# Teenager sentenced for nitrous oxide-related crash that left pedestrian with lifelong injuries



In a harrowing incident that has highlighted the dangers of reckless driving and substance misuse, Louisa Tunstall, an 18-year-old from Lowton near Leigh, Greater Manchester, was sentenced to 20 months in a Young Offender Institute after causing serious injury to a pedestrian while driving under the influence of nitrous oxide, commonly referred to as "hippy crack."

On an evening last May, Tunstall was observed inhaling from a gold balloon while driving her Fiat 500. In a shocking sequence of events, she veered off the road, mounted the pavement, and collided with Tracey Holman, a 50-year-old teaching assistant who was out on her daily walk. The impact of the collision left Mrs Holman with multiple fractures and significant injuries to her leg, foot, and ankle, leaving her in a condition that she described as being a "prisoner in her own home." Despite ongoing medical treatment, she faces lifelong challenges, including anticipated arthritis and further surgeries.

Witnesses recounted the chaotic scene as motorists rushed to assist Mrs Holman, while Tunstall allegedly told her passenger to "shut up" before frantically calling for help. As investigations unfolded, it was revealed that Tunstall had been using nitrous oxide at the time of the crash, a fact that one witness corroborated by noting the deflated balloon on the pavement after the car flipped onto its side.

At Bolton Crown Court, the prosecution underscored the severity of Tunstall's actions. Prosecutor Alex Beevers remarked on the tragic nature of the case, noting Tunstall's lack of previous convictions and the life-altering injuries sustained by Mrs Holman. Judge Abigail Hudson, in her sentencing, stated that Tunstall’s behaviour demonstrated a "total disregard for the risk of danger to others," marking the incident as an example of the "inherently dangerous" practice of consuming nitrous oxide while driving.

The dangers posed by nitrous oxide are increasingly coming to light, as evidenced by several recent tragic cases across the UK. In December 2024, for example, Thomas Johnson, aged 19, received a substantial prison sentence for causing the deaths of three friends after inhaling nitrous oxide and recklessly driving at speeds exceeding 100 mph. Similarly, in July 2023, Cameron Hughes received a lengthy prison term after his van, under the influence of nitrous oxide, tragically took the life of 15-year-old Bonny Barrow.

Such incidents have spurred calls for stronger legal repercussions for those who drive under the influence of nitrous oxide. Following Tunstall’s conviction, experts have emphasised the importance of preventing this dangerous behaviour, especially among young people. Defensive driving courses and community outreach programmes aimed at educating adolescents about the risks associated with nitrous oxide use may be crucial steps in mitigating these tragedies.

Echoing broader societal implications, Mrs Holman’s poignant statement in court revealed the profound emotional and physical toll of the incident: “You have turned my world upside down... I have gone from being able to work and have a social life to being a prisoner in my own home.” This sentiment resonates as a stark reminder of the ripple effects such reckless behaviour can inflict not only on victims but also on families and communities.

As Tunstall’s case underscores the need for greater awareness and stringent punishments, it serves as a cautionary tale for young drivers tempted by substance use to reconsider their choices behind the wheel. The message from the courts and society at large is clear: the consequences of such decisions can be devastating, resulting in loss of life, liberty, and the pathway to a future.

### Reference Map

1. Content regarding Louisa Tunstall’s actions, legal proceedings, and victim impact was sourced from the lead article.
2. Related incidents involving nitrous oxide and their legal outcomes were drawn from multiple summaries to provide broader context on the issue.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14711643/teen-driver-hippy-crack-balloon-hitting-pedestrian.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/dec/18/nine-years-laughing-gas-crash-driver-killed-friends-oxford> - In December 2024, Thomas Johnson, 19, was sentenced to over nine years in prison for causing the deaths of three friends by dangerous driving after inhaling nitrous oxide. The crash occurred in June 2023 when Johnson's BMW 3 Series, traveling at speeds exceeding 100 mph, collided with roadside furniture and a tree in Marcham, Oxfordshire, resulting in the deaths of passengers Elliot Pullen, 17, Daniel Hancock, 18, and Ethan Goddard, 18. Footage from the victims' phones showed Johnson inhaling nitrous oxide from a balloon prior to the crash. The judge emphasized that Johnson's actions were 'all for teenage thrills' and that he would be 'forever defined' by his 'teenage mistakes'.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-67267006> - In July 2023, Cameron Hughes, 24, was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison for causing the death of 15-year-old Bonny Barrow by dangerous driving after inhaling nitrous oxide. Hughes was driving a Mercedes Sprinter van at high speed while under the influence of nitrous oxide and using his mobile phone. The van lost control on the A56 at Huncoat, Lancashire, and plunged into a ravine, resulting in Barrow's death and Hughes sustaining minor injuries. The incident highlighted the dangers of driving under the influence of nitrous oxide, also known as 'laughing gas'.
4. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/crime/thomas-johnson-marcham-crash-oxford-b2666471.html> - In June 2023, Thomas Johnson, 19, caused a fatal crash in Marcham, Oxfordshire, after inhaling nitrous oxide and driving at speeds over 100 mph. The crash resulted in the deaths of his three teenage friends: Elliot Pullen, 17, Daniel Hancock, 18, and Ethan Goddard, 18. Johnson was sentenced to nine years and four months in prison after pleading guilty to three counts of causing death by dangerous driving. The case underscored the dangers of driving under the influence of nitrous oxide, commonly known as 'laughing gas'.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-44195515> - In May 2018, William Thompson, 18, was sentenced to nine years and 10 months in prison for causing the deaths of two women by dangerous driving after inhaling nitrous oxide. Thompson was driving a van on the A41 in Hertfordshire when he collided with a Nissan Micra, resulting in the deaths of Mary Davis and Jean Malone. Prior to the crash, Thompson was seen inhaling nitrous oxide from a balloon while driving. The incident highlighted the risks associated with driving under the influence of nitrous oxide, also known as 'laughing gas'.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c99xmzey88vo> - In December 2024, Thomas Johnson, 19, was sentenced to over nine years in prison for causing the deaths of three friends by dangerous driving after inhaling nitrous oxide. The crash occurred in June 2023 when Johnson's BMW 3 Series, traveling at speeds exceeding 100 mph, collided with roadside furniture and a tree in Marcham, Oxfordshire, resulting in the deaths of passengers Elliot Pullen, 17, Daniel Hancock, 18, and Ethan Goddard, 18. Footage from the victims' phones showed Johnson inhaling nitrous oxide from a balloon prior to the crash. The judge emphasized that Johnson's actions were 'all for teenage thrills' and that he would be 'forever defined' by his 'teenage mistakes'.
7. <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/mo/st-louis/news/2023/09/11/missouri-jury-awards--745-million-in-death-of-woman-struck-by-driver-who-used-inhalants> - In September 2023, a Missouri jury awarded $745 million to the parents of Marissa Politte, 25, who was killed by a driver under the influence of nitrous oxide. The driver, Trenton Geiger, 20, had inhaled nitrous oxide canisters before losing consciousness behind the wheel and striking Politte outside an urgent care center in Chesterfield, Missouri. The lawsuit alleged that the company distributing nitrous oxide, Whip-It!, conspired with a smoke shop to sell the product to customers intending to inhale it illegally. The jury found the distributor 70% liable, the smoke shop 20% liable, and Geiger 10% liable.