

Runaway horse spurs wild carriage ride

By SCOTT WILLIAMS
of the Journal Star

A Granite City family visiting Peoria this weekend got to see the wilder side of life here when their horse-drawn carriage ride became a treacherous romp through downtown.

Shortly after midnight Saturday, William A. Russell and his family were taking in a few sights from inside a buggy drawn by 8-year-old "Rick," a veteran buggy-puller.

"At first, the lines for the rides were real long," recalled Russell, 44, who brought his family to Peoria for an Elks Club convention. "Then we figured, well, it was the only time we were going to be in Peoria for a couple of years, so we'd go at midnight."

The Russells were just a few minutes into their ride when an automobile suddenly came speeding around the corner headed straight

for the buggy. A collision was narrowly avoided, but it was a close enough call to send Rick into a frenzy.

"He got really spooked, and he lowered his head and actually started kicking the buggy with his hind legs," Russell said.

Within seconds, the horse was racing down Adams Street, with the Russells still in tow, and crossing Hamilton Street against a red light. Luckily, there was no traffic on Hamilton.

Despite a lot of bouncing around inside the otherwise-comfortable buggy, none of the Russells were injured.

And when Rick charged up onto the sidewalk on the east side of Adams and came to a dead halt, the Russells seized the opportunity to bail out.

The driver of the carriage, how-

ever, 24-year-old Pamela Price, continued trying to calm Rick, who responded by snapping his hindquarters back again and shattering a storefront window.

By this time, Peoria police had arrived on the scene, and Rick greeted them with an onslaught of kicks to a patrol car. The car sustained a broken head light and a damaged front fender.

Price, meanwhile, had been pulled from atop the carriage and suffered minor cuts and bruises. She later was treated at Methodist Medical Center.

Before Rick finally was subdued, however, he had inflicted more serious lacerations on his legs, and he eventually was unable to stand. Later, his owner called a veterinarian to the scene and ordered Rick destroyed.

Robert J. Unes, owner of Carr-

aige Classics Ltd., said this is not the first time a careless downtown driver has disturbed one of his horses. But he said it is the first time a horse has responded so violently.

"We don't have any problems with our horses or our drivers," he said. "Only with drunk drivers and crazy people driving."

Unes called Price one of his best drivers, and said she handled the situation as well as could be expected.

Russell also applauded Price, saying she probably kept him and his family from being injured. The only person to blame, he added, is the driver who triggered the incident and then just drove away.

Although the whole ordeal had his family "very nervous," Russell said it did not spoil their weekend in Peoria.

"We were very impressed with the town — really."