

SCHOOL OF MUSIC SHUT

First it was the Trafalgar Centre, now earthquake fears force closure of second venue. **FULL STORY P3**



HOW WE SURVIVED

EXCLUSIVE
Sasha Borissenko

As a shipping container came hurtling towards their car, brothers Matias and Agustin Carrasco grabbed each other and hung on for dear life.

“I was waiting for something to hit me. I was waiting for some pain. I knew what was happening but nothing was catching, nothing was hurting me,” Agustin, 23, said today.

Through an interpreter, the Argentinian brothers told the *Nelson Mail* of their incredible escape, days after they walked away uninjured from the wreckage of their car, which was crushed by the container on the trailer of a toppled truck.

The brothers, who are holidaying in New Zealand from Cordoba, were at the back of a line of three cars travelling towards Nelson along a winding stretch of State Highway 6 in Collins Valley on Monday morning.

They said they saw the truck coming towards them around a corner 50 metres ahead. While the tractor unit remained upright, they could see the trailer carrying the container tilting, with the wheels on one side spinning in mid-air.

The driver of the first car in the line accelerated ahead and avoided the crash, while the second car, carrying a 66-year-old Blenheim woman and a 70-year-old Blenheim man, braked hard.

With nowhere else to go, the brothers had no option but to run into the back of the second car. The container struck that car and came hurtling towards them, and they braced for the impact.

“I could see the container coming towards us and hear the metal screeching. All [I] could do was bend down,” said Matias, 28, who was driving.

Matias leaned over and down, holding on to his younger brother, who also hunched down as far as he could in the passenger seat.

The 13-metre container, full of empty wine bottles, smashed into the front of the car and slid over the top of them, crushing the roof and coming to a halt at the rear of the vehicle, only a metre from their heads.

“You could hear everything moving, the papers scattering, the windows popping, but we were very solid, like a rock,” Matias said.

He said it was fortunate that their Honda Accord station wagon had no airbags, otherwise they



“When we saw the damage, it was unbelievable. How could anyone explain how someone survived that?”
Agustin Carrasco

Duck and cover:
Argentinian brothers Matias, left, and Agustin Carrasco discuss Monday’s incident.

Photo:
ALDEN WILLIAMS/FAIRFAX NZ

would have had no space to duck.

Ironically, being tall also helped, because their seats were pushed back, giving them room to get low enough to avoid decapitation.

Agustin said he called out to his brother after the crash, and was very relieved to find that they were both safe.

“When we saw the damage, it was unbelievable. How could anyone explain how someone survived that?”

The car was flattened down to the bottom of its windows, with the exception of the steering wheel, which somehow remained in perfect condition.

Agustin said the cars were pushed up against a metal roadside barrier, which stopped them going further.

He said it was only after the brothers saw the photographs of the accident scene in the *Mail* the next day that they realised how lucky they were.

Apart from a few small cuts from broken glass as they left the squashed vehicle, they were unharmed.

Emergency services arrived in less than 15 minutes and set about

freeing the trapped Blenheim woman, who had moderate injuries. She is recovering in Wairau Hospital.

One of the first firefighters on the scene was sure he would find bodies, and was amazed to see the Carrasco brothers sitting at the side of the road. They said it was a funny situation as they explained that they had come from the crushed vehicle.

The driver of the truck also approached them, and appeared to be deeply shocked. Matias said he kept shaking his head, apologising and asking if they were all right.

“He just kept saying, ‘Oh my goodness, what have I done?’”

The brothers remained at the scene to retrieve their belongings, including their passports, computers and clothing. Once the container was lifted off the car, they were surprised to find that their possessions were undamaged. The only item they lost was a pair of Agustin’s jandals, which were trapped in the passenger footwell.

Their large volume of luggage probably also helped to save the life of a hitchhiker. The brothers had decided against giving him a

ride about five kilometres earlier.

The man had “eyes like a ghost” when the brothers saw him passing the crash scene in another car later that day.

They praised the help and support they had received since the accident.

The truck’s operators, TNL, paid for their accommodation, food and a newer-model Honda Accord station wagon.

Matias, who has been in New Zealand for nine months on a working visa, said he was particularly grateful because he had no insurance for the crushed car, which he had bought in Tauranga for \$2000.

Such a swift resolution would not have happened in Argentina, where it would take months to go through the court process, he said.

If anything, he had thought the pair would be in big trouble for crashing into the back of the car in front of them. “We thought we were guilty and would have to pay because we don’t have insurance.”

Their parents in Argentina were shocked to hear of their narrow escape, which happened on their father’s birthday.



Written off: The brothers look at the remains of their car, left, after it was involved in a crash with a truck, right, in the Collins Valley between Nelson and Rai Valley. Photo: MARTIN DE RUYTER/FAIRFAX NZ

“When we called our Dad, he thought we were calling to wish him happy birthday.”

Their father cried when he saw the photographs of their car, despite being a “tough guy”.

“He couldn’t withhold his emotion.”

Their mother was left speech-

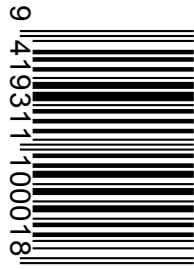
less. While being slightly shaken, the brothers have no qualms about driving again, and were setting off for the West Coast and Queenstown today.

They said they did not see the accident as a bad thing, because they had no control over what happened. It was just bad luck.

“There is nothing we could have done differently. It is very easy to drink, drive and crash and blame yourself. But here, we did nothing wrong,” Matias said.

■ The *Mail* is grateful to Nelson interpreter Leonora Soares, who helped to interview the brothers.

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