

Weekender

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Dragsters drive for speed strip in Markham

By ROBERT DONNELLY

Each weekend, sometimes as many as 150 spectators gather to watch their favorite muscle-cars thunder down Markham roads at three times the posted speed limit.

It's 1:30 a.m. Sunday and two Camaros are lining up side by side on a quarter-mile stretch of Warden Ave south of Major Mackenzie Drive.

There is the wail of 200 horsepower engines, and the rumble of dual exhausts, difficult to ignore—especially if you happen to live in the farmhouse across the road.

There is the acrid smell of burning rubber in the air as drivers—with one foot on the brake and the gas pedal pressed firmly to the metal—warm up the tires to improve traction and acceleration out of the 'hole'.

And there is the stealthy approach of two York Regional Police squad cars.

Before the smoke has a chance to clear, the crowd has already scattered. The police make no attempt to apprehend the felons.

The road warriors re-group at Macho's Burgers on Victoria Park Ave., south of Steeles, to decide upon an alternative location—such as 14th Ave., McCowan Rd., or even Hwy 404—to settle claims as to who has the fastest car.

"Wherever the cops aren't, that's where we go (to race)," says Markham resident Jeff Catlin.

A collector for a Scarborough credit company by day, he hangs up his suit and tie and dons a pair of jeans, a T-shirt, and a jet-black satin jacket at night.

"If you meet me during the day and then you turn around and meet me at night, you might not recognize me," he said.

His machine is a dark purple 1970 Dodge Swinger with mag wheels, rally rims, dual hood scoops, a dual exhaust, and a bored out 340 cubic inch six-cylinder powerplant: sopping up \$8,500 of his hard earned bucks for repairs to the engine and transmission.

"I had the car about two days and then I blew the engine and the tranny, so I completely rebuilt it...it goes pretty good now."

It's 3 a.m., and a group of fine-tuned machines are cruising Steeles Ave. in search of an empty stretch of pavement to lay some rubber. Two friends are itching to find out whose car has the fastest straight-line acceleration.

They start at the lights at McColl Ave. and barrel up McCowan Rd. toward Steeles Ave. at 90 mph. Pete, in his 1972 baby-blue Dodge Duster, surges ahead to a certain victory over his friend, Jeff Catlin, in the purple Dodge Swinger.

The race is over in less than 15 seconds.

Mr. Catlin and his fellow street racers and the fans who crowd the shoulders of the road do share, however, a common interest with many members of the York Regional Police.

They can be counted amongst the more than 2,000 signatories of a petition in favor of eliminating street racing altogether by building a bona-fide drag strip in Markham's industrial area.

One of York Region's finest, who requested anonymity, stated that more than 90 per cent of the officers would support a local drag strip "...just for the fact that you get them off the street."

Law enforcement procedures such as speeding tickets are ineffective, he says, and are useless as deterrents since the racing has continued unabated for years.

Also, a charge of racing, which involves a loss of six points and a hefty fine, is difficult to prove in the courts, he adds.

"The racing paraphernalia alone is not enough to substantiate the charge," he explains. "You almost need a confession."

Just ask Mike if the legal system has curtailed his speedy ways.

Speeding tickets, and an upcoming trial for having illegally wide tires may have the 19-year-old worried enough to change the color of his nitrous-oxide breathing Vega from orange to royal blue to elude police, but "it hasn't slowed him down none".

The apprentice mechanic can still do the quarter-mile in under 13 seconds (closer to 12 if he hits the trigger and fires up the 'nitro

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The sound of peace

Orchard Park Public School students in Stouffville took part in the International Day of Peace rally at the town's bell tower. Visible from left; Steven U'ren, 10, Philip Pridham, 10, Darrin Zeller, 11 and Lisa Wisniewski, 10 pealed the bells and sang a song

for peace. A slight hitch developed and the mechanism in the bell tower didn't work at the appointed time (Tuesday noon), so the students rang their own bells all the more vigorously.

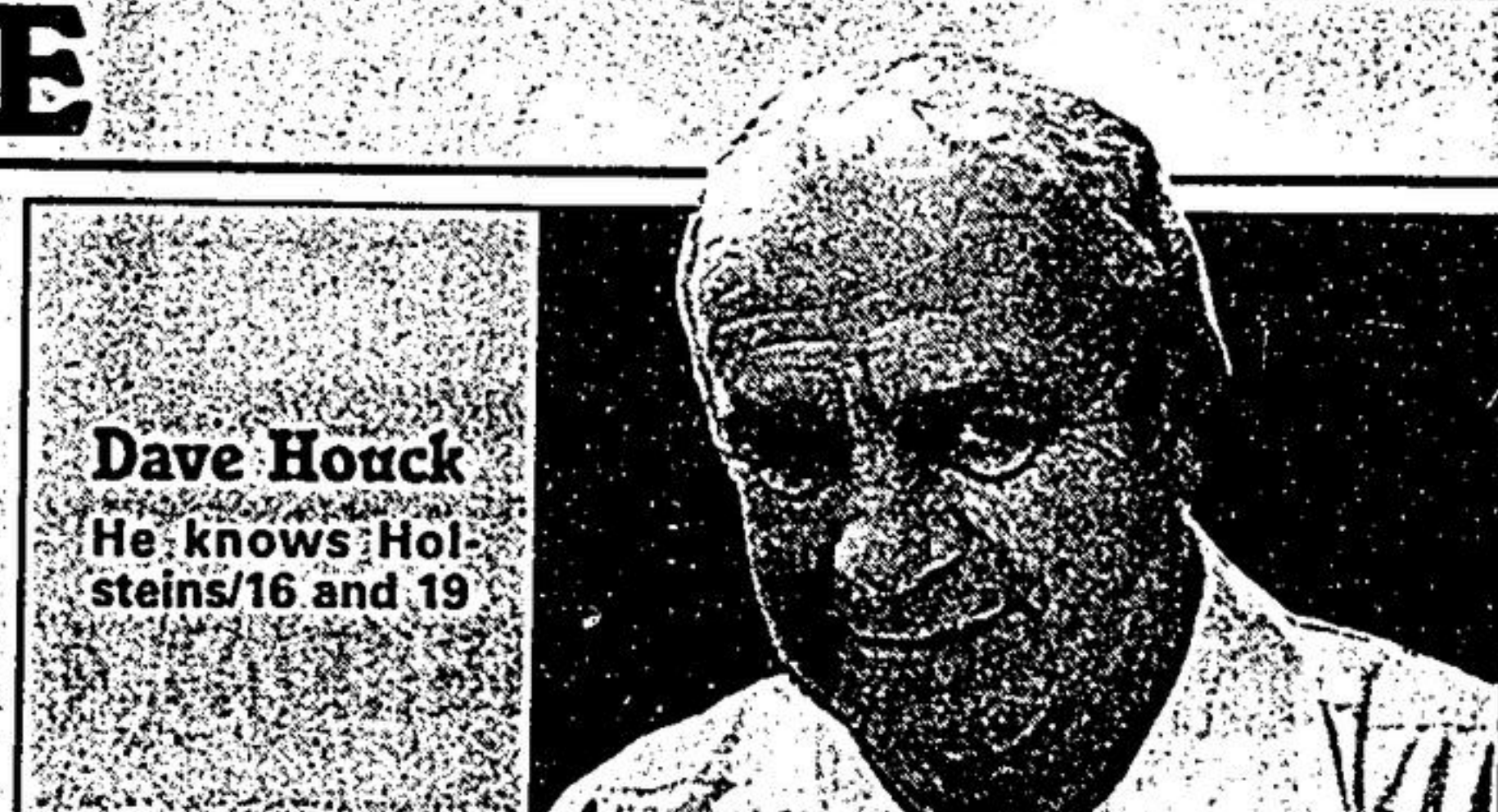
— Sjoerd Witteveen

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