

'They came within an inch of their lives'

BY PETE BLENCH

TWO women used a mobile phone to call for help as they lay injured and trapped under a crushed car.

Frances Ford, 55, and Mary Leighton were travelling from Shropshire to see a client of Hope House children's hospice when they became involved in a nightmare on the A49 near Ashton.

Mrs Ford's husband, Peter, has described how the pair "came within an inch of their lives," after they were in a "concertina" collision with three lorries near Leominster.

As reported last week, the names of the casualties were not released following their miracle escape on January 10.

But Mr Ford, of Baschurch, near Shrewsbury, contacted the *Hereford Times* to tell their story – and to plead for action.

He is calling for politicians to be held accountable for a lack of safety action on the A49 and for anger to be directed "right to the top" – to the Prime Minister.

Mr Ford drove to the accident scene near temporary traffic lights to the south of Ashton after Mrs Leighton called him from inside the wrecked car.

He learned that two articulated lorries were in collision when the first stopped at the lights.

His wife, driving behind the HGVs in her blue Ford Maverick 4x4, was able to stop safely but her vehicle was then in collision from the rear with a loaded aggregate lorry. Her car was shunted under the articulated lorry in front.

"Such was the force that it lifted the rear of the lorry from the ground," said Mr Ford. "Thankfully the lorry was empty, I hate to think what would have happened if it had been loaded – the car would have taken much more impact."

Mum-of-four Mrs Ford was trapped in the wreckage for two hours "with the underside of the lorry about half an inch from her face," said her husband.

Rescue workers described how the women were trapped in a space about 16 inches deep and how the car steering column was flattened on a seat.



▲ The wrecked car in which the two women were trapped for hours being winched out from the back of the lorry. Picture courtesy of Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service.

Mrs Leighton, who was able to make SOS calls on her mobile, was freed after about an hour as Mr Ford waited anxiously by the roadside.

They had not met before. "It was one hell of a way to meet," he said.

The women were treated for injuries in Hereford and released but Mrs Ford, who suffered a double fracture of her right arm and got glass in her eyes, later went into hospital at Shrewsbury.

"She looks like she has done 30 rounds with Mike Tyson," said Mr Ford, who heaped praised on

Herefordshire's emergency services.

"I think it is appalling that the authorities continue to take no positive action on this section of the A49

"It is only by a miracle and the skills and dedication of all involved in the rescue did Mary and Frances both survive, while Blair and his bunch of incompetents do nothing.

"Perhaps he would like to tell me that if the prospect of two dead wives and six kids without their mums is not enough to warrant affirmative action then what is?"

Carnage on their doorstep

THE section of the A49 through Ashton, near Leominster, has a long, grim history of serious accidents going back many years but demands for action snowballed following the horror of June 7, 2004.

Two drivers died and a cottage was destroyed in a fireball after two lorries were in collision.

Months later another man – a car driver – died at an accident at the same blackspot near the Tunnel Lane junction at the north side of the hamlet.

The whole stretch through Ashton, through a series of bends, is notorious for the frequency of incidents resulting in injuries and wrecked cars.

Vehicles have frequently smashed into the railings of Berrington Hall park, plunged through hedges and overturned in fields.

This latest horror smash involving a car and three lorries happened on the edge of the park on the south side of the hamlet.

Villagers in the small, long-suffering community have campaigned against the carnage on their doorstep, mounting petitions and lobbying the authorities with the backing of their MP Bill Wiggin.

Mr Wiggin has raised the issue in Parliament but residents have become frustrated as months and years have slipped by.

They say they want something done – the erection of speed cameras, massive signs which light up on approach or whatever else it takes to slow traffic.

So far the body responsible, the Highways Agency, has not responded to the specific problems of Ashton but has indicated it could make a number of improvements along the trunk route.