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## Dangerous driving: The outcry grows

**Carmakers should fund campaigns to curb racing and other reckless driving, safety advocate says**

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STAFF REPORTERS

Carmakers should fund campaigns to curb street racing and other forms of reckless driving, says a safety advocate.

And they should stop promoting racing and extreme driving with "nudge, nudge, wink, wink" disclaimers in their own advertising, said Brian Patterson, president of the Ontario Safety League.



ASHLEY HUTCHESON/TORONTO STAR  
Truck driver David Virgoe's wife, Debbie, is comforted by his stepmother at their home in Innisfil. The trucker was killed in a highway crash on Monday.

Patterson suggested carmakers voluntarily commit 5 per cent of what they spend selling their product "into the ongoing education of the public."

He joined the road safety debate in the wake of Monday's crash on Highway 400 near Bradford that killed David Virgoe, whose truck crashed as he avoided racing cars.

Police said Virgoe's actions in avoiding the racers prevented other crashes. That was in keeping with his character, his brother Don said yesterday: "He was a total good guy. That's always who it happens to."

York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge is to deliver a special presentation on street racing and traffic safety today.

The force has been operating a special project to crack down on racers, using a helicopter to spot them. In the past six weeks, York police have charged more than 550 drivers with street racing offences.

One of the most recent occurred last Friday, when a police helicopter spotted a group of cars and motorcycles racing at speeds of up to 200 km/h near Woodbridge, on highways 7 and 400.

Although the drivers split up as police moved in, with the help of the helicopter they were able to arrest and charge the drivers of two cars and four motorcycles.

The two men charged in Virgoe's death appeared in Barrie court yesterday and their case was adjourned until Friday.

Prabhjit Multani, 20, and Nauman Nusrat, 19, remain in custody and were ordered not communicate with each other.

The two are facing charges of dangerous operation of a motor vehicle causing death, criminal negligence causing death, criminal negligence causing death – street racing, criminal negligence causing bodily harm – street racing, and committing a common nuisance.

A third man was charged with dangerous driving.

Speaking at a General Motors plant yesterday, Premier Dalton McGuinty said drivers must be responsible for safety.

"There is no excuse for this kind of tragedy to unfold on Ontario highways. At the end of the day it's one individual who sits behind the wheel of a car. It's like a loaded gun."

The province has just increased the maximum fine for road racing to \$10,000 from \$1,000, and has given police the right to impound cars immediately and suspend drivers' licences for seven days if racing is suspected.

But the safety league's Patterson said automakers must promote safe driving, in the same way that beer and liquor companies warn motorists not to drink and drive.

He said car ads stress speed, and often unsafe and even illegal types of driving. "I don't think you should show a product being used recklessly and put an illegible disclaimer in the bottom that says, 'On a closed track with a professional driver,'" he said.

Consumers themselves have a role to play, he said, in the same way that public pressure changed attitudes and behaviour around drinking and driving.

"I think the Big Five would be responsible enough to step up and realize they are offending the public in how they're advertising their vehicles," Patterson said.

"They should treat it like beer and cigarettes. The manufacturers did step forward – voluntarily or otherwise – to fund appropriate and effective safety messages.

"It would be easy for the government to regulate it," he said, but it would be wiser for the industry to take the initiative.

The carnage on the highways makes changes imperative, he said.

"It took 30 years on seatbelts and impaired (driving) to make that socially unacceptable. We don't have the time with extreme driving.

"We've got to move the bar higher, and move it quickly."

The Ontario Safety League is a not-for-profit organization that has been involved with transportation safety since 1913. It creates public education and safety awareness programs to reduce preventable death and injury.

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*With files from Justin Piercy, Rob Ferguson and Curtis Rush*