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Dealing with highway killers

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David Virgoe was an everyday truck driver before he was brutally killed on Highway 400. Now he has become a cause celebre. Hopefully his senseless death will not be in total vain. Hopefully police and the courts will use new powers to fiercely prosecute road racers in ways that truly deter drivers from endangering innocent people.

Virgoe, who 24 hours earlier had spent a happy Father's Day with his family, died Monday after his truck was side-swiped by a speeding car whose driver used the crowded highway as his own little video game world. Virgoe swerved and managed to steer his truck hard into a ditch, a move which cost him his own life and saved the lives of others.

Anyone who regularly drives our congested highways is familiar with criminal drivers veering in and out of streams of traffic, racing in twos or threes at NASCAR speeds, threatening lives in every vehicle on the road around them.

Infuriating incidents like the latest Highway 400 crash invariably spark cries for a crackdown on such murderous behaviour, and despite perceptions to the contrary, government does respond.

Ontario has just raised maximum fines for road racing to \$10,000, from \$1,000. More importantly, police can now impound cars on the spot as well as suspend licences for a week when racing is suspected. In federal law, dangerous driving causing death carries a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison. If it involves road racing, that goes up to life (25 years).

Of course, tough laws have to be used to be useful. Short of heightening the public danger, police should aggressively seize vehicles from racers before tragedy occurs, not after someone is dead. And the killing of dads such as David Virgoe makes it imperative that courts use sentencing allowances to protect the public and send a message to others.

There is, however, another key piece of the equation: society at large. Many carmakers woo us with base vanity marketing, ads in which speed equals smart and youthful and cool. Why? Because they know we'll respond. We take the bait and buy their road candy.

Do we need a government to stop us from doing that, too?

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