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PUBLIC SAFETY: Not just young stunt drivers

Cops cruising for street racers

BY JOE FANTAUZZI
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While the problem of street racing on York Region's roads isn't on the rise, it's important to remain vigilant, traffic officers say.

The comments come as police across the province prepared to launch Project ERASE (Eliminate Racing Activity on Streets Everywhere), a street racing crackdown, last week-end.

There were three street racing charges laid by York Regional Police last year — all in Vaughan. The figures mirrored 2009, when York officers laid one street racing charge in Markham and two more in Vaughan.

Young people in modified vehicles continue to meet at York Region coffee shops and stoplights before putting their vehicles to the test. York police traffic bureau Sgt. James Slykhuis said.

But, he cautioned it's not just two or more vehicle races that can result in street racing penalties — one vehicle speeding from point A to point B against a clock can also form an offence.

COFFEE-SHOP MEETINGS

The behaviour is just as prevalent as it's ever been, he said.

Meanwhile, police patrolling provincial highways that run through York say while there has been a slight drop in the amount of racing the problem continues to exist — and so will police enforcement.

"You can't just drop it, even if the numbers

are down," OPP Sgt. Dave Woodford said.

When laying charges under the provincial legislation, OPP typically see two types of drivers: the older high-speed motorist and the younger stunt driver behind the wheel of a modified vehicle and boosting technology, he added.

157 KM/H CHARGE DISPUTED

Provincial traffic legislation passed in 2007, commonly known as the 50-over law, provides for strict penalties for high-speed and stunt driving. It results in vehicle impoundment and seven-day licence suspension if motorists are caught exceeding the limit by 50 km/h or more.

The 50-over section was upheld by the Ontario Court of Appeals last year after it was challenged by a Halton Region grandmother.

And it's a section with which Newmarket resident Mack Fraser, 20, has recent experience after being pulled over on Hwy. 400 near Canal Road about two weeks ago.

Mr. Fraser denies he was travelling 157 km/h in a 100 km/h zone, as police allege.

"They called it a stunt, which threw me off a bit because I was just trying to get home," he said. "I didn't race my car. It's my dad's car. I'm not going to put other people's lives at risk because I want a thrill."

After he was charged, Mr. Fraser had to put up \$250 for a tow and pay \$75 a day for seven days to cover the cost of storing his vehicle at an impound lot.

He said he does support the law in principal for motorists driving recklessly.



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