

# HOW THE EXPERTS PUZZLE IT ALL OUT

STUDY has proved what South Africans have known for a long time. We have the third-highest accident rate in the world. More than 140 000 people die on our roads annually, despite the millions of rands government spends on the Arrive Alive campaign. Forensic accident expert Stan Bezuidenhout said more had to be done to prevent road accidents, writes SHANAAZ EGGINGTON.



CHAOS: A typical accident scene where the fire department, emergency services and cops work hand-in-hand. Photo: SUPPLIED



EXPERTS: Jackie Smith and Stan Bezuidenhout next to their sponsored vehicle. Photo: WILLIAM MCINTOSH



FAULT: A nut is missing from the wheel and there's no brake pad. This photo can prove the parts were missing. Photo: SUPPLIED

## The dead also play a big role

SHANAAZ EGGINGTON  
DISMEMBERED bodies, dying people. These are the scenes that confront Stan Bezuidenhout every day. For the specialist forensic accident analyst, it is unavoidable. But Bezuidenhout, 39, says he can handle it. He said: "I'm not saying I am completely desensitised to death. "But I do not allow gruesome scenes to get the better of me. I'm a professional. "I must not think of the disfigured and dismembered as people. Unfortunately, I have to see them as pieces of a puzzle that needs to be completed after the accident." He said he knows many people in similar professions, such as undertakers and the like, who handle their jobs well. Bezuidenhout says: "You don't hear of undertakers running to psychologists. "No, they have chosen their jobs and they knew what they were letting themselves in for. "It's tougher for paramedics. They have to try and save lives. They sometimes suffer quite badly." He says that after every accident, hospital drama and others receive counselling, but it is often not enough.

## Accidents are like cryptic crosswords

SHANAAZ EGGINGTON  
CAR ACCIDENTS are like crossword puzzles. You have to fill out all the squares to get an answer. So says Stan Bezuidenhout, 39, a forensic expert in the field of vehicle accidents. It's his job to analyse accident wreckage to determine exactly what went wrong. Bezuidenhout and tyre expert Jackie Smith

are the owners of IBF Investigations (Independent Bureau of Forensic Investigations) in Milnerton. This company is one of four independent specialist investigative units in the country contracted by the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC) to investigate accidents in which more than five people died. IBF is the only one in the Western Cape. Bezuidenhout was, over the past year,

among others, involved in the investigations into three tragic accidents in the Cape. The Kloofnek bus accident which claimed the lives of the driver and three learners, the Piketberg bus accident in which 10 farmworkers died; and the accident in the Franschoek pass between a milk truck, a bakkie and a Toyota Venture, in which six people died.

Bezuidenhout told *Cape Sun*: "The 'squares' with which we work, are firstly the human factor. "Was the person drunk or sober, was he elderly and sickly, for example. "Then there are the mechanical factors. Is the vehicle roadworthy or did the brakes give in?"

**Analysed**  
"Then there are factors like the weather. Was it perhaps overcast or was the road wet?"  
"Then there is the speed factor. I can say exactly how fast a car was driving when the accident took place just by looking at a few factors."  
"Jackie is the tyre expert and has investigated more than 6 000 accidents. "There are many other factors to be taken into account as well and all these factors must be scientifically analysed. "It is crucial to be one of the first persons on the scene, as we need to gather evidence that hasn't been tampered with. Later, this information is processed on a computer so that the accident can be reconstructed." Bezuidenhout says the majority of acci-



EMERGENCIES: Forensics staff are trained in first aid. Photo: SUPPLIED



LIKE SO: Stan Bezuidenhout shows what look for when a car was involved in an accident. Photo: SUPPLIED

dents that occur are never properly investigated. He says: "Unfortunately there is a serious shortage of trained forensic experts. "South Africa has a high accident rate, but too little money is being spent to investigate and analyse this tendency. "Most of the time it is simply speculation on what happened, instead of a scientific investigation." Bezuidenhout and Smith are also reservists at the Milnerton police station. Bezuidenhout also regularly gives presentations to policemen about the correct way to handle an accident scene.