

IOWA HISTORY



Courtesy Library of Congress
Grille of vintage Pontiac

Safer in Car Than in Her Home

Believe it or not, Iowan Eva Jordan probably broke a world record in 1935. That was the year Robert Ripley featured the 66-year-old in his newspaper column “Believe It Or Not...” He stated that in an era of “entirely too much reckless driving,” Eva had achieved an “enviable record of safety,” having driven a million miles—with no accidents.

Eva, a former newspaper editor and banker from McGregor, worked for the university hospital in Iowa City. It was her job to transport patients to and from the hospital and their homes in northeast Iowa.

Using her own cars, she put plenty of miles on the vehicles. It was estimated that in her 14 years as a driver for the hospital she had driven the equivalent of more than three times around the earth. And, what was even more remarkable was the fact that Eva had only begun driving a car at the age of 52.

During her time as a hospital driver, she owned 14 cars. The last ten had all been Pontiacs. She had put 137,000 miles on her 1930 model and estimated that over all she had driven about 850,000 miles in the Pontiacs alone.

When Ripley featured Eva, he claimed she “always drives as carefully as when a patient is her passenger.” Eva said she made a habit of driving at “moderate but steady speed.” She said she watched the road “at all times” and faithfully checked the “rear vision mirror.” A key to her accident-free record, according to Eva was that she “keeps conversation at a minimum” while driving.

Because of Eva’s reputation and national attention as an accomplished and accident-free driver, it became a widely reported story when she had an unfortunate incident in her own home. In August 1937 the *Fayette County Leader* ran an article titled “Safer in Car Than At Home.” According to the newspaper, Eva had been spotted hobbling around the town of Elkader using a

cane as support. Turned out she had bumped her left foot on her rocking chair and broke her toe. It was noted that a few years earlier Eva had fallen and broke her arm—also in her home, leading the paper to suggest that Eva was not “immune to accidents” and that the safest place for Eva was in her car.

©www.CherylMullenbachInk

Sources

“Believe It or Not...by Ripley,” *Record-Argus* (Greenville, PA), Nov. 21, 1935.

“Drives Million Miles Without Mishap, Hurts Arm in Fall At Home,” *Carroll Daily Herald*, Oct. 30, 1935.

“Flash! Flash! Flash! Woman Drives 1,000,000 Miles Without Accident,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 22, 1936.

“Safer in Car Than At Home,” *Fayette County Leader*, Aug. 5, 1937.