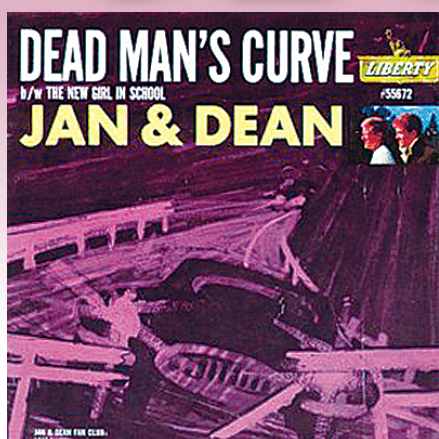


# DEAD MAN'S CURVE



By Charles Apple  
THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Yes, “Dead Man’s Curve,” from the old Jan and Dean song, was a real place. Yes, it was the scene of tragic car crashes — including one involving a famous cartoon voice actor.

And yes, Jan Berry himself was nearly killed there — or *near* there — on April 12, 1966: 60 years ago.



MEL BLANC

Jan Berry wasn't injured *precisely* at Dead Man's Curve. And neither was voice actor Mel Blanc — famous for providing the voices for Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Tweety Bird and dozens of others. But both had automobile accidents nearby.

On Jan. 24, 1961 — three years before Jan and Dean sang about Dead Man's Curve — Blanc collided head-on with a car driven by an 18-year-old college student. Blanc suffered three fractures in his skull, two broken legs and a broken pelvis.

Blanc laid unresponsive in a coma for two

weeks until a doctor asked him one day: “How do you feel, Bugs?” Blanc replied in Bugs Bunny's voice: “Eh, just fine, Doc. How are you?”

Once he sufficiently recovered, doctors allowed recording devices in Blanc's hospital room so he could resume work: He was the voice of Barney Rubble on “The Flintstones” at the time.

After discovering there had been 26 accidents at Dead Man's Curve over the previous two years — three of them fatal — Blanc sued the city of Los Angeles. The city responded by reworking the curve to try to make it safer.



**LYRICS TO 'DEAD MAN'S CURVE'**

- 1 “Let’s come off the line, now, at Sunset and Vine.”
- 2 “I flew past LaBrea, Schwab’s and Crescent Heights...”
- 3 “He passed me at Doheny then I started to swerve, but I pulled her out and there we were at Dead Man’s Curve.”

**MEL BLANC'S ACCIDENT**  
Jan. 24, 1961  
Near the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Marmont Lane

**JAN BERRY'S ACCIDENT**  
April 12, 1966  
Near the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Whittier Drive

**THE 'REAL' DEAD MAN'S CURVE**  
... except the dangerous route was headed east, not west

**ANOTHER BAD CURVE**  
Some locals say that a real Dead Man's Curve is westbound on Sunset Blvd. at Evans Road, where drivers head downhill into a curve with an increasing radius.

JAN AND DEAN



Three years after Blanc's accident, the popular rock band Jan and Dean released a song about Dead Man's Curve. The tune was written by Beach Boys founder and producer Brian Wilson. Lyrics were written by Berry and L.A.-based disc jockey Roger Christian, who had co-written “Don't Worry Baby” and “Little Deuce Coupe” with Wilson.

In hopes of naming landmarks that might be more familiar to record buyers not from Los Angeles, Christian and Berry's fictional race started near the famous Capitol Records building and headed west on Sunset Blvd. If that race continued “all the way to Dead Man's Curve,” it would have been 8.7 miles — awfully long for a teenage street race.

The single was released on May 8, 1964 and peaked at No. 8 on the Billboard Hot 100 singles chart.

Nearly two years later, Jan Berry was involved in an

accident very near — but not quite *at* — the deadly curve he had sung about. On the way to a meeting with a record executive, Berry crashed his Corvette into a parked truck. Berry was in a coma for two months. He was partially paralyzed and suffered severe brain damage.

Berry eventually wrote music again and went on tours with his old partner, Torrence. But he never fully recovered from that accident. Berry died in 2004.

In addition to his musical skills, Torrence is a trained graphic artist. He capitalized on his contacts in the music world and designed album covers for a living. He did work for Linda Ronstadt, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Harry Nilsson, Steve Martin and his pals, the Beach Boys. Torrence won a Grammy for Album Cover of the Year in 1973. He lives south of L.A. in “Surf City”: Huntington Beach.

Sources: “When We Get to Surf City” by Bob Greene, “That’s Not All, Folks” by Mel Blanc and Philip Bashe, the New York Times, the Orange County Register, JanBerry.com, Snopes.com, The Gallery HB, OpenCulture.com, Biography.com

PHOTO OF JAN AND DEAN AND THE COVER OF “DEAD MAN'S CURVE” FROM LIBERTY RECORDS. PHOTO OF MEL BLANC FROM WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.