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NORTHEAST PENNSYLVANIA'S LARGEST NEWS TEAM



\$1.00 NEWSSTAND

You're in for a rough ride: The area's most fearsome potholes



JAKEDANNA STEVENS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER A filled pothole near the entrance to Green Ridge Plaza at the intersection of Green Ridge Street and Ross Avenue in Scranton on Wednesday, March 21, 2018.

CLAYTON OVER, STAFF WRITER / Published: April 1, 2018

Boulevard Avenue is a real monster.

The beast chews up rubber tires, spits out wheel lugs and uses your alignment as a toothpick.

Stretches of the road, in the vicinity of the Lackawanna County Recycling Center and Green Ridge Health Care Center, earned top dishonor in the Sunday Times' inaugural Slammies, awarded to the most disgraceful, teeth-rattling, hubcap-stealing, compact-car-swallowing potholes on area roadways. Times-Tribune readers suggested nominees on Facebook.

In the 3300 block of Olyphant Avenue, Throop-bound cars slowed and swerved Wednesday to avoid pocked pavement not far from Sarah Hannon's home.

Pothole dodging — considered a spring sport by many in Northeast Pennsylvania — is particularly robust on the Scranton/Throop border. The stretches of Boulevard Avenue and Olyphant Avenue both earned People's Choice Slammies.

Olyphant Avenue is in the poorest shape she's seen it, said Hannon, who has lived there for 55 years.

"Just the past few years, it's the worst it's ever been," Hannon said.

Responders online described blown out tires and other issues after driving on Boulevard Avenue. They compared driving on the road to traveling on the moon or through a war zone. Another reader said both avenues look as if they'd been "used for Air Force bombing practice."

Rich Pencek, who lives down the street from Hannon, said errant hubcaps sometimes end

up in the yards of neighbors or across the street.

Pothole hotline

Complaints about pocked roadways stream into Scranton's Department of Public Works pothole hotline.

"All day. Every day. All over the city," said dispatcher Tim Gilroy, who helps tend the hotline.

City DPW crews made a few stops on Olyphant Avenue already this year, Hannon said, pointing to some cold patches in front of her house.

However, they aren't permanent pothole solutions and efforts to mend potholes locally have been hampered so far this year by the weather, Gilroy said.

City crews cold patched some potholes in the city earlier in the year, before storms dumped more snow on the area.

"It just kind of masks it for a little bit. You run it over with a plow and it's gone," Gilroy said.

More permanent repairs will have to wait for warmer temperatures, when hot materials can be used to patch holes, Gilroy said.

Neither Hannon or Pencek reported car damage from potholes, but both agree the road needs to be repaved to truly fix the problem.

"It's to the point where patching won't do it much good," Pencek said.

Most improved roadway

This marks the second year the newspaper asked online readers where the worst potholes lay in wait.

Viewmont Drive, which winds from North Main Avenue in Scranton past retailers, restaurants and the Viewmont Mall to the intersection of Ravine Street and Commerce Boulevard in Dickson City, reigned supreme as most pockmarked in our poll last year.

The road, which the mall owns, was completely milled and repaved last year. The ride is now smooth, earning the Slammie for the Most Improved Roadway.

The same can't be said of all the prior stops last year.

The entrance to Green Ridge Plaza, at Green Ridge Street and Ross Avenue, also appeared in last year's social media search. One particular coffee-in-your-lap pothole existed for years, said Vince Brunetti, owner of nearby Pioneer Beer. Within the last year, some work has been done, but it remains troublesome, Brunetti said. Others opened up along Ross Avenue closer to the plaza.

"It's not better at all," Brunetti said. "It's horrible."

Hefty damage

Besides posing a safety hazard, vehicle damage caused by potholes cost motorists in the U.S. about \$3 billion annually, according to AAA. American drivers report paying an average of \$300 to make repairs stemming from pothole damage, AAA North Penn director of marketing and public relations Nina Waskevich said.

The costs associated with driving on rough roads are higher for drivers locally, according to a November 2016 report by TRIP, a national transportation research and advocacy group.

People living in the Scranton metro area pay an average of \$650 in vehicle maintenance each year because of travel on rough roads, the 18th highest in the nation when compared to areas of similar population, said Carolyn Boniface Kelly, associate director of research and communications with TRIP.

The Scranton-area also ranked 11th nationally in terms of percentage of roads in poor condition among areas of comparable population, with 42 percent of roads in the Scranton area in poor condition and another 25 percent in mediocre condition, Kelly said.

The figures are the most recent available. An updated report will be published later this year, Kelly said. The rankings only include expressways, interstates and arterial freeways.

"The anecdotal way to think of that is the roads you travel on after you leave your neighborhood," Kelly said.

Potholes a priority

Pennsylvania Department of Transportation crews have been working to tame the pothole beasts.

Last week, crews locally began working day shifts, with pothole repair and litter pickup taking the highest priority, Dennis Giordano, assistance district executive for maintenance for the department's Dunmore-based District 4, said in an email.

A pothole blitz, scheduled for April 18-30, will see nearly 100 percent of resources directed to "permanent pothole repair," he said.

"In addition, we have worked with our partners in the utility industry for them to join forces with us during this period to make a grand attempt at eliminating the majority of the worst areas, not only from potholes but from emergency utility cuts that occur throughout the winter," Giordano said.

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@ClaytonOver on Twitter & #8220;most teeth-rattling, hubcap-stealing, compact-car-swallowing potholes”

Call it in

To report a pothole in Scranton, call the Pothole Hotline at 570-348-4178. Motorists can report potholes and other highway maintenance concerns on state routes at customer.care.penn.dot.gov or by calling PennDOT's toll-free hotline at 1-800-349-7623.

Top 25 metro areas, highest percentage of roads in poor condition

1. Concord, California: 75 percent
2. Madison, Wisconsin: 66
3. Victorville, Hesperia-Apple Valley, California: 61
4. Antioch, California: 60
5. Flint, Michigan: 56
6. Peoria, Illinois: 51
7. Colorado Springs, Colorado: 51
8. Canton, Ohio: 50
9. Stockton, California: 46
10. Jackson, Mississippi: 44
11. Scranton: 42
12. Davenport, Iowa/Illinois: 40
13. Savannah, Georgia: 39
14. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: 38
15. Des Moines, Iowa: 38
16. Reading, Pennsylvania: 38
17. Fort Wayne, Indiana: 38
18. Spokane, Washington: 37
19. Shreveport, Louisiana: 36
20. Santa Rosa, California: 36
21. Thousand Oaks, California: 35
22. Trenton, New Jersey: 35
23. Youngstown, Ohio/Pennsylvania: 33
24. Modesto, California: 32
25. South Bend, Indiana/Michigan: 31

Top 25 metro areas, additional vehicle maintenance costs due to roads in poor, mediocre or fair condition

1. Concord, California: \$1,014
2. Madison, Wisconsin: \$974
3. Antioch, California: \$883
4. Jackson, Mississippi: \$862
5. Victorville, Hesperia-Apple Valley, California: \$854
6. Flint, Michigan: \$825
7. Colorado Springs, Colorado: \$776
8. Canton, Ohio: \$770
9. Peoria, Illinois: \$738
10. Fort Wayne, Indiana: \$734
11. Savannah, Georgia: \$729
12. Stockton, California: \$711

13. Des Moines, Iowa: \$705
14. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: \$698
15. Davenport, Iowa/Illinois: \$696
16. Santa Rosa, California: \$663
17. Shreveport, Louisiana: \$661
18. Scranton: \$650
19. Provo-Orem, Utah: \$646
20. Reading, Pennsylvania: \$641
21. South Bend, Indiana/Michigan: \$637
22. Thousand Oaks, California: \$629
23. Trenton, New Jersey: \$629
24. Huntsville, Alabama: \$619
25. Lubbock, Texas: \$613

— TRIP, BUMPY ROADS AHEAD:
AMERICA'S ROUGHEST RIDES AND
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SMOOTHER, NOVEMBER 2016