

POLICE: More than 240 charges laid in summertime blitz on bad drivers

Chopper keeps tabs on dragsters

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN
Staff Writer

Drag racers in York Region, savvy enough to monitor police scanners and post cruiser watchers, had a little more trouble avoiding the eye in the sky last weekend.

In a three-night, joint-forces blitz, 565 drag racers were stopped by York, Peel and Ontario Provincial Police officers who laid a total of 243 charges.

And Air One, York/Durham's chopper, continues to play a big part in helping police crack down on the risky, high-speed activity.

"These people are organized and quite sophisticated. They have their spies and their spotters, they monitor what we do," said York Region Police Chief Julian Fantino.

"We had to find more strategic ways to deal with them and the helicopter works."

Officers aloft can see where groups of racers are forming, whether on farm fields, backroads or in deserted industrial plazas.

"They spot activity and are then able to direct the officers on the ground. It's far more effective," Fantino said.

Traffic Staff Sgt. Al Ledger said of the 243 charges, 192 were related to illegal equipment and speeding, 21 were laid under the Environmental Protection Act for modified mufflers or catalytic converters spewing fumes, 18 charges were liquor related and five were for driving while under suspension. Two drivers were charged with impaired operation and three 12-hour suspensions were issued.

Ledger said the helicopter has been a boon for police, especially in trying to nab the late-night racers.

"It lends an extra set of eyes, eyes that are looking from a different vantage point," he said.

"And while we're stopping cars, if they know a helicopter is there, they think twice about engaging us in pursuit."

This is the latest blitz in Fantino's traffic safety initiative, still in full force across the region. As police focus monthly on different aspects of the rotten driver, aggression, speeding, running red lights and stop signs, for example, Fantino said officers are continuing to hammer home the message — and that message is zero tolerance.

In May, York officers laid 1,200 charges for aggressive driving, including speeding, weaving in and out of traffic and tailgating.

In the first three weeks of the July/August residential streets campaign, more than 2,300 drivers were charged with speeding and stop sign infractions and fined between \$30 and \$299 each.

"The main reason we are concentrat-

ing on residential areas now is because it's summer. The children are out of school, playing on the streets, more families are out walking dogs, taking kids to the park," Ledger said.

"We wanted to get out there and be visible."

New statistics show accidents are up 65 per cent; injury accidents up 19 per cent. While Fantino said changes in policy have affected those stats, such as the fact officers are attending every collision now rather than have drivers self-report,

the sheer growth in the region will continue to present a challenge.

"Traffic calming measures like speed humps are just a Band-Aid solution," he said.

"We refer to them as accidents, but 85 per cent of these incidents are totally preventable. They happen because of inappropriate driving, aggression, disobeying the rules of the road. We also have to come to grips with the fact the public has total control over the outcome. Bit by bit people will get the mes-

sage."

Ledger agreed. "York Region, residentially and commercially, is one of the fastest growing regions in Canada. Now we have the 407 through it, people coming off all the 400-series highways and a lot of tourists. We live in a fast-paced society and everyone has to be someplace 10 minutes ago. People have to slow down and be patient. They should know we are out there aggressively enforcing the Highway Traffic Act."

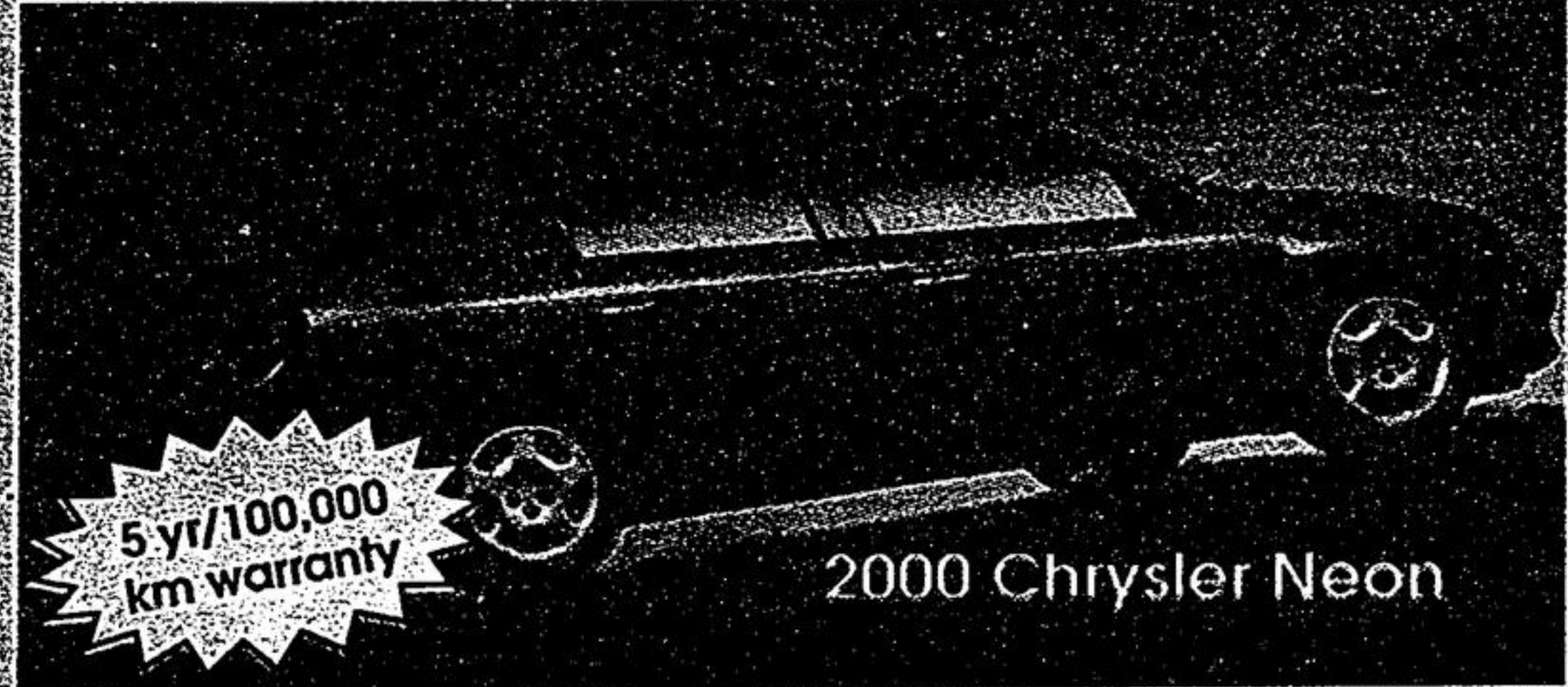
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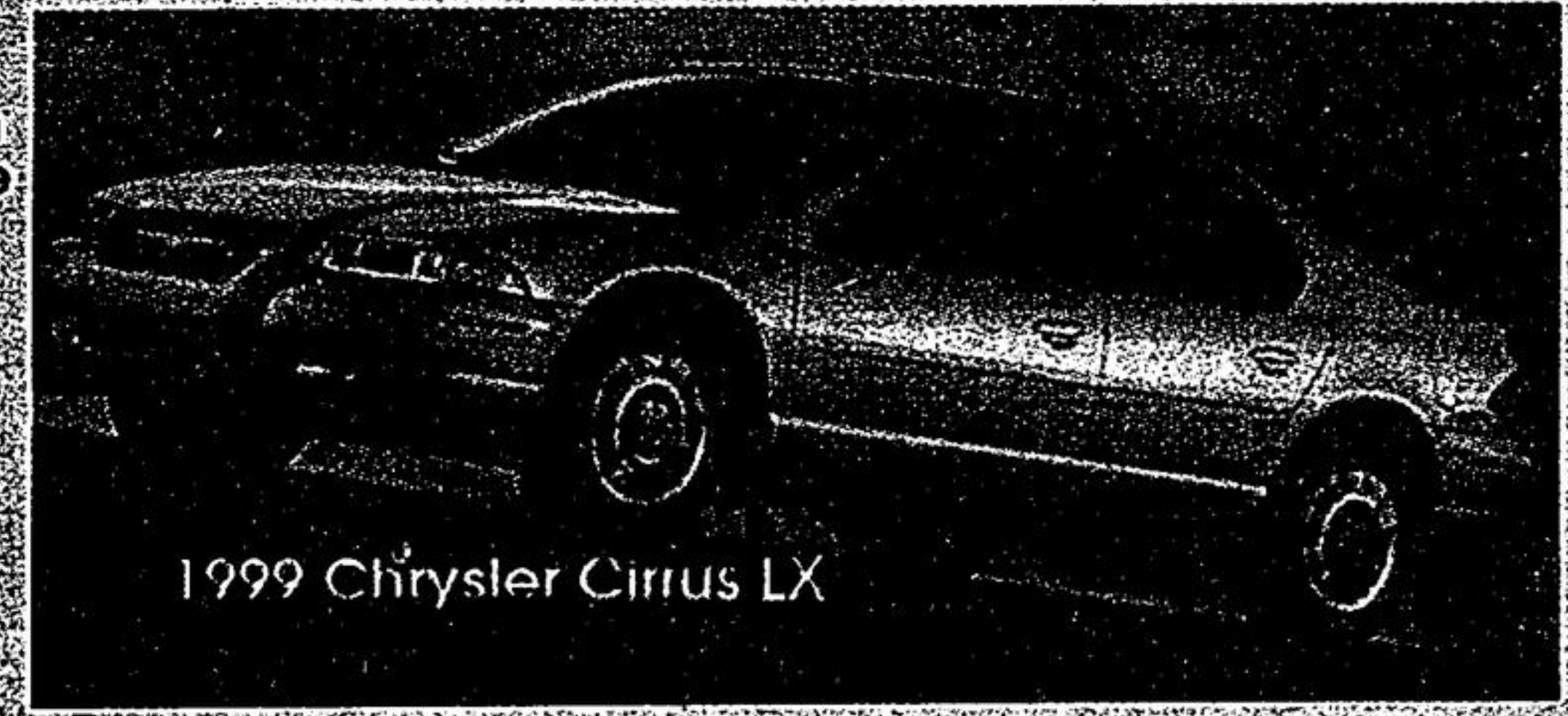
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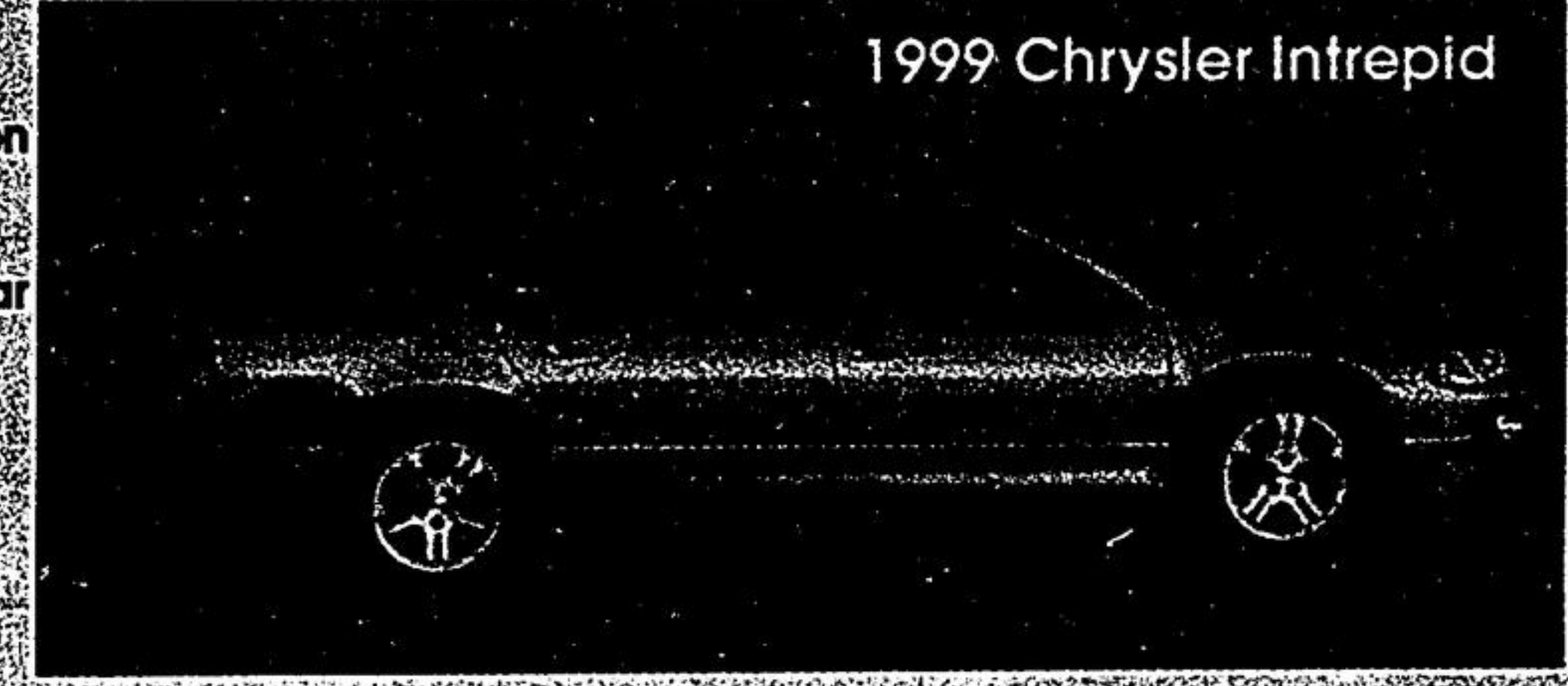


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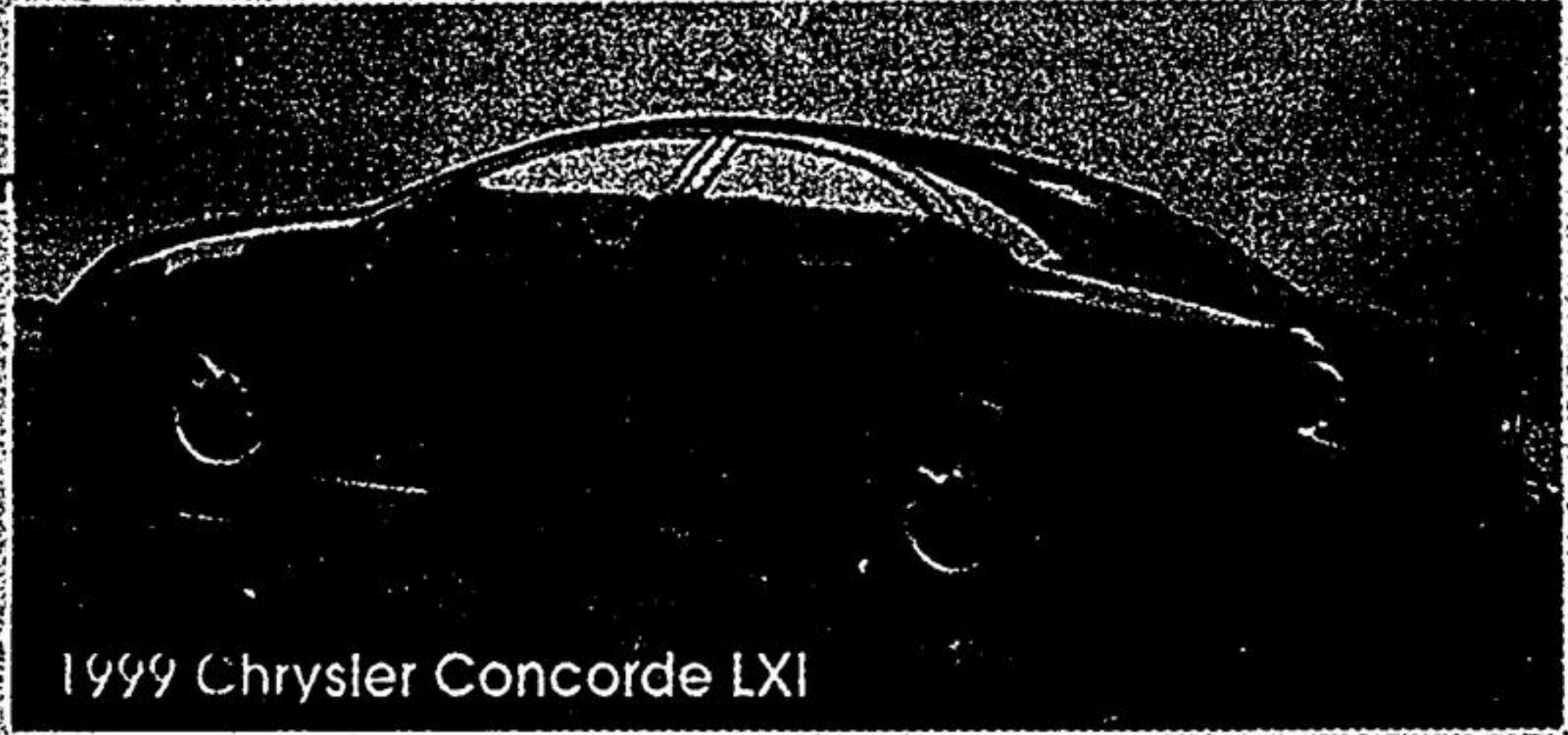


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