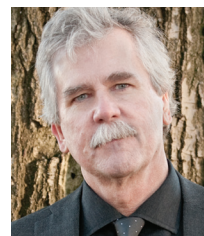


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Washington bureaucrats, Stapp turned his attention to the slaughterhouses that were America's highways, pioneering car safety long before Ralph Nader emerged on the scene.

Before he was done, Stapp helped pave the way for seatbelts, airbags, and ejection seats, arguably saving more lives than anyone in history. However, as this thrilling work demonstrates, Stapp didn't win every battle. His unconventional style of scientific research made him a pariah among some of his Air Force superiors, and his life of triumphs included lesser-known failures—both personal and professional.

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CRAIG RYAN is the author of two acclaimed books on extreme adventure and scientific discovery in the stratosphere, *Magnificent Failure* and *The Pre-Astronauts*. He co-wrote the autobiography *Come Up and Get Me* with one of America's greatest aviation legends, Joe Kittinger. He is also the co-producer of the documentary film *Angry Sky*. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

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SONIC WIND

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THE STORY OF JOHN PAUL STAPP AND HOW A RENEGADE DOCTOR BECAME THE FASTEST MAN ON EARTH

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JUST AS HE FELT THE THUNDER OF THE FIGHTER JET ROAR UP BEHIND HIM, John Paul Stapp heard the dry pop of the igniters. A 35-foot river of flame erupted behind the rocket sled, almost instantly propelling Stapp to 639 miles per hour. Flying the observation jet above, legendary test pilot Joe Kittinger was astonished to see Stapp's *Sonic Wind* outracing him. Then, suddenly, the sled slammed to a stop—from the speed of a .45 caliber bullet to a standstill in just over one second.

This 1954 experiment—which still stands as the most punishing deceleration voluntarily encountered—immediately transformed Stapp into a celebrity, putting him on the cover of *Time* magazine as “the Fastest Man on Earth.” Though the experiment nearly cost him his eyesight, it proved what Stapp had been arguing for years: if provided with adequately engineered vehicles and proper restraint systems, we can survive all manner of violent collisions.

Drawing from troves of previously unpublished government documents and Stapp's personal files, as well as dozens of new interviews, renowned biographer and historian Craig Ryan now recounts the unforgettable life of a renegade doctor who risked everything in the name of safety. Vividly re-creating an American panorama of a time when all eyes were pointed skyward, Ryan traces Stapp's story from his humble beginnings as the son of Texas missionaries to his death-defying rocket sled experiments in the California and New Mexico deserts, to his high-altitude balloon programs, which set records that were not eclipsed for fifty years. We witness Stapp—with his loyal team of swashbuckling scientists, engineers, and test pilots—rewrite the textbooks on what the human body can endure, along the way establishing the protocols for stratospheric survival and vetting the Mercury astronauts for the great “space race” that lay ahead. And when his treacherous experiments became too much for

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