

Father of **Tesla** driver: 'Had she been in another vehicle she would have been alive'

Indianapolis Star

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Casey Speckman's father, Jon Speckman, speaks exclusively to IndyStar in his only interview since his daughter and Kevin McCarthy died when a Tesla electric vehicle crashed on the north side Nov. 3. Vic Ryckaert/IndyStar



(Photo: Provided by Jon Speckman)

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There is no doubt Casey Speckman [was drunk when she crashed her boss's Tesla](#) in a fiery, explosive wreck that killed him and herself.

But her father said he has no doubt that her odds of surviving the Downtown November accident would have been much better in any other car.

"Had she been in another vehicle she would have been alive for me to yell at her for driving after drinking," Jon Speckman said in an exclusive interview with IndyStar.

Casey Speckman's blood-alcohol level tested at 0.21 percent, according to investigators and an Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department accident report released Wednesday. The legal limit in Indiana at which a driver is presumed intoxicated is 0.08 percent.

Kevin McCarthy, the passenger and owner of the Tesla, had a blood-alcohol level that tested at 0.17 percent, investigators said.

Speckman, 27, and McCarthy, 44, were killed when McCarthy's 2015 Model S crashed shortly after 1 a.m. Nov. 3 into a tree and parking garage near Illinois and 16th streets and exploded.

Jon Speckman met with IndyStar on Friday at the Downtown office of his attorney. Speckman said he wants the public to know that there was more to the deadly crash than how many drinks his daughter consumed that night.

The biggest piece of new information: Casey Speckman swerved to avoid a wrong-way driver on Illinois Street right before she lost control.

Speckman's lawyer, Patrick Elward, provided IndyStar with video from the parking lot camera at a White Castle restaurant that shows the headlights of the wrong-way driver heading south and the Tesla traveling north on Illinois Street.

The Tesla crashed just beyond the camera's view.

Alfred Finnell Jr., 81, was driving behind the Tesla and saw the crash. The vehicle sped right by him.

"It passed me like a flash," Finnell told IndyStar in a telephone interview. "It hit that curb and plowed into that tree."



Finnell stopped his vehicle near the White Castle driveway. The Tesla had spun around the tree and into the garage. Smoke was coming from underneath, Finnell said.

"Before I could get out of my truck the car exploded," Finnell said. "The parts of the car, engine and everything went up in the air. It was the most horrifying thing that I had ever seen."

Finnell drove north to get away from the falling debris. He heard a loud sound and said he stopped in a parking lot about a half-block south of 18th Street.

"I thought something had hit my truck, but it had missed my truck," Finnell said. "It was sitting out in the street. It was the wheel and axle assembly of the car."

Firefighters said the debris field stretched about 150 yards.

The luxury electric sports car is powered by a 1,200-pound battery pack made up of several thousand small lithium batteries. The force of the crash broke apart the battery pack.

Exploding lithium batteries made headlines last year. The TSA last year banned the Samsung Galaxy Note 7 from airplanes after the [phones started exploding](#). Balancing scooters known as hoverboards [were recalled](#) last summer after the batteries caught fire.

Tesla itself was the target of a National Highway Transportation Safety Agency investigation after a series of battery fires in 2013 Model S vehicles. Tesla strengthened the battery compartments, and [NHTSA closed that probe in 2014](#).

The agency at the time said "a defect trend has not been identified" but added that "the closing of the investigation does not constitute a finding by NHTSA that a safety-related defect does not exist and the agency reserves the right to take further action if warranted by new circumstances."

Elon Musk, Tesla's CEO, defended the car's safety in a [blog post on Oct. 4, 2013](#), not long after a Model S caught fire on a Washington State highway when the driver ran over a large metal object that punctured the battery. The driver managed to pull over and safely exit the car.

"Had a conventional gasoline car encountered the same object on the highway, the result could have been far worse," Musk wrote. "For consumers concerned about fire risk, there should be absolutely zero doubt that it is safer to power a car with a battery than a large tank of highly flammable liquid."

In Indianapolis, rescuers were on the scene of the November crash in a few minutes. Firefighters arrived to find the car burning and small lithium batteries popping and exploding around them.

Casey Speckman, investigators said, died of crash-related injuries with the fire as a contributing factor. The fire killed McCarthy, according to police.

An earlier statement by the Marion County coroner indicated that the cause of death for both victims was blunt-force injuries caused by the crash. The manner of death was an accident.

The Tesla Model S, which starts at \$68,000, has a top speed of 155 mph. Some versions are equipped with an ["insane mode"](#) that accelerates from 0 to 60 mph in 3.1 seconds.

Jon Speckman doesn't claim to be an expert in crash reconstruction, but as a grieving father he questions the logic of allowing a vehicle this powerful on city streets.

"This is a vehicle that travels from 0 to 60 in 3.1 seconds. She's clearly having to swerve to miss a vehicle going the wrong way on a one-way street," Speckman said.

"If her foot should happen to hit the accelerator, it's like a rocket ship. I don't know why they have to make a car that does that."

A representative for Tesla Motors declined to comment for this story, saying the company stands by a previous statement emailed to IndyStar on Jan. 27.

"We have been deeply saddened by this accident and have been working closely with authorities to facilitate their report," Tesla said in the statement. "While it can be difficult to determine the precise speed of a vehicle in such a crash, the observed damage and debris field indicate a very high speed collision."

The owner of the Tesla, McCarthy, was the founder and CEO of the Indianapolis company that developed [Case Pacer](#) case management software for attorneys.

Casey Speckman worked for Case Pacer as a sales representative.

Her father said she worked hard to graduate from Indiana University with high marks in 2007. She put herself through Roger Williams University School of Law in Rhode Island and graduated in 2014.

While her father has hired an attorney, Speckman said he has not made a decision on whether to sue Tesla.

The investigation is not yet complete, police said. Detectives are still working to determine how fast the Tesla was traveling when it crashed. The investigation is tricky for the detectives [who are unfamiliar with the new and unique electric vehicle.](#)

"I have full confidence that the authorities will come to the correct conclusion of what exactly happened to this vehicle," Speckman said.

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