

Truck driver who saved woman's life honoured

Jordan Smith

In his words, truck driver Michael Baty was “just doing his part”. In reality, he saved Colleen Reid’s life.



After her car flipped over driving along Nevis Bluff on State Highway 6, Reid was unnoticed by passers-by for 24 hours. The crash had left her car hidden by dense bush, leaving her trapped in her own vehicle, unable to communicate for help.

Baty, who had seen posts on Facebook and Police articles that Reid had disappeared, remained vigilant on his commute. From his elevated position, he spotted Reid, and after calling 111, waited with her until emergency services arrived.

In those precious minutes, Baty provided her with reassurance and comfort as they held tight for help.

According to the Cromwell man, it was “literally only two minutes” until police arrived on the scene after he had alerted them, and another three for the rescue helicopter.

There was a lot of adrenaline and shock that she was alive. Having her look up at me is a feeling I can't describe,” Baty said.

Michael Baty, 2024 National Award for Community Service Recipient

As a result of his actions, Baty was nominated and subsequently the winner of the National Award for Community Service in 2024, an honour that recognises members of the community who have provided outstanding care or support to a road trauma victim.

When asked what it meant to him, Baty said he was "shocked and privileged" for the award and lamented that he's "just a genuine bloke."

"I didn't expect anything for it; I was just doing my part.



Steve Watt, Otago Lakes Central Area Road Policing Manager
Photograph supplied by New Zealand Police

Watt praised the simplicity and efficiency of the award's nomination.

"Baty may have believed he just did what any person would do, but when Area Road Policing Manager Steven Watt got wind of the award's existence, he didn't think twice to nominate the selfless truck driver.

"I instantly thought of Michael and thought 'what a well deserving person for this award'", Watt said.

"It was a simple form document that I had to fill out. [It] didn't take much time at all, and it was quite well set out and informative."

Watt said this kind of award holds an incredible amount of significance, especially when regarding Kiwi's tendencies to shy away from the spotlight.

"We're a country of humble people. We don't like to be recognised, and we don't like to push people forward to be recognised for extraordinary acts."

"I think we have to get past that humility and go 'you know what, these are deserving people'. We need to step up and show the country and show others that we do have exceptional people out there and rightly recognise them through awards."

However, the impact of the award doesn't just end at celebrating the individual.

In a sector such as road trauma and transportation in general, the narrative is dominated by negative, dreary headlines.

There's good reason for that too. In a 2022 study conducted by the Australian Government, New Zealand ranked 4th highest out of the 31 OECD countries in terms of road deaths per 100,000.

While those statistics demonstrate New Zealand's roads do face problems, Watt said recognitions such as the Community Service Award celebrates examples like Baty's that are setting a new precedent for how the sector is viewed.

"It's important to not ignore the negative but instead focus on the positive and build on that."

"I don't want to take away from the trauma but there is a lot of really good stuff that happens on our roads. Whether it be an example like Michael's or the engineering of roads or new initiatives... It's not all bad."