

A Hero's Reward: Texas Paramedic Rewarded 4Runner After Surviving Crash, Helping Others

March 03, 2021



Paramedic Trey McDaniel was headed to a COVID-19 vaccination clinic in Fort Worth, Texas to administer shots when his 2011 FJ Cruiser hit a patch of black ice and tapped the car in front of him. But in his rear-view mirror, McDaniel saw an out-of-control 18-wheeler hurtling toward him.

“I just took a moment to grip the steering wheel and braced myself for impact,” says McDaniel. “I can’t even find the words to describe how it felt. At first, I wasn’t even sure I survived.”

The FJ Cruiser was destroyed. But McDaniel was OK. He wiggled his toes, flexed his legs, and crawled out the window of his mangled SUV. The deadly crash on I-35 left more than 100 vehicles piled up. There was wreckage as far as he could see.

“Everywhere I looked, I just saw more cars, and more people who needed help,” says McDaniel. “I heard people screaming to be rescued, which I’ll never forget. My adrenaline was pumping, and I just felt, as a paramedic, I had to do something. I’ve seen bad crashes before. But this was on a totally different level.”

McDaniel connected with emergency crews arriving at the scene, assisting with rescues and keeping crash survivors calm.

“To me, it was a no-brainer,” says McDaniel says. “As a paramedic, it’s my duty to help people in their time of need.”

Honoring A Hero

McDaniel was grateful to survive the Feb. 11 crash. But he mourned his FJ Cruiser. He spent much of his free time working on the vehicle or enjoying it on the trails and the open road.

He shared his experience on an FJ Cruiser online fan forum, and the reaction was swift. Word eventually reached Toyota’s corporate headquarters. After learning of McDaniel’s heroic decision to help others, the company responded to his online post:

“We’re just glad you’re safe and inspired that you chose to help others in need. We’re happy you’re part of the Toyota family. So, don’t worry about replacing your vehicle — it would be an honor for us to get you a new one!”

While Toyota no longer sells the FJ Cruiser, the team quickly found a replacement for McDaniel: a 2021 4Runner TRD Pro in Lunar Rock.

The vehicle was delivered to McDaniel in late February, at Texas Toyota of Grapevine. In fact, it was a bit of a full circle moment for McDaniel: Before becoming a paramedic, he worked as a sales associate at the dealership.

For Toyota’s leadership, the decision to give McDaniel the 4Runner was easy.

“Despite having freezing temperatures, when I first heard about your heroic action, my heart warmed up,” Toyota Motor North America President and CEO Tetsuo “Ted” Ogawa told McDaniel when presenting the keys. “Your story melted all our hearts at Toyota. Our company has a long-standing core value of respect and care for people. On behalf of all of us at Toyota, thank you from the bottom of our hearts. You are a true hero.”

McDaniel was overcome with emotion as he received the keys to his new vehicle. And while he’s grateful for the gift, he’s especially thankful for his beloved FJ Cruiser.

“It did its job,” says McDaniel. “And I’ll always be thankful... for the rest of my life.”



A Fan for Life — McDaniel's 2011 FJ Cruiser was destroyed in the crash, but he says "it did its job." McDaniel says he's a Toyota customer because of the company's commitment to quality, durability, and reliability.



Better Days — McDaniel's FJ Cruiser in better days. He loved to take the vehicle on trails or the open road.

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Brothers. I was in the Silver FJ on I35 yesterday in Fort Worth that got launched into the Northbound lanes. That Toyota saved my life.



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toyotausa 3 hours ago

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the_pandra 3 hours ago

Amazing as always Toyota 🙏

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treyman780 2 hours ago

Incredible! Thank you so much! Words cannot express how proud I feel that I was driving a Toyota that morning. The support I've received from Toyota, off-roaders, DFW community, and people nation wide have been more than I could have ever imagined.

2 Reply Give Award Share Report Save



1dirtyfj 2 hours ago

You are a true hero, maybe a very lucky one, but a TRUE hero.

1 Reply Give Award Share Report Save



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Awesome of you to acknowledge, you just gained another toyota lover.

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