documents released to The Associated Press.

The documents also quote one top Justice Department official as saying FBI agents would not cooperate with New Jersey federal prosecutors who questioned Absecon's tactics.

The undercover political corruption probe became public in February 1980 and has resulted in the conviction of former U.S. Sen. Harrison Williams Jr. of New Jersey and six congressmen. Their convictions are being appealed.

BEIRUT, Lebanon — The government will propose a partial pullback of Israeli forces as the first phase of a plan for total pullout of foreign armies from Lebanon at today's talks with Israeli and U.S. negotiators, Lebanese press reports said.

In Jerusalem, U.S. presidential envoy Philip C. Habib held his first meeting Sunday with a new, high-powered Israeli team designed to speed up the withdrawal, and Israeli radio reported he was seeking major progress within a week.

An estimated 25,000 Israeli troops occupy southern Lebanon and about 30,000 Syrian soldiers control the northern and eastern parts of the country. At least 6,000 Palestine Liberation Organization guerrillas are believed based behind Syrian lines.

LONDON — Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, claiming "I am the true darsar," said Sunday she will make sure Britain deploys new U.S. nuclear cruise missiles this year despite growing public opposition.

In a live television interview one week after her triumphant tour of the Falkland Islands, Thatcher said the missiles are vital to counter a Soviet buildup.

"So they're not increasing the number of nuclear weapons at all," she said. "They're substituting a modern weapon for an older one. We needn't deploy any if the Soviets can be persuaded to negotiate and take their SS-20s down."

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announcements

WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL? Make your wish a reality! Come to the first Recreation Committee meeting on Monday, Jan. 17 at 6:00 pm in the Union.

SPRING BREAK, CRUISE TO Mexico and Florida Keys. Seven days of fun and sun. Student bargain. Space very limited. Don't delay. Call 933-5006 now!

THE LORELESS WILL HOLD auditions Tuesday and Wednesday, Jan. 18, 19 in 291 Hill Hall from 5-7 pm. Bring audition piece. Questions? Call 968-1069 or 967-9885.

THE UNC DUNGEONS AND Dragons Club will meet today at 7:30 in the Union. Topic will be Psychology and gaming. New members welcome.

FOR ALL INTERESTED WOMEN: Sigma Sigma Sigma National Social Sorority will reconvene Delta Delta Chapter, UNC, on Jan. 22 and 23, 1983. Open Rush Parties — Saturday Jan. 22, 11:00 am or 1:00 pm party, and Sunday, Jan. 23, 1:00 pm or 2:30 pm party. Call 967-3646 for more information.

THE ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS Students will hold a meeting on Thursday, Jan. 20 at 3:30 p.m. in Gardner 105. All members and prospective members are invited. Refreshments will be served.

lost & found

LOST 1/12/83. 14K Gold Rope Bracelet. Please call Kim at 929-2334. Reward.

LOST MY GLASSES on campus 1/12/83. Metal frames, rimless, not in case. If found call blind Alan at 383-7164 (Durham) after 6:00.

FOUND: MASTER LOCK in front of Undergrad Library at bike rack on Jan. 12. Call 969-7263.

help wanted

EARN \$5/hr in EPA breathing experiments on the UNC-CH campus. We need healthy non-smoking males, age 18-35. For more information call 966-1253. 8-5. Monday-Friday.

EXCELLENT SUMMER COUNSELING OPPORTUNITIES for men and women who are interested in serving boys and girls ages 7-16, guiding them in their physical, mental and spiritual development. Only those persons who will dedicate their wholehearted efforts to help each individual child develop his or her potential should apply. One must have ability to teach in one or more of our specialized activities. College students, teachers, and coaches should apply. **CAMP THUNDERBIRD**, located 17 miles southeast of Charlotte, N.C., is an ACA accredited camp member, specializing in water sports (sailing, water skiing, swimming and canoeing), yet an added emphasis is placed on the land sports (general athletics, tennis, golf, archery, riflery and backpacking). Horseback riding, white-water canoeing and tripping are extras in our excellent program. For further information write or call G. William Climer, Jr., Director, Camp Thunderbird, Route 7, Box 50, Clover, S.C. 29710 (803-831-2121).

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HELP WANTED. PUMP HOUSE Video Game room is looking for responsible friendly students for part-time help this semester. Flexible hours. Apply at 112W Franklin Street, next to Pizza Hut. 967-9600.

OVERWORKED DENTAL STUDENT (and would-be basketball fanatic) needs student(s) to sit for tickets to home games. You'll be well-paid for your time! Call Marsha evening 542-2312.

TIERED OF WORKING INDOORS. Counselors wanted for boys overnight camp in Maine. Nine week season beginning June 20th. Positions available: baseball, basketball, soccer, tennis, swimming, water skiing, sailing, archery, riflery, crafts, trips. Write Matt Arker, 9616, Duke Station, Durham.

POSITION OF "SYSTEM PROGRAMMER" now open. Job involves installing and operating system, utilities, and compiler design and maintenance. Background should include at minimum ABS in computer science and some experience with mini computers and 16-bit micro-computer systems software. Send resume to Technical Systems Consultants, 111 Providence Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

BABY SITTER FOR CUTE, easy 2-year-old. Saturday nights and occasional weeknights. \$2.00/hour. Must have transportation and experience, references preferred. Call 967-1887.

POSITION OF "USER SOFTWARE coordinator" now open. Job functions include technical writing of software user manual, interface with computer software end users, and small programming projects. Background should include college degree and some computer programming experience. Send resume to Technical Systems Consultants, 111 Providence Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

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I NEED TWO TICKETS to the Carolina/Duke game. Name your price. Call 942-1350 and leave a message.

NICE, NEAT, ATTRACTIVE FEMALE junior transfer needs basement, garage apartment or similar starting 1st Summer Session or Fall Semester 1983. Call 968-0273 and ask for Scott or write to E-14 Carolina Apartments, Carrboro.

volunteers

GIVE IT YOUR BEST shot in the Spring of '83 — Become a volunteer at NC Memorial Hospital. Interested students should come to the Volunteer Office on the 1st Floor of the Hospital between 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. through Friday, January 21. A REQUIRED ORIENTATION will be held on Wednesday, January 26, 1983 in the Fourth Floor Clinic Auditorium from 5:00-7:30 p.m. Questions, call 966-4793.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO WORK with juvenile delinquents at Dillon School. For more info come to a meeting Tuesday or Thursday at 6:00 p.m. (Ask at desk for room). Or stop by Campus Y.

WANTED: VOLUNTEERS For a 12 week acute study. Must have moderately severe facial acne. Fee offered: 6 visits to dermatology clinic required. Sponsored by the Dept. Dermatology, UNC School of Medicine. For information call Carol Meyer Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1 pm-5 pm. 926-3321.

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HOUSEMATE WANTED FOR SMALL very nice house in country. Beautiful location. Own room. Woodstove heating. \$95.00/mo. Call Keith at 732-6384.

ROOMMATE NEEDED TO SHARE room in Old Well Apt. Rent \$90 and 1/2 utilities. Prefer nice quiet student, grad. If possible. Call 933-7395 evenings.

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FOURTH FEMALE ROOMMATE NEEDED to share an apartment close to campus. Rent and lease term negotiable. Please call Janet at 933-1435. Keep trying!

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STUDIOUS, NON-SMOKING MALE needed to share furnished apartment within walking distance of campus for \$140 a month. Utilities are included. Call 968-8120.

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