

# Runaway truck missed many by centimetres

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A 35-vehicle smash that killed one woman and left two people seriously injured could easily have been worse, it emerged yesterday as witnesses told of their near misses with an out-of-control semitrailer.

With mechanical failure emerging as the most likely cause of the pile-up that killed a 52-year-old Gosford woman, several F3 travellers said they had come within centimetres of being struck by the huge truck.

Meanwhile police were continuing to piece together the chronology of the accident on the Mooney Mooney Bridge north of Sydney on Friday.

The truck's driver was assisting police with their inquiries.

John Grist, of Somersby, and Rae Busold, of Bronte, were among those with tales of narrow escapes.

They were travelling north on the F3 when the truck, carrying steel and wood, lost control and started smashing cars out of its way.

"We are just incredibly lucky," Mrs Busold said. "We were practically stopped in traffic when it all happened around us and the truck went past narrowly missing us," Mr Grist said.

Tara Mayhew, an off-duty police detective, estimated the truck was travelling at 100 kilometres an hour as it passed her vehicle on the left-hand side on the approach to the bridge.

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"At first I thought he was just in a hurry," said Ms Mayhew from Ryde, who said she was restricted to about 30 kilometres an hour at the time.

"Then we saw he was honking his horn. He locked the wheels to try to veer left but he lost control."

It appeared the chain of events began with a relatively minor crash in southbound traffic on the freeway.

With the wreck up against the safety barrier dividing the carriageway, northbound traffic was forced to merge left and motorists slowed to look at the accident, which happened about 5.45pm.

Also heading north was the Volvo semitrailer. Its driver is understood to have

told police the brakes failed on his vehicle, which ploughed through the slow-moving traffic. Witnesses said he appeared to be trying to keep the vehicle to the far left lane.

The truck travelled at least 400 metres, smashing into dozens of vehicles along the way, sending some cars airborne and dragging a four-wheel-drive more than 200 metres.

The woman who was killed died when her Hyundai Excel exploded after being involved in the collision.

A 45-year-old man flown to Newcastle's John Hunter Hospital with head, chest and leg injuries was in a stable condition last night, a hospital spokesman said.

A 45-year-old Gosford woman, who was flown to Sydney's Royal North Shore Hospital, suffered serious limb fractures and minor head injuries.

Six others were taken to hospitals in Gosford, Hornsby and Wyong for treatment for minor injuries.

Andrew Bradley, 25, from the Central Coast emergency rescue unit, arrived at the scene 30 minutes after the accident and described it as like a movie scene. "I have never seen anything like it," he said.