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Horse Carriage Flips in Columbus Circle Accident, Witnesses Say

By Trevor Kapp and Aidan Gardiner on September 26, 2013 10:50am

COLUMBUS CIRCLE — A horse-drawn carriage driver heading up Eighth Avenue towards Columbus Circle Thursday morning lost control of his animal and flipped over sideways in the middle of traffic. The chestnut-colored horse was pulling a white carriage up Eighth Avenue near 57th Street about 10:15 a.m. when his driver lost control and hit a car, flipping the carriage onto the horse's hind legs, witnesses and the carriage driver said.



"I passed 57th Street and the horse starts acting crazy. He started kicking his back legs. I grabbed the reins and I must've yelled, 'Stop' 15 times," said carriage driver Frank Luo, 43, who works out of the Clinton Park Stables on 52nd Street near 11th Avenue

Luo, who said the horse's name is Chris, said he couldn't calm the steed down.

"He broke the whole front of the carriage and the fifth wheel. The harness trapped the back legs and he stopped," Luo said, adding, "I didn't do anything wrong. I did my job well. If I had gotten scared and jumped out [of the carriage], it would've been ten times worse."

"I still love the horse," Luo said, "Accidents happen."

Witnesses said the driver was shouting at the horse before the crash.

"It looked like the driver was having a fit. He was screaming. He couldn't control the horse," said Garth Burton, 48, a pedicab driver.

Burton said when the carriage flipped over, pinning the horse underneath, the driver "grabbed the horse by the head. The horse was trying to get out. He was on his legs," Burton said.

A witness' video posted on Instagram shows the horse stumbling and trying rise as firefighters surrounded it.

Burton said he and another good Samaritan lifted the white carriage, adorned with flowers and American flags, off of the struggling horse, eventually freeing it by slicing off its harness.

"The horse was kicking and flipping out. It fell back down a second time. It looked like it was going to keel over. We started cutting the harness [and] everyone started applauding," Burton said.

Police questioned Luo, but released him to lead the horse down Eighth Avenue to the Clinton Park Stables on 52nd Street near 11th Avenue.

Police evaluated the animal at the stables and said it was in "good condition," an NYPD spokesman said.

Officials from the NYC Department of Health, which is responsible for regulating the horse carriage industry, said the horse was not seriously injured, but a private veterinarian will perform a full health exam.

Chris will be taken out of service until it is certified that he is healthy enough to go back to work, according the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals spokesman Bret Hopman.

The Health Department said there had been no prior accidents with the horse involved in the accident, and referred all questions about the driver's record to the Department of Consumer Affairs.

Reps for DCA did not immediately respond to calls for comment.

Chanelle Futrell, 31, a witness, said she saw what appeared to be minor injuries to the horse.

"The horse had an indentation on its right thighs. It was the size of a basketball," said Futrell, a dogwalker from Harlem, "Its eyes were wide open. It wasn't making any noise. The horse looked surprisingly calm," Futrell said.

Advocates seized on the incident as another example for why horse-drawn carriages should be banned.

"Animals don't belong in traffic. It's only a matter of time before an animal is seriously hurt or killed," said Allie Feldman, executive director of NYCLASS.

A horse was injured when its carriage collided with an SUV and a motorcycle near Columbus Circle in last June. Two months later, a spooked horse bolted from its carriage into traffic where it sustained some injuries.

Feldman said that NYCLASS' efforts to ban the carriages has gained traction with current mayoral contenders, which has drivers like Lou worried.

But the carriage driver said he and his colleagues need the work.

"We're all worried our jobs are going to get taken away. I'm getting by, but in this economy what else am I going to do?" Luo said, adding that he's been a carriage driver for 17 years.

"I've got to support my family. This is my only way to make a living," he added.