

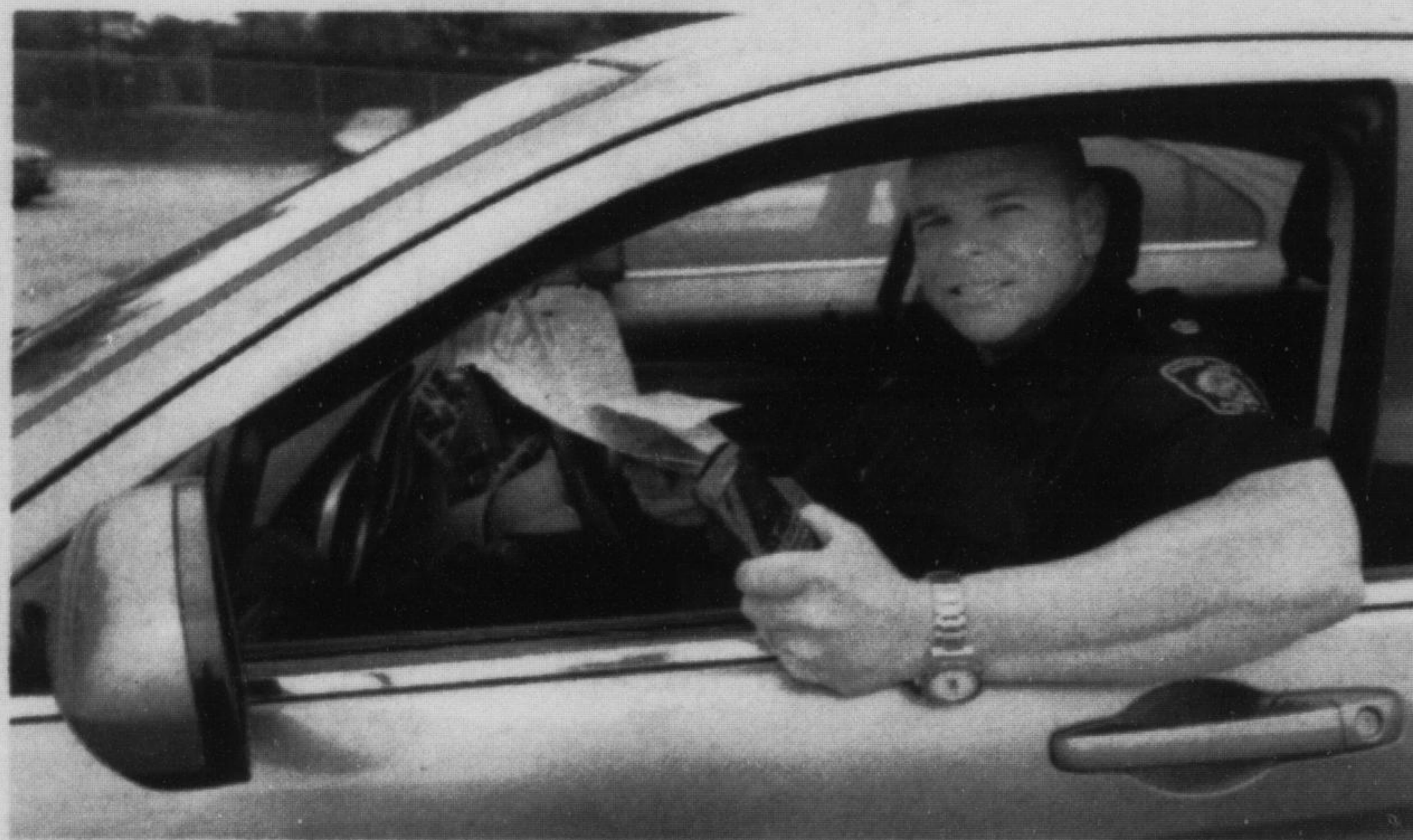
Like giving candy to a kid: traffic tickets in Milton

Cases of distracted driving all too common in town

Halton Regional Police recently wrapped up its Distracted Driving campaign, and as expected, drivers seem to think they're above the law. From April 15 to 19, police issued 835 provincial offence notices — and of that, 807 were in Milton alone. In fact, Milton is seventh on the top-10 locations for distracted driving in the GTA. Earlier this month, Champion reporter Julie Slack spent the morning on traffic patrol with Halton Regional Police Superintendent Chris Perkins to see just how many offences people are committing on the roads, getting a sample of some bad driving habits and cell phone use.



Julie Slack
Reporter



Superintendent Chris Perkins recently offered Champion reporter Julie Slack a first-hand look (via a morning ride-along) at just how common cases of distracted driving are in Milton. *Graham Paine / Canadian Champion (Follow on Twitter @halton_photog)*

A full five minutes passes without seeing a driver texting or talking on a cell phone.

"What's going on here?" says One District (Milton, Halton Hills) Superintendent Chris Perkins. "I'm getting withdrawal."

It's true. Talking and texting drivers, visibly holding their phones in their hand, are so common in Milton that it's almost difficult to find someone who's not violating the law.

In one case on the morning of May 9, a woman was spotted in the middle of the Derry Road West and Ontario Street intersection, waiting to turn left. While she waited, she could be seen with both hands on the cell phone, texting.

"I want talking and texting to become as socially unacceptable as drinking and driving," said Perkins, who said most of the time drivers acknowledge it's wrong when they get stopped by police. "Only then will people get

the message."

The message is simple: distracted drivers get into car accidents. Perkins wants it to stop and he wants to prevent someone from being injured, or worse yet, dying because of that distraction.

"People think it's not going to happen to them — it will happen to some other guy," he said. "Well I got news for you, you are the other guy."

As for people who get a ticket, he said they offer all kinds of excuses for driving with a hand-held phone. "My mother died, my husband has cancer, my daughter's getting married, I just lost my job" are just a sampling of what Perkins has heard.

"The other classic is 'I never use my cell phone when I'm driving,'" he said. "Isn't it a shocker, that just today, this one day I'm out here, they did?"

In another case, a person continued driving for more than a kilometre, while Perkins, lights activated, tailed him, after spotting him

with a phone held up to his ear.

His excuse? "I never use my cell phone when I drive, I know it's dangerous" pointing to a blue tooth device that he wasn't using.

"Another case of 'I never do it except on this day,'" Perkins chuckles, after getting back into the car. "My point made — driver behaviour influenced."

Milton isn't alone in the problem, he noted — distracted drivers are everywhere.

He has theories about why the numbers are so high, suggesting people today are: more aggressive, less courteous and multi-tasking. "All that transcends into driving," said Perkins, who as a motorcycle enthusiast is planning his next vacation around the Isle of Man TT Races. He sees driver error under a microscope on a motorcycle.

"Everyone's living in the instant... it used to be you'd look things up in the Encyclopedia Britannica, nowadays it's Google everything." He says things like licence plate validation stickers are another all-too common occur-

rence.

In a four-hour stretch last week alone, at least four infractions were seen. Two of those included a traffic stop that could have netted violators a \$120 fine. In both cases, drivers offered excuses such as losing the sticker, or not taking the time to get a new one.

"When people come into contact with us — when they're pulled over by an officer — it's a big deal," he said. "They're talking about it with friends and family."

"Traffic enforcement is a double-edged sword for police," Perkins added. "Everyone wants it, except when it affects them. Then they want the verbal warning."

That's what they got on this day, Perkins explaining to them that they "got off" because he has a newspaper reporter in the front-seat of his unmarked cruiser.

"No ticket, but they'll be front and centre in a newspaper article," he quipped.

And to naysayers, who suggest "don't you have something better to do with your time," that answer's also simple — no.

Enforcement is the duty of an assigned traffic officer, so they are expected to engage in enforcement.

"While it is hoped that the community can come together and take ownership of their own driving behaviour, there is clearly a segment of our society that will not heed any amount of advice or requests to slow down and pay attention to their driving," he said. "Charging this type of motorist may be the only way to ensure the safety of us all. We all deserve the right to be free from concerns about drivers who endanger others through their thoughtless and dangerous driving habits. All drivers need to consider how important it is to be safe on our roads."

As far as quotas to fill, that's hogwash.

"There's no quotas to fill... there's no toaster or microwave oven to the officer with the most tickets," he joked, relaying the reaction he received on a day he recently spent at a busy intersection handing out tickets to people turning right on a red light, who didn't

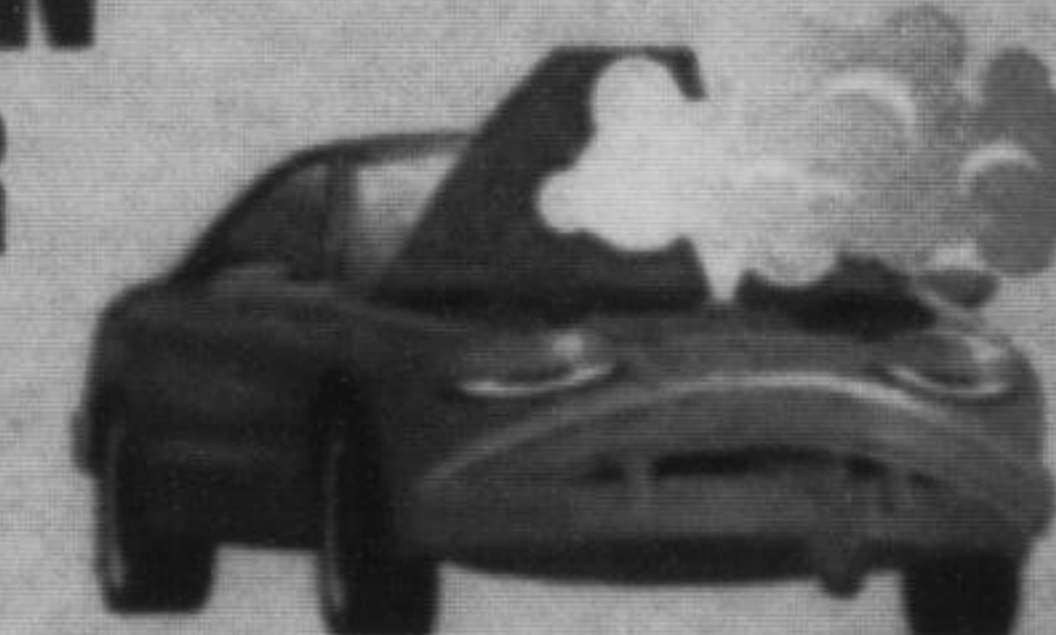
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