

## DAILY REPORT

Topics ▾ Surveys & Rankings ▾ Case Digests ▾ Public Notice & Classifieds ▾ Court Calendars ▾ All Sections ▾



James E. Butler Jr., founding partner of Butler Prather. (Courtesy photo)

NEWS

## 'An Amazing Impact on Consumer Safety': Meet the Lawyer With Seven \$100M Verdicts

"I don't think there's anybody close," one colleague said of Jim Butler, who secured a \$127 million judgment for a seatbelt products liability case on the first Monday of 2022.

January 07, 2022 at 12:04 PM

 6 minute read

Products Liability

**Katheryn Hayes Tucker** 

Reporter

We're stumped to find a lawyer who's won more big verdicts than Jim Butler, who has offices across Georgia in Columbus, Atlanta and Savannah.

The \$127 million judgment for a seat belt product liability case in Atlanta federal court this week marks the seventh time Butler's trial teams have won verdicts in excess of \$100 million.

"I don't think there's anybody close," Gerald Davidson Jr. of Mahaffey Pickens Tucker in Lawrenceville told the Daily Report Thursday. "Jim's had an amazing impact on consumer safety worldwide."

Davidson has worked with Butler as co-counsel in some of those notable trials. One was a 1993 case against General Motors. The jury awarded \$105 million to the parents of Shannon Moseley, a teen who died when his truck's side-mounted gas tank ruptured in a crash. That verdict—which included \$101 million in punitive damages—was later overturned, and the case settled before it could be tried again.

Davidson was a family friend and was asked to look into the Moseley case at the funeral. The first thing he did was take a look at the impounded truck. He could see the hole in the gas tank. He told the Daily Report he went back to his office and thought about who could help him take on GM. He said he asked himself, "Who's the baddest of the bad? Who's the best punitive damages lawyer in the country?" He called Butler.

“People think I’m crazy when they ask me what drives him,” Davidson said. “He loves the ‘kill,’ but the ‘kill’ to him is making America and the world a safer place to live.”

Like other great litigators, Butler combines hard work with deep knowledge of the law and facts. He pulls together effective trial teams – with lawyers from his firm and others. He tried *Walden v. Chrysler* to a \$150 million verdict working with his son James E. Butler III, known as Jeb, who has his own firm in Atlanta, the Butler Law Firm. Certainly he’s passionate about his cases. He just seems to take it up to an even higher intensity.

“When he gets after these auto product manufacturers, you know, it’s like they’ve hurt his feelings,” Davidson said. “He’s going to make ‘em do right. He’s working for his clients.”

Asked about his motivation, Butler shared a [clip](#) of the scene from “To Kill a Mockingbird” when Gregory Peck passes under and never notices the crowd standing out of respect for him. “I’m still inspired by Atticus Finch—60 years later,” Butler said. “What better way to spend my time than seeking justice for good people?”

But there’s more. When he was 17, Butler was in a horrific crash driving his father’s Corvair. He fell asleep and hit a double telephone pole. The front end collapsed. The car had no shoulder belt. His face and a hip were crushed. Six months later, the car was recalled for carbon monoxide leaking into the passenger compartment. But he endured surgeries to reconstruct his face and hip, followed by 39 years of pain and walking with cane — “before medical science finally perfected a prosthesis that would last,” as he put it.

“Yes, all that had a profound impact on my life, and empathy, and affinity for automotive safety,” he said Friday.

He added, “I’ve been blessed to work with great lawyers and paralegals and investigators – every verdict was a team effort.”

Now 70, Butler graduated from the University of Georgia School of Law in 1977 and started practicing in Columbus, a state border town next to Phenix City, Alabama, long known as a plaintiff-friendly venue. He founded a firm that has been through a series of partner and name changes, mentoring and spinning off some of the best trial lawyers in the state.

The latest big verdict appeared in Butler’s inbox on Monday—his first business day of 2022—after eight years of litigation on the case. The 96-page order concluded a bench trial conducted over six days in October before Judge Steve Jones of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia. Jones entered a verdict in the amount of \$127,019,343 against seat belt-maker Autoliv but apportioned 50% of the compensatory damages to Mazda, reducing the judgment against Autoliv to \$113,509,671.

The case involved the death of 38-year-old Micah Andrews on April 12, 2013. He was on his way home to his wife and daughter that evening, traveling on I-575 North in Cobb County, when his Mazda3 suddenly swerved to the right, apparently to avoid something in the road. The car ran down an embankment so steep the state later installed a guardrail at the site. The Mazda hit a group of three small trees while Andrews tried to correct course. The electronic front sensor, which was meant to actuate the air bag, failed to send a signal, and the air bag failed to deploy. His seat belt spooled out 20 inches, allowing his face to hit the steering wheel hub with such force that his skull was fractured. He died at the scene, Butler said.

Butler tried the case with Tedra Cannella and Rory Weeks of Cannella Snyder, along with paralegals Cathy Huff and Beth Glen of Butler Prather. They all practiced together at Butler, Wooten & Peak until last month, when the firm [split](#) into three separate firms.

The judgment included \$2 million for predeath fright, shock, terror and pain and suffering, \$25 million for the full value of the life and \$100 million in punitive damages imposed against Autoliv. Butler said the team had already reached a confidential settlement with Mazda.

This latest win was only the fifth on Butler's list of biggest verdicts. He also noted most of his cases have settled for confidential amounts—particularly in the past couple of decades. This one makes 50 verdicts of more than \$100,000 on Butler's list.

Here are the top seven:

1. \$454 million in *Six Flags v. Time Warner Entertainment* on Dec. 21, 1998 in Lawrenceville, Georgia.
2. \$150 million in *Walden v. Fiat-Chrysler* on April 2, 2015, in the southwest Georgia town of Bainbridge. That case involved the death of 4-year-old Remi Walden in a Jeep with a gas tank that exploded into flames in a rear-end collision. The judge reduced the award to \$40 million, and Chrysler paid it with interest after the Georgia Supreme Court upheld it 9-0.
3. \$150 million in *Hardy v. General Motors* on June 3, 1996, in Lowndes County, Alabama.
4. \$127,104,653 in *Rodriguez v. Suzuki Motor* on July 7, 1995 in St. Louis.
5. \$127,019,343.40 in *Andrews v. Autoliv* on Jan. 3, 2022, in Atlanta federal court.
6. \$105,500,000 in *Flax v. DaimlerChrysler* on Nov. 23, 2004, in Nashville, Tennessee.
7. \$105,241,613 in *Moseley v. General Motors* on Feb. 4, 1993, in Atlanta.

“There is no question he is a fabulous trial lawyer with incredible results for his clients,” said former Georgia Trial Lawyers Association president Darren Penn of Penn Law. “Off the top of my head, I cannot think of many other Georgia trial lawyers with verdicts over \$100 million.”

## You Might Like



December 18, 2021

### **Brennan, Harris & Rominger Removes Samsung Lawsuit Over E-Cig Battery Defect Claims**

By ALM Staff

🕒 1 minute read



EVERYTHING IP

#### **Skilled in the Art**

This week, Scott Graham digests the latest developments on everything IP and helps make sense of the trends, data, and politics around patents.

By Scott Graham



January 07, 2022

### Couple Sue Equifax, Republic Finance Over Fair Credit Reporting Act Claims

By ALM Staff

🕒 1 minute read

January 07, 2022

### Perdue Challenges Campaign Fundraising Law Benefiting Kemp

By Associated Press

🕒 3 minute read



CLASS ACTIONS | MASS TORTS

#### Critical Mass

Class actions and mass torts—big wins, novel legal strategies, appellate battles and who’s getting the work. Amanda Bronstad keeps you in-the-loop on the key class action developments that matter.

By Amanda Bronstad



January 04, 2022

### Fall Bench Trial Leads to \$127M New Year's Verdict in Seat Belt Case

By [Katheryn Hayes Tucker](#)

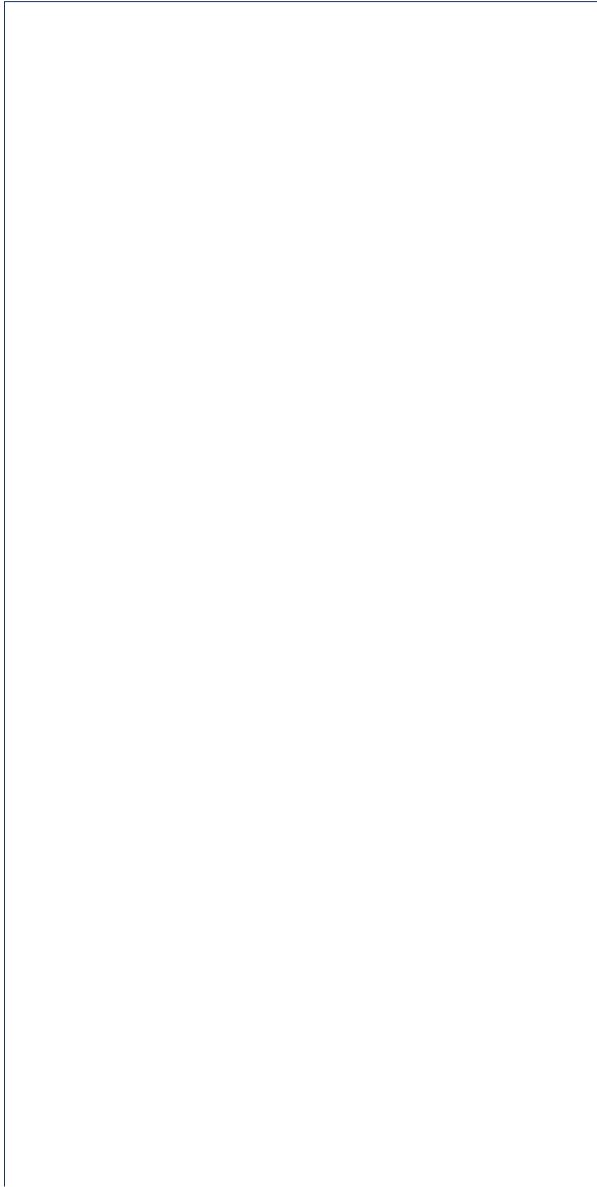
🕒 4 minute read

---

#### LAW FIRMS MENTIONED

---

**Butler Wooten Cheeley Peak**



TRENDING LAW FIRMS THIS WEEK

[On My Radar](#) [All Law.com](#)

- 1. **Burr & Forman**  
5 new blips
- 2. **Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani**  
5 new blips
- 3. **Bursor & Fisher**  
4 new blips
- 4. **Hall Booth Smith**  
4 new blips
- 5. **Morgan & Morgan**  
3 new blips

[Open Law.com Radar](#)

TRENDING STORIES

**These Firms Dominated 2021 M&A League Tables**

[THE AMERICAN LAWYER](#)

**LAW.COM | PRO**

**Our 2022 Watch List: Law.com Pro's Global Team Highlights Key Trends to Keep an Eye on**

**Accused of Slapping Colleague at Holiday Party, Denver Airport's Top Lawyer Resigns**

CORPORATE COUNSEL

**Omicron Exacerbates Cultural Divides Within Law Firms**

THE AMERICAN LAWYER

**Greensboro Jury Awards \$15M in Motocross Accident Injury**

DAILY REPORT ONLINE

**NY Judges Call for In-Person Appearances to Cease as Omicron Rages Through Courthouses**

NEW YORK LAW JOURNAL

**This Year**

**Dishing on Diversity: A Candid Discussion on DE&I in Law Firms**

**2022: The Trends to Watch in the New Year**



**Mentioned in a Law.com story?**

License our industry-leading legal content to extend your thought leadership and build your brand.

**LEARN MORE**

**FEATURED FIRMS**

**Law Offices of Gary Martin  
Hays & Associates P.C.**  
(470) 294-1674

**Law Offices of Mark E.  
Salomone**  
(857) 444-6468

**Smith & Hassler**  
(713) 739-1250

## More From ALM

### [CLE Center](#)



#### **Premium Subscription**

With this subscription you will receive unlimited access to high quality, online, on-demand premium content from well-respected faculty in the legal industry. This is perfect for attorneys licensed in multiple jurisdictions or for attorneys that have fulfilled their CLE requirement but need to access resourceful information for their practice areas.

[View Now](#)

#### **Team Accounts**

Our Team Account subscription service is for legal teams of four or more attorneys. Each attorney is granted unlimited access to high quality, on-demand premium content from well-respected faculty in the legal industry along with administrative access to easily manage CLE for the entire team.

[View Now](#)

#### **Bundle Subscriptions**

Gain access to some of the most knowledgeable and experienced attorneys with our 2 bundle options! Our Compliance bundles are curated by CLE Counselors and include current legal topics and challenges within the industry. Our second option allows you to build your bundle and strategically select the content that pertains to your needs. Both options are priced the same.

[View Now](#)

[Go to CLE Center](#)

#### Legal Newswire

**Bernstein Liebhard LLP Reminds Investors of the Deadline to File a Lead Plaintiff...**

**SHAREHOLDER ALERT: WeissLaw LLP Investigates SeaChange International, Inc.**

**Bernstein Liebhard LLP Reminds Investors of the Deadline to File a Lead Plaintiff...**

**Crocs, Inc. to Acquire Casual Footwear Brand HEYDUDE**

Submit a press release



## Sign Up Today and Never Miss Another Story

As a part of your digital membership, you can sign up for an unlimited number of a wide range of complimentary newsletters. Visit your My Account page to make your selections. Get the timely legal news and critical analysis you cannot afford to miss. Tailored just for you. In your inbox. Every day.

Subscribe to ALM Legal Publications Newsletters

