

Charges don't shock crossing guard

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"It has lingering consequences, but it should have immediate consequences. People get into cars now and feel that sense of immunity."

The number of driving infractions near schools is too high for York police traffic bureau Sgt. Ed Villamere, who said many of the drivers stopped by police live nearby.

With several officers out for traffic enforcement during the early weeks of school, the number of charges is bound to increase, he said.

The same York police updates indicate more than 8,300 drivers have been charged with speeding, mostly in school zones or near schools, during the past three years of Operation ABC.

"Every one of those speeding tickets is a potential fatality," Mr. Patterson said.

The results of this year's Operation ABC were not available at press time.

Diane Wallenwein stood looking across a half-dozen lanes of traffic as children made their way back to school.

From her spot on the northwest corner of Robinson Street and Hwy. 7 in Markham, Ms Wallenwein, a crossing guard for four years, kept an eye on the traffic as it flowed past St. Patrick Catholic School.

"This morning is lighter than normal," Ms Wallenwein, clad in a fluorescent vest, noted before stepping out and raising her red stop sign up to the eye level of dozens of drivers.

Two women, one with a young child, walked across the highway. Before they made it halfway, a black sedan made a long loping left around them and drove off.

Ms Wallenwein, who grew up in Markham, said she believes a lot of the motorists who drive past St. Patrick, an area posted at 50 km/h and marked with fluorescent and community safety zone signs, are on their way to work and don't have sons or daughters attending the school.

"I've had to pull a few kids back because (drivers) have not stopped; they've gone through the red," she said. "I almost get hit once a day."

She wasn't fazed when told of the 19 people charged across York with failing to stop for a school bus with its lights flashing.

"Is that all?" she asked.

She said she was also not surprised by the number of people charged with speeding during back-to-school enforcement, noting she often sees York police stopping motorists just east of the school.

'IS FIVE MINUTES WORTH IT?'

A similar scene plays out in Aurora.

Barbara Archibald cheerfully called out greetings to young people and parents crossing at Glass and Murray drives Tuesday.

A crossing guard for three years, Ms Archibald, also clad in a reflective vest and holding a stop sign, said she often notices motorists roll through stop signs at the intersection, which is just steps from both Regency Acres Public School and St. Joseph Catholic School. The area is marked with fluorescent school zone signs.

She wasn't surprised by the number of people caught speeding and ignoring school bus lights. She blames drivers' impatience.

"If they kill someone, is five minutes worth it?" she asked. "I don't know what they're thinking."

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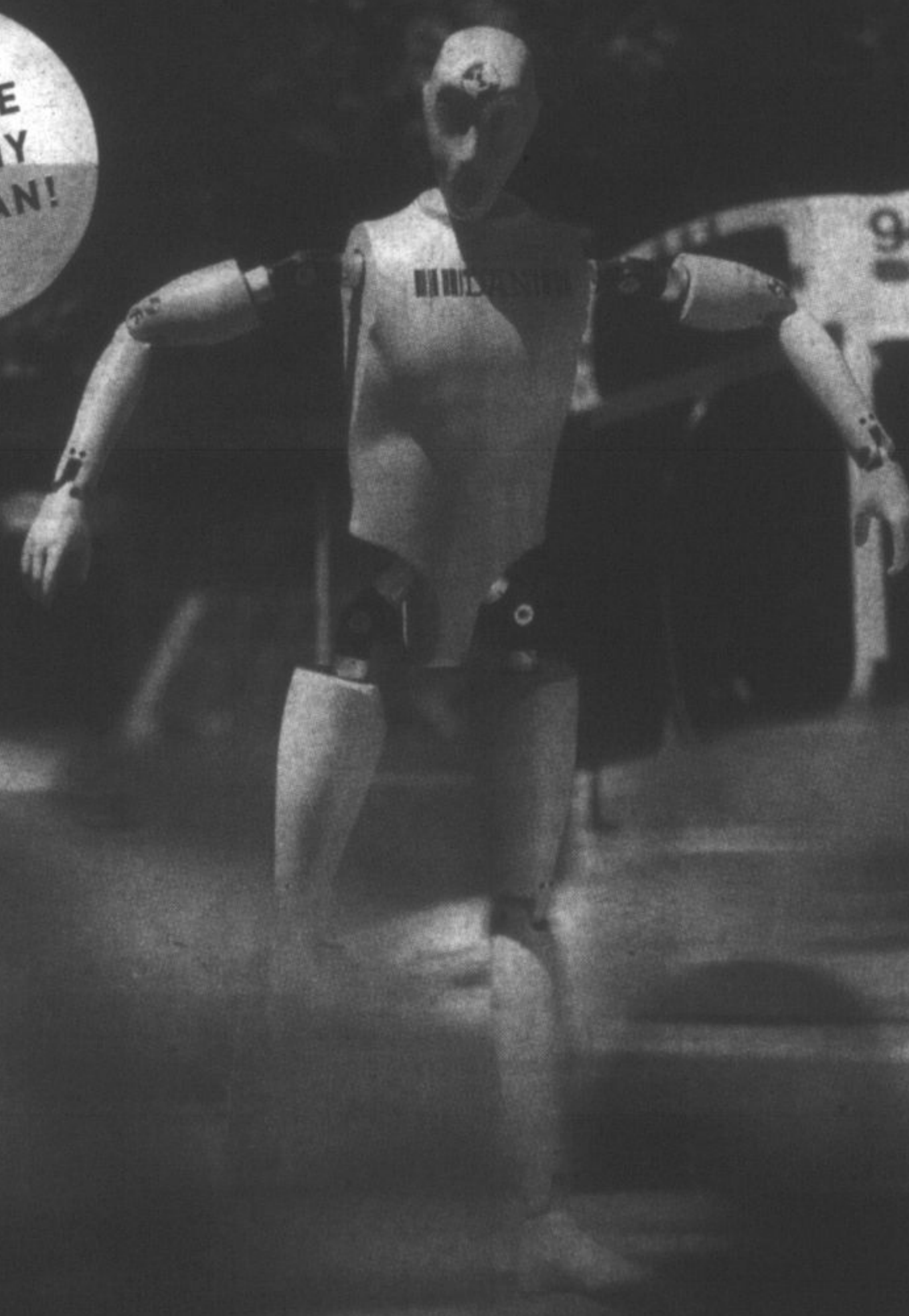
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