

# Come Ride With Us!



[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [SPORTS](#) [LIFESTYLE](#) [OPINION](#) [CLASSIFIEDS](#) [FEATURES](#) [COMMUNITY](#) [MEMBERS](#)

CONTENT COURTESY OF



**SubSCRIBE**  
Daily Journal  
Job market strongest in decades

#### JOURNAL PUBLISHING

- [NEMS Daily Journal](#)
- [Aberdeen Examiner](#)
- [Amory Advertiser](#)
- [Itawamba Cty Times](#)
- [Pontotoc Progress](#)
- Journal Enterprises
- [About Us](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Subscribe](#)



## Many driving mishaps claim Mississippi youths

8/10/2005 10:50:37 PM  
Daily Journal

#### DJOURNAL.COM

- [News](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Lifestyle](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Forums](#)
- [Search](#)
- [Mortgage Rates](#)
- [Make Us Your Homepage](#)

BY AUFEYA GLOVER

Daily Journal

Few people ever really imagine that tragedy can happen in their lives, but in Mississippi, it's more likely than many other places.

This state ranks third deadliest for young drivers, according to the National Safety Council and End Needless Death on Our Roadways, a physician-led traffic safety advocacy group. Only the District of Columbia and North Carolina were worse.

For Ellen Martin Bryant of Booneville, tragedy has already struck. Her son, Trey Bryant, was 17 when he had a fatal auto accident May 29. He wasn't wearing a seat belt.

"I'd always say to him, Put on your seatbelt," Bryant recalled. "When he drove my car, he always wore his seat belt." He was driving another vehicle that tragic day.



#### CONTACT

-  [Webmaster](#)
-  [More Contacts](#)

#### NEWS FOCUS

- [Killen Trial](#)
- [Inside the AFA](#)
- [Nonprofits](#)

Can the Philadelphia Eagles win without Terrell Owens?

- Yes
- No

[Vote](#)

What should be the minimum age to receive a Mississippi driver's license?

- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18

[Vote](#)



PHOTO GALLERIES



Similar stories echo throughout Mississippi.

Danny Berry, executive director of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, said he was not surprised that Mississippi's ranking and believes underage drinking is a large part of the problem.

"Our system is supposedly zero tolerance, but we don't always abide," Berry said.

"We allow our kids to drink and drive. We've got a lack of parental involvement," he continued.

MADD plans to push for tougher penalties on drivers under 21 who drink and drive during the 2006 legislative session, which begins in January.

Mississippi law is zero-tolerant of underage drinking, which means the detection of any alcohol brings punishment. Lee County authorities said that if an underage person gets stopped and has been drinking, if they are over the legal limit, they will be taken in just like an adult. A youth court judge will decide whether to hold them or release them to their parents. Either way, it does not go on their permanent record.

For adults, they are deemed intoxicated if the blood alcohol level is 0.08 percent. First and second offenses are misdemeanors, but third and subsequent offenses are felonies.

Mississippi doesn't have any penalties for a drunk adult driving with a minor in the vehicle. Other states do.

In Alabama, minimum sentences are doubled if an offender over age 21 was transporting a minor under age 14 at the time of the offense. Louisiana's law says a DUI offender is subject to the following mandatory sanctions if a child 12 years old or younger was a passenger in the vehicle at the time of the offense: first offense: 10 days in jail and \$125 fine; second offense: 30 days in jail and \$300 fine; third offense: six months in jail; fourth offense: two

**BancorpSouth Center**  
[The Mid South's Premier Entertainment Complex](#)

To order school copies  
[CLICK HERE](#)

**MISSISSIPPI**  
[VisitMississippi.org](#)  
[Click Here to Register for a Free Vacation!](#)

years in jail. Tennessee's are similar.

Speed a factor, says sheriff

A few states have special license plates for persons convicted of drunken driving.

Lee County Sheriff Jim Johnson blames speed in many deaths of teenage drivers.

"A lot of the accidents involving teenagers are speed related," he said. "We've seen an enormous increase in teen accidents involving speeding. A lot of the responsibilities fall on the parents, but we as law enforcement have to educate these kids on the dangers of driving."

According to the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, 24 percent of the 15-to-20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking, a 13 percent increase in 2003, the most recent information available. The Mississippi Highway Patrol reports that in 2004 accidents resulted in 900 fatalities with 95 of them between the ages of 15-20

"We've done a poor job in our state of holding our kids accountable," Berry said. "We've got a serious problem when we're the third worst state killing our most valuable resources- our children."

In 2003, about 97 of Mississippi's 146 traffic fatalities involved at least one 16-24 year-old driver. That's 16.76 percent.

Our neighboring states fare better - all rank 15th or above except for Louisiana, at fifth place. Louisiana had 190,081 young drivers at the time of the research, while Mississippi had 39,090. Yet Mississippi had one more youth-related driving fatality than the Pelican State.

Dr. Tami Brooks, chair of the legislative committee for the Mississippi Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, said the AAP is very aware of these accident statistics and has been fighting to reverse them.

"We've been promoting highway safety and have been introducing bills for a while now," Brooks said.

"The bills fly through the Senate but die in the House Transportation Committee, for whatever political reasons."

#### Seat belt law cited

A primary seat belt enforcement law is a remedy for the disproportionately large number of youth-related driving fatalities. A primary law would enable law enforcement officers to pull over drivers solely for failure to wear a seat belt and charge a fine.

Brooks said the House Transportation Committee members apparently believe their constituents do not want a primary seat belt law because they feel it is invasive.

"We already have laws that tell us how fast we can drive," Brooks said. "I don't think that claim holds up."

Sen. Charles Ross of Brandon, chairman of the Judiciary A committee, said the Senate has passed the primary law each of the past two sessions.

"I think there's a strong conviction in the Senate that it just makes sense," Ross said.

He said the primary law is not unduly restrictive.

"The primary law is really not an imposition," Ross

assessed. "We're not asking people to go out of their way."

AAP's Brooks agrees.

"It just seems like a no-brainer to move to a primary seat belt law," she said. "If not for the adults, let's at least do it for the kids."

END also presented its "Prescription for Teen Driver Safety," containing suggestions for making the roadways safer for and from young drivers. The National Safety Council released the "Family Guide to Teen Driver Safety," a comprehensive guide for parents with teen drivers.

Included in the prescription is a recommendation for the suspension of the license of underage drinkers stopped for alcohol-related violations until they become 21 years of age, as well the requirement that all passengers under 18 must be buckled in all seating positions.

Seat belts seem to be the number one proposed solution to Mississippi's problem with young drivers.

Booneville's Bryant supports a primary seat belt law but thinks parents should impose the rule, even if state government does not.

"I encourage the parents to really enforce seatbelt use with their children," Bryant said. "Even if they're just going one block, they should wear their seatbelts, whatever it takes to save lives."

She has to deal with the loss of her son every day.

"I'm trying to accept that Trey has gone to Heaven, that it was just his time to go," Bryant said. "But I do believe that seat belts save lives."

Aufeya Glover has been a summer intern at the Daily Journal. She will return to journalism classes this fall at the University of Florida. Danza Johnson contributed to this story.

*Appeared originally in the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal,  
8/11/2005 8:00:00 AM, section A , page 1*

© 2004 djournal.com, All Rights Reserved