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THE WINDSOR STAR

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Cars, the automotive industry, trees, gardening -- and a little politics, just for levity. Vander Doelen covers the auto industry in Windsor and Detroit full time. On his own time he dotes over a small woodlot near Harrow with his wife, who is also a journalist.

Street Racing Nonexistent Problem, Stats Show ★★★★★

I received the letter below recently from driving enthusiast Ron Durocher of Harrow. His comments and research are even more timely this morning, given what Progressive Conservative leader John Tory is proposing to do about speeding.

Last week, Ron was pretty annoyed by the political grandstanding of the provincial Liberal government over the alleged crisis in "street racing."

"It just seems like our rights and freedoms as drivers are being whittled away because of political agendas and misinformation," Durocher wrote in an e-mail.

In response to a couple of deadly Toronto incidents that seemed more linked to that city's growing ethnic gang culture than to racing, the Liberals have been threatening to impose a Draconian crackdown on street racing across the province.

Durocher says the statistics don't back up the government's claim there is a "crisis" on our roads. According to his research, police chases actually cause more deaths in North America than outlaw racers do.

I'm sure Ron is even more disappointed today to learn that the provincial Conservatives have not only jumped on Premier McGuinty's streetracing "crisis" bandwagon but are advocating even more severe action.

Under the Conservatives' proposed law -- which you can be sure will part of their election campaign this fall -- any vehicle caught travelling more than 50 km over the speed limit would be confiscated on the spot for a week.

You have to wonder if that law would apply to certain well-known local speed demons in the legal profession, local industry, and some close family members of police officers who brag about their immunity from tickets. There certainly could be a lot of cars in our local impound lot. And that's not even counting the flood of American speeders on Highway 401 who know they are immune to our current laws . . .

Anyway, here's Ron's letter, which he titled The Myths About Street Racing:

"Recently, there has been much in print and much grandstanding by politicians, Attorney Generals and Police Commisioners about how street racing is an "epidemic."

"Sadly, Joe Public eats it all up since he/she really has no clue and no way of verifying if what the talking heads are saying is true. How do I know this? Well that's because Canada doesn't compile and keep statistics on the causes of accidents, which would include those by street racing.

"As an auto enthusiast and an engineer for an automotive manufacturing company, I take a keen interest in all things automotive. So I decided to do much research on the topic so that I could make my own decisions. With little info available here, I had to turn to the US. By all accounts, street racing is a much more serious problem in the US than it is here. Well after coming up empty for statistics from Transport Canada, I found a wealth of information from the National Highway Safety Administration FARS (Fatality Analysis Accident Reporting System) statistics. Street racing has been included in the FARS database since 1998.

"The statistics, to say the least, were eye opening. Far from being a scourge of the highways, street racing accounts for very few traffic deaths. From 1998-2005, there were 304,236 fatalities on U.S. roads. Of these, a mere 353 (0.12 per cent) were from street racing. For comparative purposes, I also looked at other common causes. Talking on a cellphone, another dangerous driving habit much hyped by police and the media was only slightly less dangerous at 327 deaths (0.11 per cent).

"Bear in mind, millions of Canadians talk on cell phones daily; an act statistically as dangerous as street racing.

"Driving slower than the posted speed limit (429 deaths, 0.14 per cent) accounted for more deaths. Surprisingly, being distracted by something inside the vehicle, such as talking to a passenger, adjusting a mirror, fiddling with a radio or eating caused an eye-opening 38,914 deaths (12.79 per cent).

"Again, this is something plenty of people do every day while driving. Some of the highest trained street drivers in the world, police officers, caused nearly four times the fatalities (1,357, 0.44 per cent) of street racers!

"But these all pale in comparison to drunk driving. Nearly 144,000 people were killed by drunk drivers in the U.S., a staggering 44 per cent of all fatalities. Canada isn't much better. Drunk driving here is responsible for at least 30 per cent of all fatalities, claiming sometimes over 1,000 victims per year.

"By contrast I've been only able to find less than a dozen deaths caused by street racing in Canada for the last two years combined.

"And now there's been talk from the Attorney General about impounding and crushing cars of street racers. Why such a harsh punishment for something that is more or less insignificant statistically? Easy. These street racers are generally young people. And young people have no money to defend themselves in a court of law. So it's easy for the agenda-driven police and politicians to "show" that they are cracking down and being tough on this "epidemic" of street racing.

"Now, let's imagine for a second that the police and politicians changed the laws so that the cars of drunk drivers, the most dangerous group of killers on Canadian roads, were crushed. The outcry would be IMMENSE to say the least. Drunk drivers include people from every walk of life. Judges, teachers, politicians, police, journalists, engineers you name it. And more alarming, these people drive drunk multiple times! Even with suspended licenses.

"The fact is "street racers" are being centered out for political reasons but mainly because they are easy pickings. What a better group to target than a group of people perceived as dangerous drivers that can't defend themselves.

"Don't get me wrong here. Street racing is stupid, irresponsible and downright dangerous. But is it the threat to humanity we have been reading about? Certainly not.

"The average person doesn't know the facts and has no idea where to look for them. They are being lied to and are being fed a plate full of bullshit. (Last month) the Commissioner of the OPP said that we need a fleet of airplanes to combat street racing! Are you kidding me? A fleet of airplanes? And he had the audacity to say that the cost would be "minimal" and that they would pay for themselves by saving tens of thousands of lives!

"A fleet of airplanes that require engine overhauls every 1,500 hours at a cost of \$15,000 each!! And we need these to get a very small number of nut jobs off the road? And guess who will buy into this and be the ones paying for this? Yes . . . the same people who have no idea that this isn't really a problem . . .

Ron Durocher
Harrow

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