

In 1993-95, I did some research on illegal street racing, which was published as an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and then as a longer article for the journal *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*.

Following this, I was contacted by a documentary producer who was interested in doing a story on illegal street racing. On his instigation, I went back to a number of people involved in street racing, and interviewed them about the sport. These include several racers, magazine editors, a manager of a legal dragway, a police officer, and a lawyer. I'm pretty sure the interviews took place in 1994.

The documentary never went ahead, so when I found these notes in a bottom drawer, I thought I might as well post them online. If anyone would like to quote from them (with attribution), please feel free.

Questions are not separately denoted (though it should be pretty clear from the context). Bold text marks out parts of the interviews that I thought at the time were most interesting.

At the end of this PDF, I've appended a few photographs of street racers that were taken by an SMH photographer who accompanied me out to watch some young men smoke their tyres for us in a North Rocks cul-de-sac. Alas, I don't recall the photographer's name, though in the unlikely event that he'd like me to remove the images from this website, I'll certainly do so.

I haven't done any work on street racing since 1995, so there's no point asking me how things have changed since then.

Andrew Leigh
January 2010.

Adrian - I've gone through the interviews, and put in bold the sections which I thought would be worth using in the documentary. Have fun reading it all!

NICK - SPECTATOR ONLY (about 20 y.o)

What do you get out of going to an illegal race?

Adrenalin.

When do you get the adrenalin?

When they're racing.

What about standing around and watching?

Yeah. It's just the atmosphere.

What kinds of people do you hang around with at the races?

They're just mates that you meet and start talking to. Especially people with cars, you start talking to them.

How did you get involved?

With me friends [Richard and Brett].

Has anyone ever tried to arrest you when there's been a police bust?

No. They can't really do that unless you're racing.

You go along to Eastern Creek as well, don't you?

Yeah, as many times as I possibly can go.

Do you prefer that to street racing, or the other way around?

Well it's two different kinds of racing - you've got your legal, and then your outside, which is just a lot of fun.

What's better about the illegal side of racing?

Bigger adrenalin, you're out with your friends. Youse talk. It's for free.

Is it more stifling at Eastern Creek?

Yeah, you can't get right on the action.

Is it dangerous?

You can make it dangerous yourself. If when they're racing you jump out in front of them.

Have you done that?

No, cos I'm not stupid.

But you've seen people leap out and force them to stop?

Yeah. Or if there's another car coming that doesn't know, it could get collected.

Would you be a passenger in a car race?

Yeah.

Wouldn't you be scared about the idea of doing 180 km/h on the wrong side of the road?

Nup. Well, I probably would there, but not now.

If you had kids, would you take them to a race?

No. Cos they don't know really what to do. Like if there's a bust, everybody just runs, and they might just go the opposite way, get collected by a car, fall over.

You were saying earlier that you wanted to join the police force. How long have you wanted to do that for?

About eight years.

How did it make you feel, going along to a big illegal thing like street racing?

Different. You get to see a different type of life.

How many years do you think it'll be before you're working as a police officer?

Two... two and a half... maybe three years.

What would you do if you were a police officer, and you were told to go and break up a street racing meet?

(laughs) Well that's that. That'd be my job and I'd have to do it. I'd break it up and that's it. They shouldn't be there, like I shouldn't be there now.

What sort of ages are the people who attend street races?

I've seen kids - three or four years old, and people over thirty.

Have you ever seen injuries?

Nup, not a thing.

Do you reckon the illegal scene will ever be wiped out?

No. You can't stop it. There will always be a person racing off the lights, two mates going down to a back street, racing someone on the way to work or whatever. It's just the same. We just do it at nights with a bigger crowd.

RICHARD - DRIVER AND SPECTATOR (about 26 y.o)

How did you first get into street racing?

About five years ago, a friend had a rotary, and we heard about Auburn, so we went for a drive down there one night.

They were still meeting there even five years ago?

Yeah, it's been there for about ten years. Maybe even longer. Anyway, we went down there and there were hundreds of people behind the pub with their cars. As we left to go home, the cops pulled us over, and it was the first time I found out what a defect was.

Did you race on your first night?

No, cos we were younger then, and never really spoke up. But we kept going year after year, and probably about three years ago, I got bored down there one night. We moved from place to place. The police would come and shut us down, so we progressed down Parramatta Road towards Sydney. We ended up at Bondi a few times, but we got sick of that because it was too far to travel to meet everybody there. We ended up at Granville, and it was pretty late one night, a lot of people went home and there was a few people left who wanted to race, but they never wanted to speak up enough to ask each other to race, so I went up and asked 'em. And we arranged to go to a certain street. And we went down there. Then it was just week after week, someone would come up to me and say "is there anything to race?" and I'd organise a run here and there. I just got more and more involved, and from there on until now, things just go bigger and better every week.

Where were you meeting then?

Down at the old Nissan on Parramatta Road. Capital Motors, it was.

How did your first race go?

I raced my friend's rotary at Smithfield, at a place called Davis Road. I won the first race. It was the first time, and I was lucky. I drove his car a fair bit - around the streets and that. The first time you race it's a bit scary, y'know, but we had two runs - I won, he won. It was just through mistakes we made in the race. You get a big buzz out of it - shifting the gears, hearing the car rev. It's just a really big thrill to do. I think that's what everyone finds. As the adrenalin starts pumping, it's really good.

You rode a motor bike later, didn't you?

I had a couple of trail bikes, and I ended up getting a road bike because a friend had one. It was just a 250, but was pretty quick on the streets. You'd ask someone for a race down at Auburn, and they'd say "no, a bike's too quick". And you'd say "come on, it's only a 250, how quick can it be?". You'd finally persuade someone, anyway, and I ended up beating everybody I raced except the 11 second drag cars from Eastern Creek.

That'd be good fun.

It was excellent. There was a Gemini which had a V6 motor out of a Commodore, and apparently it was smashing everyone else. And I raced him at the oil refinery in Rosehill, and I beat him down there. That was a good thrill.

Have you ever wanted to be a circuit racing driver?

The dream's always been half there, but you've always got that barrier in the way - money. So it's just getting the money. If everybody had money, they could all race, and do what they want. They open up Eastern Creek to cars and bikes some days, and you can race all day for \$110, which is really good. I might take my car out there when it's finished.

What's your car?

A Datsun 1600, with a turbo motor in it.

How quick will that go?

Probably 13 seconds at Eastern Creek. If it runs a low 13, I'll be happy. But I prefer to race bikes, so early next year, I'll probably get rid of the car and get another motor bike.

What sort of speeds do you get up to?

Roughly 180, almost 200 kilometres at the end of a long street. At Eastern Creek, it varies from 160 to 220 kilometres per hour.

What sorts of people go street racing? Is it mostly mechanics?

Yeah. It's probably about 50 percent mechanics, and 50 percent everybody else - carpenters, boilermakers, shopfitters or whatever. There's a big variety, but you mainly find mechanics.

Are they married or single?

Both. A few years ago, it was a lot of kids who were young, single, outgoing. But as time's gone on, I've noticed a lot more married people have been coming out there. I've seen a few people out there with young kids as well. You get a variety up there.

Is the group getting older?

Yeah. A lot of the oldies like to stay and hang around. Some people are still there from like ten, twenty years ago.

Have you ever seen any women racing there?

Yeah. I've seen it a couple of times. Nothing special, though. She had a Torana, and raced it at Davis Road, Smithfield. There was another one who had a Gemini wagon. They were reasonably quick on the street, y'know, they had a go. There's no sexism thing down there, you know.

Could anybody just turn up and race?

Yeah, anybody. Some race their parents' cars. I doubt the parents know. If it gets late and we're bored, and all the quick cars have finished racing, just for fun we like to race the slower cars to get a good laugh out of it. We don't race for money down there. It's just for fun and reputation. The faster the car, the better reputation you have.

Who are the top cars involved in street racing?

A lot of the top guns, the big fellas, have backed off a bit, cos they're doing more to their car. It's like the younger generation is taking over. Like Pacman, you see. A lot of the four cylinders and turbos are coming out more now, you see. The older generation are still into the V8's.

Do you organise many races during the week?

Yeah. You get some of the ones who don't like to risk their reputation, or don't want to be seen racing for some reason. We've had a few good runs, like normally Thursday nights at Penrith gets pretty busy up there, but it's more hanging out than racing sort of thing. It gets bit boring. Like I said, there's different groups of people that go out to the drags. There's our group, that just like to get down and race. Then you have the yahoos, that just like to go and show their cars. Then you've got the next group that just like to go and do burnouts. Which is just a waste of time, and causes too much trouble. It's noisy, it leaves marks on the road which upset neighbours and the police. In the old days - a year and a half ago - it was just race, race, race, and we hardly had any hassles from the cops. Then again, that was the older generation who are more mature. The younger generation are all on their P's, they're out on their own, they want to be showoffs.

How much do people spend on their cars?

For the top guys, like Pacman and Baz, their cars are probably worth twenty-five thousand dollars. They're big dollar motors, parts from Melbourne, or imported, and stuff like that. What have they done to the cars?

Pacman's is a rotary turbo, built up from scratch by trial and error. They go to Eastern Creek all the time and end up blowing something and have to tow their car home every time. They're pretty unfortunate, but they finally got there - from 13's, to 12's to 10's.

Do they just buy the engines?

They import the engine, and a lot of them build up themselves from the engines, which is a lot cheaper.

Can you just go through what you'd do to an engine to make it quicker?

For a rotary engine, you'd break the motor down into its pieces. If you've got a standard one, you'd take the standard carburettor off, and put fuel injection with the turbo. That's forced induction. Then you port the motor to bigger than standard. Then you have to get your transmission right. You've got to work out whether to run an automatic gearbox, or a manual. Then there's your diff - to get the ratios right for what you want to use it for.

For drag racing, you have to get the ratio right so the amount of revs in the car suits the amount of turns in the diff. It's really good. You need a strong diff to hold the horsepower - the more horsepower, the faster the car is. Then you have to start making everything reliable and strong. Reliability plays a big part. If something breaks every week, it's just going to cost you hundreds of dollars to fix. That's what Pacman went through.

In Baz's case, he used to own a big Broughan V8. He actually drilled bits and pieces out of the car to make it lighter, and cut away parts of the internal car for weight. He used to

have a 400 Chev (that's a big V8 motor), and he had nitrous on it (which is a fuel booster). Then he had a big diff with the good ratios on it, and he had an automatic gearbox. See normally with turbo four cylinders and rotaries, you run a manual because it's a smaller car, and you get it out of the mark better. But being a V8 - bigger car, bigger motor, you need the automatic so it doesn't spin.

I've got a friend who's got a 350 Chev in a Torana. His motor only owes him fifteen thousand dollars. He's spent a fortune on his car - like it probably owes him thirty thousand dollars, and it's only a Torana. Everyone's got their own personal opinion about what they want to own and drive, but that's a lot of money.

What kinds of safety modifications are made?

Well, at those speeds, a lot of people like to put in a roll cage. You'd have a six-point roll cage which secures through the whole car. That means if you do roll it, the car won't crumple around your head or anything. A lot of people like to add a racing harness, which means that instead of the single seatbelt strap, you have six or four straps that hold you in. So if you do have an accident, you're not going nowhere. You're staying bolted into that seat. You're more secure than a standard car, but for some reason, the police like to defect that. Roll cages and safety harnesses must be engineered, and you've gotta have an engineering certificate for them. The police are pretty harsh on that rule.

What crashes have you heard of?

Well, it's only rumour from rumour. I think stories get added to as they go through the years. We've actually seen the aftermath of one of our friends. He didn't know where the road went, and went straight through a fence and ended up in a creek, and smashed his Commodore up really bad.

I've heard of three others - one at Davis Road, Smithfield, where an EH Holden did a burnout, lost it and hit a pole. Then there was another from drag racing where a guy went over a hill, and a car was coming the other way. He was still on the wrong side of the road, and went across and hit a pole. Then there was Pacman, with his original car. He was doing a big burnout (he had a big turbo motor in the car), and he lost it and ended up in hospital. The car was written off, and he had to pay for the pole that he broke.

Have you ever heard of anyone being killed while drag racing?

No. There's been times when idiots have gone crazy and started doing helicopters and donuts near the crowd, which is utterly crazy. One day it will cause an injury from stupidity like that.

Do you get worried about the dangers of drag racing?

Yeah, well there's always that worry there when you have to be that little bit self-conscious of other people. It's only gonna take one accident, then everybody's gonna back off and slow down, which will be good. I sorta keep my distance when they start getting stupid, just in case the guy runs into trouble in the car and can't pull it back in, so I've got that chance to move away. You've always gotta watch other people.

What do your family think of it? Do they know you go along to street races?

Yeah. A lot of our parents do, and I think they sort of agree with it more than going out and spending money on alcohol and getting drunk, where you've got nothing to show. See, when you build a car or a motor bike, you put a lot of time, money and effort into it, and you've got something to show and prove what you've done to everybody, not just yourself. Your pride is good, to say you've brought this car down here, to show it and race it. But you don't have to race - nobody makes anyone else race down there. Basically, my parents say "so long as you're careful, don't get in trouble with the police, we're happy with you".

Would you take your parents down there?

One time I told my parents to go down to Bondi, so they could see me with all my friends. We bumped into them down there, and they seen all the cars. It was a big thrill for them, it was like "jeez, is this what you get up to". We've also videotaped it and shown our parents what goes on. We're not shy of it - we do what we do, if we get caught, we get caught - and have to pay the consequences of it. I've paid almost \$2000 in police fines, and unfortunately that's my mistake for being silly.

How much do others pay in fines?

A friend of mine had a turbo Gemini, and he had two red defects (a red defect means the car is not to be driven off the spot). He had the red on it, and he took it off the window (which is a \$2000 fine if you get caught), and he still drove the car. Anyway, he got pulled

over again exactly a week later, and he got another red defect on it. He pulled the sticker off again, drove the car home, and that was it. Those two red defects would've cost him \$10 000 for what he got defected on - pollution level, the car wasn't engineered, the safety standards didn't comply - so he was up for a lot of money, and wanted to sell the car because he couldn't pay for the defects. That's the thing. If you want the car, you've gotta expect the unexpected.

Can you describe what happens when the police raid a street race?

The procedure normally is every man for himself. Like if we had a scanner, we'd hear the police coming, and that's a head start for us to get away. So we'd get away scot-free. But if we're there and the police come unexpectedly and we're surprised, it's run for your car and get out of there as quick as you can before you get defected.

Easter Sunday is a very big meeting. Everybody from everywhere comes down to the meets on Easter Sundays. Sometimes you get a couple of thousand people - hundreds of cars just driving everywhere, from place to place. Sometimes there's that many cars that want to race, we just can't end up racing, because the police arrive and we've got to go. So we just drive around until we lose the 50 percent that are just there to watch. The streets around Capital Motors and Auburn McDonalds were full. Honest to God. It's just something you'd have to see to believe.

Two years ago, on Easter Sunday we were at Davis Road and the police turned up, so we made a bolt for the cars. I ran into a fella. We were both running flat out and it was just by accident. I reached down to pick him up, and he said "naah, don't worry about it, just go". I was polite enough to help him up, but like I said, it's every man for himself to get in your car and get out. A lot of people come close to hitting each other because they're in a panic, which can be quite dangerous. We've had to hide from the cops in bushes some nights - just lock our cars up and run down the road and hide in bushes so we don't get busted.

Do they ever do anything to the cars?

Some of the cars have been locked up - chains put around them, ready to be towed away. Then at the last moment someone runs out and says "I own the car, I own up". So then they take the chains off and they still get a defect. I think that upsets the police a lot more.

Does street racing make you a fast driver?

I think drag racing makes you more cautious. You drive on the street like a respectable driver, except for the dickheads who want to drive like idiots and endanger everyone. You said the other day that drag racing isn't just something people do at an organised meet. Can you go over that again?

You don't realise that every day of your life, you probably end up racing someone off a set of lights, whether it's an old mother or father or whatever. You just don't realise it. Someone will take off a bit quicker than someone else and they'll look at each other, trying to be a bit quicker than one another. You don't realise it, but if you look for it, you notice it.

Should street racing ever be legalised?

The police shouldn't be as strict. Where we go and race isn't harmful 90 percent of the time. Sometimes where they race is out of the question - they should have more sense and not go there. But the police should understand that where we go is industrial areas where there's no public. That's the whole idea - it's not like we race on the main road outside someone's house.

What do you see as the future for street racing? Will gambling be introduced?

The gambling bit was already attempted, but every time someone mentions money, we say "go away, we're not interested". Because we don't find racing for money is any good. It only causes trouble. You're racing for a name and a reputation.

As for the future, I see racing becoming bigger and better. I honestly do. It has its times when it slows down for a while - when everybody takes their car off the road to do more work on it. But as it comes closer to the Summernats down in Canberra in late-December, that entices people to get ready and be more open, and get their cars out.

Winter's the best time for racing - cars run better in the cold. I think that's why everyone comes out then. But after the Summernats, there's illegal street racing all over Australia - it's just unbelievable.

You tell people about it, and they say "oh - street racing's bad, isn't it?". But if you actually go out, and we have a good night, where we just race, and no idiots do burnouts and stuff, you think "I've spent \$20 on drink or food or petrol". But if you go to a club, you pay \$10 entry fee, and you might spend \$40 on drink. And what have you got to show? You got pissed. But if you go down to the drag races, you've got memories. It's like a big exhibition thing. So I think drag racing in the future will get bigger - slowly but surely. But Eastern Creek should have an extra meeting a month, because everyone just can't get in on one meet. And the others have to get turned away, you know.

OK Richard - that's all my questions, but do you have any other comments on street racing?

It's a different kind of life out there from what you do on a Sunday night at home - watching a movie or whatever. It's a whole different world. If you're really into it [driving], or just want to see it, it's good to just see what goes on.

BRETT - Racer and spectator - Mechanic - about 26 y.o

When did you first get into street racing?

About four years ago.

What got you involved?

Just my mates, really. I didn't like hanging around pubs, and I was out for a drive one night when I ran into a group of people at Auburn McDonalds.

Do you know where they met before that?

Out at Lansvale, at a place called Jillian's Diner. That got closed down.

Was it just as big then as it is now?

No, it was a lot bigger then.

How many people were there then?

When I first started, there were at least 100 cars there every night of the weekend.

Were the racers younger then?

No, there weren't as many young people as there are now. Most of the people were in their early to mid-20s.

What sorts of cars were they racing then?

Holdens, Falcons and Toranas - that sort of thing.

...

What are the Summernats [Summer Nationals in Canberra, held between Christmas and New Year's Day each year] like?

At the Summernats, there are three kinds of people. There's people that go down for the car show - to enter a car, there's people who go down to look at the show and for a party, and there's the people who go down for the street racing. There's a lot of people there for the street racing.

...

Do you often race V8's against rotaries?

It used to happen, but these days it's more often just rotary against rotary, or V8 against V8

...

What people know that you race? Do your family know?

Yeah. I know a lot of people whose families know.

Your friends at work?

Yeah, a couple of them.

Who wouldn't you tell?

My boss.

Have you ever seen anyone get caught in the act of street racing?

Yeah, I have actually. But they've never been charged with racing itself.

How did the police catch them?

Just a radar at the end of the race. But I dunno if it's hard to prove they were street racing, cos I know it's a pretty major charge. But I've seen people done for speeding normally.

...

Is it dangerous to start the race - standing between the cars as they're starting off?

I've never heard of anyone getting hurt doing it. It might be dangerous, though. There's a metre in between the cars.

What kinds of people do you get at street races?

A lot of mechanics, but a big range too - there's carpenters, carpenters, plumbers, electricians - mostly people with trades, though.

Does everybody want to race at some stage?

Yeah.

Are you working on a car at the moment?

At the moment I'm between cars, actually.

Are you planning to get another?

Yeah. Probably another Mazda, purely for drag racing.

What modifications will you make to it?

I'll turbocharge it, and put a bigger motor and gearbox in it.

How much will you spend all up?

Probably ten grand. I can see at least seven going into the motor alone. The gearbox and clutch will cost at least a grand.

How quick are you hoping the car will go?

I'm hoping to build a ten second car.

You'll have to do a lot to it to get it that quick, won't you?

Yeah. To get a car quick, you have to do the whole package. You can have a motor that's capable of doing ten seconds, but if the gearbox, suspension, diff, tyres aren't up to it, the car will never do it.

Well to finish off, what do you see as the future for street racing?

The way the police are at the moment, it's cutting down a lot on what's going on, by getting a lot of cars off the road with defects and stuff. A lot of people who aren't real serious about it might get their cars defected once or twice and that's it - they won't come down again. But other people don't care - they just want to race.

I can still see it going on eventually. See, sometimes it's real small for a while, then it'll just come back big again. It all depends. See, there could be a lot of people now just building up cars that I don't know about, or there could be a lot of people selling their cars cos they've had enough of it.

ROCKY (Others call him Pacman) - Runs Pac Performance with his brother George - 25 y.o - driver & runs a workshop which works exclusively on high performance cars, some of which street race

How long have you been street racing?

About five years.

What initially got you into it?

Well, you build a car, and you want to see how good it really is, instead of listening to bullshit. You race somebody else [on the street], or you go down the track and you race it.

What was your first car?

An RX3.

Were you the first one to race the car?

Yep.

Did you win your first race?

Well, I don't think the car lost very many races. It won its first race at the track, and I don't think it lost very many races on the street.

How quick was it?

Back then, the best it ran was a 9.6 at Oran Park's long track.

What did you do to the car to get it like that?

I put a manual [gearbox] in it, and did the engine and running gear.

Did you buy the engine?

No, I built it myself.

How much did it cost you?

Probably about \$4000 back then.

And what about the car all up?

Probably about the same was spent on the car in paint, wheels and suspension.

One of the criticisms of street racing is often that when people spend a lot on performance, they don't spend much on braking. What did you do to the brakes?

Actually, we built the braking system of the car first.

So it was pretty safe as well.

Definitely. It used to stop on a dime.

And is that car still running?

No. About this time a year ago, it got written off.

What happened?

Aaaah. Accident.

At a race?

No. It was just involved in a car accident and got written off. [The real story is that he was doing a burnout at a race, lost control and hit a light pole - see Richard's interview]

OK. Well, what do you do at Pac Performance?

We build engines and set up cars for the track. We do a lot of modifications to diffs, gearboxes, motors.

Is it mainly for street racers?

It's mainly for drag racers. Whether they go to the street or not... Everybody wants to go to the track, but a lot of them end up finding it easier to go to the street than to the track. Does it worry you that you're working on cars that might be racing on the street, and could be a big danger to the people driving them?

Well, does a gunsmith get worried when he sells a bloke a gun? He sells it with the intention that the bloke's gonna use it in the proper way. Whether he goes out and kills something with it is something he's got no control over. I'm in much the same position. I build the car with the intention of the car being driven in a sensible manner, y'know.

What they do with it, though, I have no control over.

Do you encourage people to spend much on safety gear?

Definitely.

When did Eastern Creek get going?

About three years ago, now. Up until three years ago, there wasn't a proper quarter mile track in Sydney.

So how many people would you have had out on the track back then?

The street scene is as large today as it was back then. That's a definite. I think now it's maybe even a little bit bigger. And it shouldn't be like that, but everybody's gone underground a little bit more than they used to be.

What have you got against the street scene?

It's unsafe, it's inaccurate, there's too much bullshit, the coppers.

What sort of bullshit?

Well, if two people race, a lot of times there's no finish line, a lot of times one guy starts before the other. It's not a fair indication of whose car is quicker.

But what about the problem that you just don't have enough chances to race at Eastern Creek?

Well, that's probably why we are out on the street, because at the moment it's a month between meetings at Eastern Creek (in the winter season that is). In the summer season it does get a bit better - Oran Park has a couple of night meets, so it becomes a meet every two weeks. Even though they are having these meets, one - the cost involved might be a little bit higher for some, but racing isn't a cheap sport, I suppose. But there's too much delay, it's not on regularly enough. It needs to be on more regularly - something like they do in Calder Park in Victoria where they have runs every Friday night. If they can do it, I don't see why we can't. It might put a lot of cops out of work if they got the kids off the streets I suppose. Maybe it's just the government's ploy - then there'd be no more revenue.

How much would you have paid all up?

In fines and defects over the years? I'd say about \$5000.

Have you lost your licence at all?

Four times.

Some other street racers would be like that too, wouldn't they?

I'd say so. I'm probably one of the luckier ones.

(laughter)

That's the truth though. You might get fined for a noisy car, or defected for this, or fined for that. A lot of the time it's self inflicted, but sometimes the police just have a general view, and they don't distinguish between the fair dinkum streeter and the hooligan. They just put everybody in one category and go for it.

So what is the difference between the hooligans and the fair dinkum street racers?

The fair dinkum racer races at the track. The hooligan just goes out on the street and does what he wants, and doesn't worry about anybody's safety, doesn't worry about his own safety, and usually has a shitty car anyway.

So what happens when the police raid a race. When they arrive, what do you see?

You see the blue lights, and everybody just goes everywhere.

Is it dangerous when everybody's just charging off like that?

Yeah. I've seen sometimes when accidents occur from people trying to get away too quick.

That's happened a couple of times.

What sort of people are street racers?

Well I'm a mechanical engineer, and there's a lot of educated people out there, uneducated people out there.

So it's basically a big range of people.

Yeah, well a couple of people who go out with us - one of them's a dentist, the other one's an optometrist.

Do they race as well?

No, but I'd say if they had a chance they probably would.

Yeah. Do you know any women that race?

Not at the moment. About two years back there used to be, but they've sorta been out of the picture for a while.

Do you reckon a lot of the people who street race want to be circuit racers?

I don't think they want to be a race driver. I think it's more like that they want to be king, they want to be the quickest. I don't really think they want to be a race driver, they just want to be recognised for what they've got.

So who are the quick ones at the moment?

Well the quickest ones don't race on the street, but from Eastern Creek times [in order of performance], there are two big block Capris - Dean Sweeney and Bruce Forsyth, there's a big block Torana - Mark Hayes from Mark's Auto Electrical. Then there's a Cortina - that's 2COOL Cortina. Then there's us. They're all ten second cars. Then there's a couple of eleven second cars. But all those people - I don't think you'd see them having a street race. They might cruise on the weekend, cos they like driving their car. And they'd probably show up to where the race was, but they wouldn't race, cos they've got nothing to prove. I know I don't, and they probably feel the same way, because they're at every Eastern Creek meeting or Oran Park meeting, and they're doing times over and over again.

So how are you trying to get people off the street and onto the track?

Well we try and be at as many meetings at the track as possible. If we are asked for races, we say "wait until the track, y'know".

So when was the last time you had a street race?

Me? Probably about a year ago. [I'm pretty sure he's lying]

Is there more adrenalin, is it more illicit when you're racing on the street?

Definitely. Just the fact that it's illegal. Some people get a buzz from just being a step ahead of the law. When we do organise to go for street runs, we are ahead of the law, y'know. Well, until we get caught.

So do you think more Eastern Creek meets should be happening?

Yeah. The more Eastern Creek meets we get, the better.

What do you think the future of street racing is? Will police wipe it out eventually?

No. Police will never be able to wipe it out. That's a fact. People are getting more and more sophisticated with the way they're approaching their racing. There's good communication between drivers now, they've got scanners. They're usually a step ahead. I don't think the cops will be able to get rid of it. Mate, I've spoken to people who are in their 40s and 50s now, and remember all the place where they raced. It just comes and goes, y'know, and the places haven't really changed over the years. They just concentrate on one period for a time, then they move over to another. The cops have been trying to stop it for ages, and they haven't been able to.

How long has street drag racing been alive in Sydney?

Forty years. I know people in their 50s who'll tell you where they raced back then - at the brikkies, in Carter Street.

Do you have any other comments on street drag racing?

Drag racing is probably one of the biggest motor sports in Australia, if not the biggest. It definitely is the best attended.

SAM - Racer & Mechanic - 20 y.o

You're a bit of a fan of the track, rather than the street, aren't you?

Yeah. I used to see them down at the track and think that I wouldn't mind one of these. You see the noise, the blood rush. And when you do it, you just can't help it when people ask you if you want a race. You do your best, you say "naah, I'll race you down the track". But some people just have some sorta phobia - they don't want to go to the track in case their car doesn't perform as well as they think it should. So then you have to race them on the street.

How quick is your car?

It runs about a low 12 at Eastern Creek.

Just compare that to other cars for me. Say if you got a standard V8 Commodore, how fast would that do a quarter mile?

About 14 or 15 seconds.

What about a standard V6 Commodore?

About 16 or 17 seconds. [ROCKY WOULD PROBABLY BE A BETTER ONE TO GET THESE STATS FROM]

Do you get worried about the danger of racing on the street?

Of course. For the more professional guys at Eastern Creek, racing on the street is like a last resort. They do their best to avoid it for that very reason - the car that you're up against may not even hold together - it might be a wreck. You wonder what he's got to hide - why he doesn't take it down to the track. But the way this thing works, some people just refuse to go, and there's a lot of reputation at stake. So if they don't want to meet you at the track, you say "alright, alright, I'll do it". But you'd rather race them at the track for safety... and so you don't get caught, I suppose.

Would you take your family out to a race at Eastern Creek?

Yeah, sure.

What about to a street race?

Naah. I doubt it.

How much have you spent on your car so far?

About \$10000.

Where do you get the money?

Working here and there, I suppose.

Is all your money in the car?

Naah. But a lot of people are like that - everything they get goes straight into the car. But I wouldn't say I'm one of those.

How long do you reckon you'll stay street racing?

I suppose you grow out of it, but I don't know. It's hard to predict. I notice that the more professional you become, the less you want to race on the street. You want to get more involved in the official side of things. When you first start, it's everything, everything, everything, but the older you get the more you realise that this isn't right. The safety isn't there, the professionalism isn't there. And then you want to just keep going to the actual track more. You don't race on the street that often, and like I haven't raced on the street for about one and a half, maybe two months.

Do some people take it pretty seriously?

Some do. The more professional ones don't have anything to prove to others because they've got the real statistics to boast about. Others take it really seriously. But they're probably the ones that have put everything at stake like I was telling you. They've put all their money into the cars.

GERARD NORSA - Editor of National Drag Racer magazine

What are your views of street racing?

Firstly, I'd like to say that all these people are doing is racing their cars on the street. It's not drag racing. Drag racing is a safe, legal sport which is undertaken in a controlled environment with a set of regulations which are almost universal around the world.

What factors lead to people racing on the street rather than on the track?

I guess the major thing is that people build these cars, and they need an outlet to use them, and street meetings at Eastern Creek possibly only come around once a month - where people can race their street cars against other enthusiasts. Probably because they have so much money invested in these street cars, they need an outlet to use them. It's a bit like flexing your muscles on the beach to attract the girls - the biggest and fastest cars like to flex their muscles and attract the girls, or to be better than the other bloke on the street. It's a form of one-upmanship, I guess - "my car's better than your car; my Dad can beat up your Dad" sorta situation.

The reason for it is basically the popularity of performance enhanced motor vehicles, and secondly just having somewhere to go out and use these machines.

Do a lot of the people who race on the streets then race at Eastern Creek as well?

I think you would find that it would be a very brave ANDRA [Australian National Drag Racing Association] member who would race on the street for two reasons. One, they would risk losing their competition licence if they were caught doing such a thing, and secondly, they can relieve those frustrations at drag racing meetings, rather than having to do it on the street. I mean, most of these guys get their kicks at competition race meetings, so they don't need the illegal street stuff to fulfil their needs. [This is only true of people at the top levels. It definitely doesn't apply to people at the type of Friday night meeting we went to.]

Will street racing ever get to the point where it's drawing competitors away from Eastern Creek?

I don't think so. I think that the drag racing community have a loyalty that makes them a very close-knit bunch of people, and once you get into that, you're not going to give that away to go racing on the street. I mean, most of the people who are racing in these sorts of events are specialist high-performance enthusiasts, and a lot of these guys have specialised knowledge. So people find that once they start going to organised drag meetings, they're learning a lot more about their cars, and if it's something they really enjoy, why would they risk that by racing on the street?

A lot of the time, it's the other way around. I guy will go racing on the street, and then realise that he really enjoys it, so he thinks "OK, I'll do it seriously and legally". But no, I would think there would be very little fallout from drag racing back to the street scene.

Is there an illicit attraction that street racing holds?

I don't know, I've never really done it. But I'm sure it would be rather thrilling, if you're into that sort of thing, to try and beat the law. But really, these cars are worth too much to risk in the sort of environment these days. Just an engine can cost anything up to thirty or forty thousand dollars, and it's too much to risk on the street. It's very, very specialised equipment, and as I say, a lot of these people end up graduating to the drag racing scene, rather than the other way around.

Do you think you'll ever be able to wipe out the illegal scene?

No, I can't imagine it ever being wiped out. It could certainly be discouraged more than it is. How would you do that?

Generally by making the drag meets more attractive. The street meets should be more frequent and more attractive. At Eastern Creek, there's only a certain number of passes which you can logistically run at a drag strip, and they've worked it out that the maximum number they can accept is 190 to 200 - I'm not sure of the exact figure. Now they could fill those 200 places probably two nights a week. So popular are the street meets at Eastern Creek that the racers have been known to camp out the night before an event, just to ensure that they get a spot in that 200. After that, they just have to close the gates, because they can't logistically handle more racers than that in the frame that they're allowed. So to encourage it, you would either have to increase the frequency or the attractiveness - maybe make it cheaper, though I don't think it's that expensive. The frequency's probably the main thing, so that more people can get a chance to do it.

What sort of role do you think your magazine plays? Do you think in reading a magazine like National Drag Racer, people will get the idea of building a car to race on the street, as distinct from a car to race legally?

Through the images in our magazine, we may encourage people to build a high performance car, but certainly nothing in our editorial would ever encourage them to do anything but race it on the raceway. There's two different sorts of high performance magazines. There's the ones that are for street machiners, and the ones that are specifically for drag racers. We don't circulate nearly

as many as say a magazine like Street Machine, which goes directly to street machine enthusiasts, who don't necessarily race their vehicles. Maybe some of the street magazines, where they show guys doing burnouts on the cover and things like that...

Do you see more of a danger with magazines like that?

Yeah. But definitely not with the race magazines. And our readership numbers suggest that only people who are involved in the sport read out magazine. But with the high performance magazines - and if you go to your newsagent, you'll see there's a big range of them - yes, I think some of them contribute to the problem by having pictures on the cover of guys doing burnouts and stuff.

So should there be a legal limit on magazines glamorising street activities?

No. You can't teach an old monkey new tricks, and if a guy wants to be a fool on the street, he's gonna do it, no matter what you tell him. I mean, everybody did scripture and bible classes at school, but not everybody has Christian morals, so as much as you can try and encourage these guys, people will go out and do what they want anyway. I don't think the magazines need to be controlled in any way, but certainly if these people want to go out and race their cars on the street, i don't think what they read in magazines is going to encourage them one way or another. It's almost like a street fight - "I'm bigger and stronger than you are", but instead it's "my car is bigger and stronger than yours".

Do you have any other comments on street racing?

I would just emphasise that it's not street drag racing that they're doing, it's street racing. Drag racing is an internationally accepted sport that's got its own set of rules, and goes on in a legal and controlled environment. It's also one of the safest motor sports in the world - it has the best safety record of all motor sports in the world. But the main thing is - don't call it street drag racing, call it street racing. Drag racing is a proper sport. For two long, newspapers will headline a story where a couple of kids get killed by calling it drag racing on the street, and the damage that that does to the image of our sport is enormous. I've seen an article about two blokes racing along the Great Western Highway - they were just hooning along the Great Western Highway, and it was reported in the paper as two kids drag racing. Drag racing is a legitimate sport, and it's the best attended motor sport in the country, with over one million spectators last year alone. The closest to that was Speedway, with about 780 000. There's drag strips in every major city in the country, and in major regional centres as well. It's very much an unsung sport, which is still trying to break free of the blue collar yobbo image, which really has nothing to do with ANDRA.

KEVIN PRENDERGAST - Publicity manager for Eastern Creek

When did Eastern Creek commence drag racing?

The program began in September 1991. We obviously have a full range of drag racing - from the top fuel dragsters that the public recognises right through the classes. In addition to that, we have a program of street meetings, which are designed specifically for street registered vehicles, so anyone could go and race in their own car.

And that's one Friday a month?

Yes, at this stage of the game, it's on Friday nights. The program varies, but we run about twelve of these a year.

Is there a plan to expand the number of official Eastern Creek meets? One of the things people have been saying is that if there were more Eastern Creek meets, there'd be less illegal street racing.

Yes, there's no doubt about that. One, in terms of number - because in order to give anyone who enters the meeting two or three runs in a night, you can only take so many cars. We can put 60 to 70 pairs of cars - 120 to 140 cars per hour - down the racetrack. So depending on time, we have to limit the number of entries that we can take. We certainly have had the situation where we have been constantly over-subscribed, and there is no doubt that we probably could run some more.

You've actually had people camping out overnight to secure their spots, haven't you?

Yes, in our winter program, which is a pro-am program that runs through, we have had that occur.

So what's the problem with staging more events - are there too many other events on, or is there just not enough profit from drag racing?

Eastern Creek is a multi-purpose facility, and it is a very busy facility. We schedule the drag racing program in a way that works for us, and works for the marketplace. Because we have to specially set the racetrack up, we try to combine the meetings. We set the track up, then we run a street meeting and a major event together. Quite simply, there's a fairly heavy demand on the racetrack, so we have to balance all types of racing here.

Is there any other quarter mile drag strip in Sydney?

No. Eastern Creek is the only true quarter mile drag racing facility in Sydney. There is an eighth mile strip at Oran Park, a temporary facility down at Nowra, and also Canberra has an eighth mile as well.

What was there before Eastern Creek set up?

There was no A-Grade quarter mile drag racing facility in NSW for some eight years.

So was there more street racing then?

Street racing has always been a problem in every state, and in fact it's always been a problem since day one. Ever since man invented the car, someone's wanted to race on the street. I know when I was a youngster, there was street racing that went on, and there are a couple of spots in Sydney which were notorious, almost legendary, for the street racing that went on. The problem of course is now that society has become more and more compressed, and in the old days if you got caught speeding or even having a race on a back street, inevitably the policeman took you by the scruff of the neck, gave you a kick up the bum and threatened to take you home to Dad. Now it's a much more serious problem.

Have there been moves at all to ban street racers from Eastern Creek?

In terms of the major drag racing events, you have to go through a special drag racing system.

What we do in street racing is we make it as easy as possible for the guys to race, because a lot of these people have some resistance to organised licensing and so on. The system that's used for the street meetings is a system that works, but it's not as rigid as for the major events. Now, certainly if anyone who has a full ANDRA licence is caught street racing, that licence is suspended, and they are unable to compete at the major events. But I'm pleased to say that that is very rare, because once the guys progress into a major meeting, there's no doubt that they tend to accept the responsibility that goes with that.

What are the safety advantages of racing at Eastern Creek?

Well, racing on the street is simply illegal. That's a fact of life. And of course there are speed limits in place, and other vehicles on the road. The potential for accidents is obviously very large, and a large problem. Whereas racing at Eastern Creek, you can pay \$30 and come along here. You have a full fire crew, fully computerised timing equipment, reaction times, proper traction, the whole deal. I mean, it's a proper racing situation. We have vehicles that race across the spectrum - from a Mini Minor to a Lamborghini which ran the other day. And that's the name of the game - the street events are set up in such a way that you can literally race whatever it is, and it gives you a competitive situation.

There are events at which you can win trophies, and it's proper racing - it's an educational situation.

But isn't Eastern Creek a much more serious type of racing than the street? Don't you have to get to a certain standard before you can race on the track?

No, not really. For people who don't have a lot of money, you pay \$30, and that gets the competitor a day licence from ANDRA. That's the all-up fee for him. Anyone else pays an admission price of \$10. It's not a big commitment, and people run in anything from 19-second Datsun 120Y's right up. That's the beauty of the street meetings - that you can enter in whatever it is that you drive, provided it's a street legal vehicle.

What sorts of people do you get racing at Eastern Creek?

Everyone. Obviously the primary market is the 18 to 23 year olds, who may compete in a Holden or a Falcon. It also ranges from elderly guys who have a specialist type of car right through to guys who just want to test their reaction times in their Datsun 120Y.

Do many women race?

Yes, quite regularly.

Do you get many families?

Absolutely.

How many people come to street meets?

We would get anywhere from 800 to 1600 people. Now obviously we have a ratio of people to cars. If one guy enters, generally there's three to four people with him. So if we have 100 cars, there's automatically a crowd of about 500 that comes along. Now in summertime, if it's warm, it's a nice night's entertainment. A lot of guys like to watch the street racing.

Will it ever be possible to wipe out illegal street racing, and move everyone into legal drag racing?

Obviously it is an ongoing problem, and it has been for a number of people. I think that if the police department set up some form of educational program, that could be run in conjunction with the tracks. There have been educational programs in Calder Park Raceway in Melbourne - "Race a Cop" programs and things like that. I myself did those at Ravenswood, where we imported an American Police Car to raise the profile and the involvement. That was very successful, because rather than a "them and us", when you involve police in that sort of racing situation, it creates some common goals, and there's a lot of dialogue, and that tends to take a bit of heat out of it. So if there are programs put into place to encourage guys not to street race, rather than just simply bashing them over the head, then a combination of stringent enforcement of the rules, but also some encouragement programs, should work.

Do you have any other comments on the relationship between Eastern Creek and illegal street racing?

Everyone says "you guys don't do much here", but the problem we have is that we have to balance the program up. There are a large number of drag racing events throughout the year. Whether or not we can expand that is something we'll just have to look at in the future. But it's an interesting observation that since we went to a formal pre-entry system [for street meets], the numbers actually seem to have dropped off, rather than when we just got them to line up at the front door. It was a hassle because they couldn't get in, and now we've made a system where you have to pre-enter... For some reason, they generally resist organisation, and that's why I said we run the meetings fairly casually compared to what we would do for the national open level.

TODD HOLLONBECK - Editor of Fast Fours and Rotaries magazine - originally from the US

What's your view of street racing?

Street racing to me is a definition of illegal drag racing on the street. My personal, professional and editorial position is that it's not on.

So what sorts of things does your magazine do to discourage it?

Probably we discourage it in a passive way - more by promoting drag racing - take it off the street and get it on the strip. We're saying to people "listen do it where it's safe; do it where there's concrete retaining walls, where your car is scrutineered to be safe, and where you're wearing a helmet, with fire crews and all that". That's basically been our position.

What would the reaction be from your readers if you came out editorially condemning street racing?

I don't think there'd be any negative reaction. We all pretty much feel the same way.

But a lot of your readers would street race, wouldn't they?

Sure, a helluva lot of them do - everything from quarter mile runs to just stoplight to stoplight, where you never break the speed limit. I mean, there are varying degrees of what street racing can actually be. It can also be what some of our guys do, and that might be a canyon run, where they might pick a stretch of good road - say the old Gosford Highway - and you'll get two guys that'll have a road race. Now that is something that our guys are more likely to do than have a drag race. They're more likely to tune their car's suspension and handling for open road stuff like that.

So you're pushing circuit racing more than drag racing?

Yeah. That's been mainly our direction for quite a while. Develop a car for handling, braking and all-round performance. Now that doesn't necessarily mean go out and do 160

km/h on the old Gosford Highway - though I imagine that a lot of the cars would be very capable of doing that.

Do a lot of people get the message on safety?

From most of the letters we get, and the cars we look at, they will begin with engine modification, because that's the first form of satisfaction for these guys. And then they'll back up, and generally going through something like tyres and wheels will be the next step. And then they'll start to think "oh hell, I need a thing to stop". And that's where we really do come out and we hit 'em over the head. In every story, we concentrate on the brakes - on whether a guy's subtly improved them, or done a dramatic job. We've run several text stories on the issue of brakes and braking, and it's something we so adamantly support that sometimes we think we've said it too often. But in the long run, in my opinion, the most important thing to be modified is the braking system. If you're gonna double the horsepower, you've gotta at least double the braking ability. It comes hand in hand.

But I guess a lot of street racers would argue that they're tight on money, so they can't afford to do up the brakes - or sometimes can't even afford to race legally. Do you see problems with money forcing people into street racing?

Oh yeah, I do. I definitely do. And for a lot of guys, I think it's a lot easier for them to say "OK, I'll just do it on the street, instead of having to pay to go out to Eastern Creek or Oran Park. But again, CAMS [Confederation of Australian Motor Sport] has just come out and said that they're gonna allow street cars to run in lap dashes, and that's brilliant, that's a brilliant idea. Once you let a guy do that, once you let him on the circuit, he can still feel the speed, and he's doing it safely. And to tell you the truth, they're less likely to do it on the street if they have an outlet for it somewhere.

To what extent do you think the image of the sport is created by images of cars in magazines which are clearly doing burnouts on the street?

Yeah, it's a very negative image. For us, it is. But then again, you're always gonna get the kind of lunatic fringe that's going to do that. I mean, a burnout is a very traditional thing, a traditional show of power. It's kinda like a bodybuilder flexing. It comes down to something which is a very egotistical and arrogant show of what his car can do. Now it's something where even if we came out and explained that it's not a great thing, it's hard on the drive train, guys don't care. They're going to do it. It's the first thing that anybody... I mean if I took a poll around the office, even guys that aren't hoons, would say that the first car they drove, even when they were 19 or 20, sure it was a big thing to see if they could do a burnout. And a lot of new cars are even judged to see if they can do a burnout. It's a funny thing - it doesn't serve any purpose other than to tear up the pavement and wear out a set of tyres. That's the way I look at it anyway. But each to his own.

But even in an organised event like the Summernats, so much of the emphasis isn't on the official side, it's on the illegal street racing.

Exactly. It's like during that week, there's probably more street racing than any other time of the year in Australia, and that really becomes a mecca for street racing. Guys just go down there solely to street race. They don't enter the show. They just go down there to street race. It's like an unofficial national meeting. And that's why the police down there are doing everything they can to stop it, and so they should.

But are the police tough? Street racers I spoke to said they were pretty lax, so Canberra didn't lose all the tourism dollars that come with the Summernats.

Well that's an interesting side of things, because in the last few years I've been down there, I have watched quite a few of the illegal races. Of about the five that I attended, two were broken

up by police. I figured that was a fairly high percentage. So that's just what I've observed. The police tend to be very much in force out there.

Would most of the people who are at the Eastern Creek meets also race illegally?

I don't think that a high percentage of them do street race. I would almost guarantee that 100% of them started out street racing - that's how they were introduced to it.

So street racing is just a phase that people go through?

Yes. In one word. Yes.

What about people who are in to circuit racing? Would many of them have started off street racing?

I think people who do circuit racing... Well looking at myself, how I started off circuit racing was by watching Formula One on television, and I just thought "Gee, I'd like to give that a try. I'd like to see what it's like to try car control. So I went to a driving school, and started circuit racing from there. But I think circuit racing is more like if your Dad takes you along to the track, that's how you're introduced to it. But with drag racing - as they say, it's stoplight derbies. That's how guys get their first smell of it. And from there, it just grows.

You're from the US, aren't you?

Yeah.

Do you know much about the street racing scene over there?

Yeah (laughs).

What's it like in the US?

It's very big. Just relating to when I was in high school, it was a very big thing, and that's when I used to participate in it. I used to ride a little motor bike, and so I'd take anybody - that was just power to weight advantage.

There it was different, and I'm not condoning it, but I grew up in a very open, agricultural-type city. It was flat, and all the roads were wide open - 100 feet on either side of the road. And street racing back then was only usually two guys and a starter. Here, it'll get to the point where sometimes you'll have people up and down either side of the road, without any barricades to protect them. That's when street racing becomes its most dangerous. You might have a car which - and here I go back to drag racing where cars are actually scrutineered - in street racing, nobody ever checks anything. They don't even check wheel lugs. I mean, a tyre could come off, the steering could break and you've got a car going into a crowd. And that's going to do some serious damage.

Now I've heard of several problems with street racing in the US - one of which is gambling, and another is people actually trucking unregistered cars to the race. Have you heard of these?

Yeah. I've seen that first hand. Yes.

So how many people do you get to these races?

Well I've seen 75 people at one race, just to watch. But then again, not one of those people was beyond the start line. And that was what the difference was.

Are people less safety-conscious here?

They're very lax. They just don't understand. I just don't think they understand that the speed that these cars are hitting, and what could possibly go wrong.

Is that because there haven't been any serious injuries at races here?

Yeah, I'd say that. I've never heard of one of the cars getting out of control. You see a lot of guys that will lose it and wrap their car around a telegraph pole - the other day there was a Gemini on the news, and that had happened. We happened to speak to the fellow two days before it happened - he came in to speak to us about featuring his car. You hate to say it, but when you're dealing with guys that haven't yet learned what some of the consequences are, the penalties are very severe. You kinda hate to think what can happen, but it does. And when you get to the extreme levels of street racing, that's when something can happen that's very dangerous.

Let's take for example two standard Lasers. Street racing, too, is very much staged. You won't have a fella that's running a very quick car race a guy in a slow car. It just doesn't happen. It's a waste of time for the guy with the quick car. He's more likely to run somebody who he knows is equal to him. There's always that challenge, that kind of "King of the Hill" thing. If you get a guy that runs a little Laser, he might know that his quarter mile time is only 16 seconds. He's more likely to run somebody that'll run a 16 second quarter with him. You race who you're equal to. Anyway, in those slow categories, there's really not much that can happen. I mean the dangers are so minimal. It's just like accelerating hard onto the freeway - that's exactly the speeds and everything that you're dealing with. It's when you get the really quick cars - the 11 second cars that can really, really surprise the hell out of you how quick they are. If you've never been to the drags before, you realise that the enormous power it takes to propel a car down the quarter mile drag strip in 11 seconds is quite amazing. And these are cars that are road legal.

Just.

Yeah.

Are we likely to see gambling on street races in Australia?

I don't think you'll ever get gambling like it is in the States or in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong?

They have a very different form of street racing over there. They'll run through the city, and they bet on the cars. Cars are purpose-built for it.

So we aren't going to get gambling at all?

I think anytime you're gonna get gambling, but here it might be fifty bucks. In Hong Kong it might be \$5000. I just don't think that there's the money here in hand to do it. It's not like you see in some of the US documentaries or movies where they race for pink slips [ownership of the car]. I've never heard of anyone doing that here. It just doesn't happen.

Is there much trade in stolen parts?

I've never seen it happen, but that doesn't mean that it doesn't. One of the things that I've always said, and I firmly believe, is that the guys that take the time to build their car don't steal - they work hard to pay for their cars. A lot of these guys hold second jobs in order to buy car parts, because they are very expensive here. To get their car to perform is usually the most important thing for them at that stage in their life. And they'll sacrifice a tremendous amount of time and effort to attain that - to get a car to look good and run

well. And that is where they learn to appreciate the car. Guys that steal parts don't appreciate cars. I think that there is probably a lot of buying and setting of hot parts at some of these meetings - I sure as hell wouldn't doubt it. But I've never seen it, and I'm not aware of it happening. There's probably a lot more of a trade in hot merchandise that's sold through the back doors of workshops than anywhere else. Now which workshops sell, I don't know.

What attractions does illegal racing hold?

I just think it's tradition. Half of the excitement is doing it and knowing it's illegal. That's the real buzz of the whole thing. And it's at night, and it's that whole psyche. Because there is a real buzz, a real aura, when you're gonna get two cars that are really quick and they're going to have a run.

What's the future of street racing?

Probably the best way to answer that is just to look at the past. The first drag race in Australia was at the pavilion on Bondi Beach. There was a woman driver in an Alfa and I can't remember who the other person was. She hit a dog, spun the car and still won the race - I think that's the story. That was 1920, 1925 - something like that. I don't think you're ever gonna erase it. Whenever you have anything, guys are gonna compete - whether it's horses, cars, dogs, squash rackets... it's just human instinct. They're gonna compete - who's the best, who's got the biggest, who's got the quickest. It's just a matter of trying to focus them into something that's legal, and that's bringing them to Eastern Creek or to any of the other national tracks.

Did you have any other comments?

I especially want to point out that a lot of times I read in the newspaper where the police will make a statement linking crime with street racing. I don't think that that exists. In the States, a lot of the cities have passed legislation which basically is of loitering, and police will fine guys for making two or three passes on Main Street. We used to cruise Main - now it's illegal in a lot of cities in the US. And the police have felt that that's a way they can control drugs. But I don't really think so.

I look at it in a completely different sense. I would rather have these guys building cars, and improving their cars (and I'm not saying building cars to go out and street race). Most of these guys learn the trade that way - with a \$400 hack that they bought from their neighbour. They learn how to do panelbeating, they learn how to build the engine, do the brakes. They learn how to maintain a car, and that's a skill that a lot of us are losing. And I think it becomes more and more important that we look at these guys and see that it really is occupying them with something that if you took it away, and made modified cars illegal in all forms, there would be a big backlash. It keeps these guys organised, and it keeps them concentrated on something, where otherwise they might be more prone to vandalism. And I know in areas where they really have tried to cut down on youth car building, it's just gone backwards. There is a city in Victoria - I've done a news piece on them before - where they have a big street meet once every fortnight out at the local airfield. And it's done great to keep it controlled in the city, cos people just say "hey, let's settle it at such-and-such a place next Friday". We're starting to see that a bit at Eastern Creek, where guys will just have a grudge run at Eastern Creek. And that what's the exciting part about the sport. That's when it becomes very, very interesting.

It's a very interesting subculture - the cars and what guys are doing. It does have its negative side, but in all, it's very much a positive thing. You'll find that most of the guys are very supportive - where they have to help another competitor to get their car going, they will. It really is a little misunderstood subculture. And it's frustrating to read a lot of reports that do come out, whether they're on the news, or even in some of the motoring titles, they'll come out and explain street racing in the wrong terms.

I'm building up a car myself, and I feel like I'm building it for several reasons. One, to challenge my mechanical ability and two, to build something that is a visual statement. Kinda like the clothes I wear, the car I drive is part of me, and it's saying "hey listen, I'm not like everybody else". I don't want to drive a white Commodore. That's what a lot of these guys are just trying to express. They're just out there doing to damndest they can to express something. We're all like peacocks without any feathers. And that's when it's a lot of fun. The guys are so genuine, and they're so sincere, and they're very, very warming if they know you understand that. They'll become endeared to you if you can understand what they're going through. But it's not just for 18 year olds. Hell, I get letters from 72 year olds talking about the same thing.

What would be the oldest person who's still street racing?

Probably the oldest street racer I've seen was about 45. He was kinda on the fringe, so to speak. He didn't have the greatest car, but he just enjoyed it. It was a time for him just to get out and meet some people and talk about things and have a social event. And there is a lot of that that goes on. Like I say, he was just there to be part of the show, not really for any other reason. But he still had a decent car, and still liked to have a run with an equal performing car. It's just like tennis - you always want to play someone that's about your level.

Basically, it's just like two bulls in a paddock. It's animalistic. Drag racing is very rudimentary. It's from A to B. It's over in 10 or 12 seconds, and you've got an instant winner. No ifs, ands or buts. That's it.

No second chance.

Yeah, that's it. And it appeals to everyone because it's so simple. But underneath that basic level there is a complex subculture and complex engineering. And that's where your real fine tuners of engines and so on can really make a car go, and that's where you learn to appreciate it.

JIM REED - 13 times national drag racing champion in top fuel drag racing (the long ones with huge wheels and parachutes)

Were you ever involved in street racing?

Well, not necessarily involved in it. But many, many years ago - back in the early 60s before they had anywhere to race - we used to race at a place called Brikkies, which is now the site of the 2000 Olympics. We used to race on a road called Underwood Road at Homebush. It was a long, straight stretch of road next to the swamp, and they really didn't bother anybody. There were the odd few who were lunatics - they used to race out on Heathcote Road. I never ever took part in it, but I did go and take a look to see what they were all about. I used to think that these guys could get themselves in trouble.

What sorts of cars were they racing back then?

FJ Holdens and early-model Fords, but mainly Holdens. Some of them ran pretty quick, because later on, when drag racing came along, some of the guys (without naming any names) who were involved back then turned to drag racing and stopped street racing. I know them still quite personally.

Did you know people who continued both drag racing and street racing?

No. The minute there was the facility - and let me tell you, these guys back then were hardened street racers, guys who had a few rough edges - but today the same guys are very

successful in life, and would not even think of doing that sort of thing. They encourage kids to go out and do it at the drags, and not on the street.

Are there particular attractions of racing on the street?

I don't believe there is. I believe anything you see on the street these days - and let me tell you, I'm on the road all day long - you don't see cars like you used to. I put that down to quite a few things - the police do a very efficient job and there is a lot more traffic, so the opportunity just isn't there for someone to drag race someone else off the lights. I believe that's good - it's very, very rare that kids go out and street race these days.

Is it a problem that street meets only happen once a month?

Well, you've got Oran Park and you've got Eastern Creek. If the demand was there for it, it'd happen more often. I believe it's something that should be encouraged. I've got two sons that have grown up - one's 31 and the other's 25. They've grown up with drag racing, and they've had a hobby all of their lives, and they've never been in any trouble because they've been occupied. And kids need to be occupied.

What are the danger of street racing?

Killing somebody, cars not being roadworthy - some of the cars are very shoddily put together. If they go out to the racetrack, the cars are scrutineered, and if they don't come up to standard, they're not allowed to participate.

When did you get involved with legal drag racing?

1965. That was with my street ute. Now, I had the odd burn off the lights - like everyone else.

What were the advantages of the track?

I got a lot of satisfaction out of feeling safe - not feeling that someone was going to come out of a side street, or a police officer was going to lock me up. I could take my family along, and like I say, my sons grew up with it.

Can street racing be wiped out?

I believe it can, if it's given the right encouragement but the right authorities. I believe it could be wiped right out, given the opportunity.

How?

I think it needs to be made more public that the facilities are available - encouraging kids to come out to Eastern Creek.

Is there the facility for another drag track in Sydney?

I believe a drag racing facility should have been built totally separate from Eastern Creek. If they come clean, the current management will tell you the same thing. I ended up being part of the management of the old Castlereagh dragstrip before it was closed down. Let me tell you, that place used to operate seven days a week. So drag racing is the financial saviour of Eastern Creek. If it could operate separately, it would be a little bonanza, a goldmine.

Are there problems which people like yourself, who are involved in legal drag racing, suffer from the media portrayal of street racing?

Yeah. And I'll give you an example. Two guys go to Bathurst and watch the races all day. They're driving home when all of a sudden, Rev Head Louie goes by in his Commodore, and Hot Rod Freddy says "there goes a Commodore - I'm gonna race him". If they have a crash, the headlines read "Two guys drag racing have an accident".

Is that changing?

Yes it is. Drag racing is getting a helluva lot more recognition over the past five years. We were the first motorsport to top a million spectators in one calendar year. We put bums on seats.

Is there a cost factor?

They can get the money together to street race. The only difference between drag racing and street racing is paying the entry fee. It's supervised, the cars are checked out, they're given a time card, and they know exactly how they went. And there's only two cars on the strip - not other traffic coming towards you.

So what's different about those who stay street racing?

They're mugs. Their cars possibly aren't roadworthy. The cars possibly lack that bit of finesse, so they're not game to come to the strip where under strict supervision, the car may not pass, or if it does pass, it may get beaten. Some of these guys don't want to do it legally. They're too impatient, they're too pig-headed. I believe if you're caught street racing, it should be immediate loss of licence. If you break the law in an unorganised street race where you're putting other peoples' lives in danger, it should be immediate loss of licence. That'll deter them.

But could the police catch them?

It's quite easy to catch them. The word goes around as to where there's going to be an illegal race, and all the police have to do is round them up - and anyone associated with something illegal is punished by law, aren't they?

Would you book bystanders?

Well I don't believe you can book anyone for loitering any more, but if people are there encouraging it on, I believe there should be some form of action taken against them for encouraging it, because if one of these cars went screaming by, got out of control and knocked two or three of them over, they'd be the first to want the law on their side. So it's gotta work both ways.

When did street racing get started in Australia?

The first ever recorded street race in Australia took place on Bondi Beach promenade in 1932 between two Austin 7s. It was sanctioned by the Waverley council. There were 10000 people lining Bondi Beach promenade in 1932, in pouring rain to watch a couple of high society ladies from Vaucluse, I think they were. It's on microfilm in Waverley council archives and was reported in the Sydney Morning Herald at the time.

So when did drag racing become organised?

Well, it wasn't originally called drag racing. It was called sprints. A mob by the name of the Manly-Warringah car club used to hold sprints at the Castlereagh dragstrip (of course,

it wasn't called a dragstrip at the time). They were happening in the 50s. I was only a little boy then.

Was street racing bigger then?

Well, street racing to my knowledge goes back to the 50s. It was pretty wild back then, I can tell you. You'd have 300-400 cars go out to these things, though you might only have ten race. But it goes this way. You might have a car that goes pretty quick, and I might have a car that goes pretty quick. And we might have a bet to see who can beat the other. Well, the word goes around through your mates and mine, and they all want to come along and watch. While they're there, others might participate.

So there was gambling then?

Well, I didn't see any. But I believe as the years have progressed, the SP society gets along, to take a wager on who's gonna do what.

Is there gambling now?

I don't know. But guys gamble at the [legal] drags. It's not an open thing, but it happens.

Do you have any other comments?

My only comment would be to any kid that sees this - I think they're mugs if they don't explore other opportunities to do it in a safe environment, where there's medical facilities available, and they're not going to run somebody over, kill them, and have to live with that on their conscience for the rest of their lives.

WILLIAM BURNSEY - Newcastle swimming pool builder and advocate for better drag racing facilities in Newcastle

How extensive is the street racing problem in Newcastle?

There's probably regularly about 200 kids that go out to Kooragang Island and streetrace on weekends. That's the regular hard-core show. They're there as often as they can without getting themselves into trouble. They're fairly well organised in what they do - they've taken steps to make it as safe for themselves as possible. They keep people behind the start line, rather than by the side of the road. They want to race their cars - they've spent a lot of time on them, and they're keen to try them out, while causing as little damage as possible. They've never hurt anyone to my knowledge, and I think that's a pretty good record.

What's the police attitude to street racing in Newcastle?

They don't like it, because they're being made to look a bit silly with this sort of thing.

The majority of the public understand that it's illegal and that it shouldn't be happening.

But they're trying as best they can to ensure that it doesn't happen in public thoroughfares where there's houses and kids and bikes. It's a difficult situation they're placed in, because they'll always want to do it regardless. They've proved that in Sydney. But Kooragang Island is probably the best situation, because it's in the middle of an industrial estate, the noise isn't critical, there's absolutely no traffic over there at nighttime. The kids have got a fair control over who goes where. I believe at times the police have even controlled who goes where.

So the police have actually organised racing?

No, not organised it. More sort of turned a blind eye. Y'know - stood with their back to the racing while watching people coming along, and then sending them on their way.

Letting the kids do what they do, but without letting through anyone else. If it's not the police doing it, the racers will physically block the roads with their cars.

So the police are more lenient up there than in Sydney?

Yeah, they are. It's a big country town. That's something you can't escape from - the police know everyone and what's going on. They're aware that it's not something they can wipe out completely, and probably they're taking an intelligent attitude to it, because they don't make a big deal of it - they don't put on a big song and dance about busting 20 or 30 kids. In fact, you never even hear of it. I think they're just trying to reinforce their authority from time to time, if things get a bit out of hand - but that usually only happens if people come up from Sydney to take on the locals.

What needs to be done about street racing in Newcastle?

There's an enormous following for the sport here, because the sport is historically a working man's form of motor sport - it's relatively cheap to get in to. So because this is a working class town, it's got a big following. There's the opportunity for someone that's got

a bit of brass to sink into it to make a bit of money and earn some kudos by providing a facility that gets an enormous number of people into an organised place so they're no yahooping or loitering. It's a good opportunity to organise something so young kids have an opportunity to channel their energies. Probably one of the problems with our society at the moment is that nobody gets any recognition for any of the good things that they do. There are kids out there that have amazing talents in putting their cars together, and presenting their cars, and all they do is end up going street racing. For what? So they can say to the people there "I beat this guy". Whereas if it's organised, there's an opportunity for someone to take away some real, legitimate recognition. There's plenty of sites around Newcastle to do it in. I've spent an enormous amount of hours researching various sites and getting the OK's, the nods from councils to say that's a good idea. Raymond Terrace Council, from my last discussions with them, would've fallen over backwards to do whatever they could to help. They've just opened up more freeway, so it's only an hour and a half up the road from Sydney.

Why is Newcastle a better venue for motor sport than Sydney?

Newcastle is a town that's not as big as Sydney, and never will be. The ability for housing to encroach on facilities is much less. You can bet Eastern Creek will be dead and buried in ten years, because there'll be houses through there. In Newcastle, that won't happen. The facilities are in areas that are noise-affected by industries like the aluminium smelter. We've got the air force up here. Now jets aren't quiet, so there's an opportunity wherever jets are to put a dragstrip in and say "why should noise from the cars be a problem if noise from the jets isn't?". And the people up here are pretty parochial - there's always a big crowd at the speedway. Newcastle people love their sport, and they'll support anything that's local.

Is it ever going to be possible to wipe out illegal racing?

Illegal racing is difficult to wipe out, and there will always be an element that will want to do it, because it's illegal. It's like taking drugs, I suppose, they do it because you're not supposed to do it. No, you'll never get rid of it entirely. But if they put a street racing meet on here every Friday and Saturday night, I don't think you'd find many people at the normal street racing haunts. Everyone would be at the racetrack.

Do you have any other comments?

The only reason Eastern Creek is still alive and kicking today as a motor racing facility is because drag racing's there. If they took the drag racing away, the place would be history - they'd just bulldoze it into an industrial site. The same goes for Calder Park in Melbourne. If you look at the figures, they get 30000 turn up two weekends a month to watch the street racing. If it wasn't for the drag racing there, Calder park would be dead. Adelaide International Raceway - that'd be dead and buried. Surfers' Paradise has just opened again their race track there for drag racing only - everything else was a loser. All the successful drag race tracks are stand alone tracks, and they run very well. If someone was to ask me what sort of track they should build, I'd say build it for drag racing, let drag racers have the major input in how the thing's run, and keep everyone else out of it - the speedway, the circuit cars, the bike racers - let them go find their own track. We find that our sport is always being painted as the stubbies and thongs type of racing. But we get more people watching drag racing than other types of motor racing.

Drag racing is where the priority should lie, because that's where the money is. The people who drive these cars and do these cars up have, as a group of people, incredible disposable income every week. It's enormous. They don't have mortgages. Generally they don't have families cos they're young. They don't have too many commitments elsewhere financially. So they've got a lot of money to spend on their car. And if they need to spend it in going to the racetrack, then they'll pay whatever the racetrack asks for.

Eastern Creek has been the biggest example of lunatics running the asylum, clowns running the circus. Come six o'clock at the biggest drag racing meeting in the yearly calendar [the grand finals in November 1993], some bureaucrat literally turned the power off. The Australian drag racing series runs over an entire 12 months, so all the points are added up, and this was the grand final. It'd be like playing Rugby League, going through the whole season, two teams come down to the final game, and at six o'clock, they decide to shut it down. Absolutely unbelievable. When over half a million spectators turned up at Eastern Creek last year to watch drag racing, that's how they get treated. That's why Eastern Creek will never amount to much.

SERGEANT DENNIS CLARK - Supervisor of Parramatta Highway Patrol - Street racing used to be a problem in his area, but it's moved elsewhere now

What is the main danger in street racing?

The spectators line both sides of the roadway, and as you can appreciate, the vehicles are reaching very high speeds. So there's a great danger to bystanders.

Have there been accidents in the past?

Not that I'm aware of. Years ago there were some fatalities when it was carried out at Homebush. But to my knowledge there haven't been any injuries in our area that the police have been notified of.

Is there a danger to residents?

Normally the participants choose areas which are pretty much deserted, industrial-type areas. So really, there's not a great deal of danger to local residents.

Are there problems with drugs or alcohol?

We haven't any firm evidence to that extent, as far as drugs go. But whenever any large group of people are gathering on a regular basis, there's always that element creeping in. Generally, though, alcohol isn't a great problem with this group - they're what people commonly refer to as "petrol-heads". They're interested in high-performance cars, and anything to do with motor vehicles. They're generally not the type that over-indulges in alcohol. Certainly not the participants, anyway.

When street racing was a problem in your area, how many people would have attended a meet?

On a big night, you could have 1000 spectators. On a normal time, it's not that big - maybe 200 or 300.

What areas were they meeting in?

Down around the Auburn areas, they'd congregate at McDonalds - at the corner of Parramatta Road and Silverwater Road. There they'd choose streets - generally in industrial areas - or move up to an area near the Shell Refinery at Rosehill, which was another concern to us - not just for the safety of the spectators, but the obvious dangers of cars reaching high speeds in the near vicinity of the petrol refinery. It was the street leading straight into the refinery that they were racing on. So the Shell Oil Refinery were very concerned about the possibility of a mishap there.

Were a lot of resources put into dealing with street racing?

I wouldn't say a lot of resources. We had Parramatta Highway Patrol vehicles rostered on later shifts. For some reason, Sunday nights seems to be the most popular time. Although it does occur on other nights, Sunday evenings was the traditional time for people to gather there for a night out.

No, I wouldn't say we overdid it. We like to try and show a reasonable police presence. If we see that it's starting to build up, we make sure that our presence is shown fairly early in the peace. Otherwise, if you let these things run along, they build up to the point where it's quite difficult to do anything about them.

What laws are at your disposal?

Racing a vehicle on the street is actually an offence, unless you've got a permit. We've caught people doing that. We've resorted to having police in plain clothes observing the participants, because as you can appreciate, as soon as marked police vehicles come near the scene, or it's broadcast over the police radio, the participants scatter. They also scan the police radio, so they'll probably be gone before we even get there. They're pretty much on the ball, and well organised.

What else have you tried to do?

We have tried on several occasions videoing the actual race.

Was that successful?

On the ones that we've used, we haven't actually found anything that's worthwhile prosecuting in the courts. So insofar as saying it's successful, it's a good idea, but it hasn't led to any prosecutions.

What about defecting cars?

As you can appreciate, for people who run these types of cars, their main object is to extract the maximum performance out of their cars, but of course that breaches the Australian Design rules. So that's another area we're looking at to discourage the practice

of drag racing. They generally modify the engines to obtain maximum acceleration, but the other parts of the vehicles are left stock standard. So as you can imagine, cars that are capable of extreme acceleration with standard brakes are not going to be in a roadworthy condition.

Is there a fine line you're treading between removing unroadworthy vehicles and harassing the participants?

Well, it does present a problem, because we want to adopt a reasonable attitude to the youngsters, while ensuring that the cars are complying with reasonable regulations. What they're doing is illegal. It's a difficult situation the police are in. We're damned if we do, and damned if we don't. We cop a lot of flak from those involved in drag racing. I've seen on television where we're accused of taking it out on them because they've got nice cars. But I can assure you that the reason that we're trying to discourage drag racing is simply from a safety point of view. If they were to go out to Eastern Creek and pay a certain amount of money, they could drag race their cars all night.

Are there any laws you can use against spectators?

No, not really. That's an area that we have very little control over. Another thing that does concern us is that many of the spectators there are obviously concerned with performance machines, and we have reason to believe that there could be a certain amount of trading in stolen car parts through the course of these events.

What sorts of cars are being used?

Right across the board. Normally V8's, but it includes high performance four cylinders.

You conducted a big raid on street racing near the oil refinery in August 1993. Could you detail the planning that goes into such a raid?

It was just a co-ordinated response, using highway patrol units. On the night in question, we also happened to have the police helicopter in the near vicinity, and it responded to the call as well, which had a great effect on the participants. But normally, we try to handle it on a local basis if we can. We don't like to go overboard with large raids, but we'll normally have half a dozen cars in the area, stopping people for various traffic offences. Normally that's sufficient to discourage people from all their racing activities. But I'd like to stress that the helicopter wasn't there for that specific purpose. It just happened to be in the area, and we certainly made use of it. It we wouldn't normally call on a police helicopter to help us with it. Things normally aren't that bad. Certainly now it's died down in the Parramatta area. But it's the sort of thing that can pop up from time to time. I understand that this type of activity is currently going on down near the M4 freeway. But you just never know where it's going to pop up.

Will you ever eliminate street racing?

I guess while you've got young males who want to test their prowess with motor vehicles, the problem will always be there, and we can only hope to keep it in reasonable check. Age plays a big part in it. By and large the participants are in their early 20s. We just need to encourage them to use the facilities which are readily available, particularly at Eastern Creek. When they're young and enthusiastic, they don't see the potential for tragedy to result; they just see the excitement side of it, and not the danger.

Will it take a serious injury or death to make people stop and think?

In the past, there have been fatalities as a result of drag racing. Yet it resurfaces - probably with a different generation. They're very quick to forget the lessons of the past and start it all over again.

DAVID CIANCAR - Manager of M4 McDonalds, where the racers meet - curiously, street racers always seem to meet at a McDonalds restaurant somewhere, and McDonalds sponsors drag racing at Eastern Creek

When did the racers first move to M4 McDonalds?

We opened on 7 April 1993, and the cars ended up gathering in June. It started off with a few, and the numbers just got greater and greater. Obviously when the police and the RTA found out about it, they then decided to come out every so often to make sure they weren't causing any trouble.

How many cars do you get gathering?

45 to 65.

What are the big nights?

Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Sunday seems to be the biggest.

What sorts of people gather?

Teenagers, and people around their early 20s. But there's a whole range of ages at the moment. They're not a group of people that want to cause trouble. They just like to meet people, and socialise and talk about cars. But I've spoken to the people, and they're just normal customers.

What problems are you suffering as a result?

I wouldn't say that the people themselves are causing too many problems, but having that crowd there, we do tend to lose some family customers, particularly those with younger kids.

Is there anything you can do to move the racers on?

I think being on the M4, it's a bit of an attraction, with the lights and so forth. They don't cause any trouble, but it's customers that are just being driven away sometimes, and we don't want that. It gets to the stage when you ask yourself if you really want those sorts of customers to come in here.

Is there much alcohol consumption?

No, there isn't.

What have you done?

The police have been in contact with us, and they're quite aware of the problem. If things do get out of hand, we call the police, but in most instances, it hasn't been any problem, so we leave them alone. We've had the RTA out here a couple of times, and they want to make sure that the numbers don't expand. They were just pulling cars over before they go to the exit and checking them. That controlled the numbers quite successfully.

How often do the police come down?

At least one of the days of Friday, Saturday or Sunday, and on a weekly basis, they're always patrolling here.

Do you see any prospect of moving the group on?

Well, they had this problem at Auburn McDonalds, and I think the police just kept coming down on it very, very hard. So people actually woke up to the fact that they're not going to tolerate this sort of nonsense, and moved them along. And the great example that's used by the police is that they're like flies - where there's light, they'll just be attracted to that particular place. I think a few people find a new meeting ground, and they just congregate there. So until something new comes up, we're just stuck with them.

LEIGH JOHNSON - Solicitor specialising in criminal law - she has worked on a number of famous cases, and has both an excellent knowledge of criminal law and strong feelings on policy

What offences relate to street racing?

Street racing is an offence under the Traffic Act 1909. Under section 4B, "any person who organises or promotes or takes part in any race between vehicles on a public street, or any attempt to break and vehicle speed record on a public street or any trial of the speed of a vehicle on a public street or any competitive trial designed to test the skill of any vehicle, driver or the reliability or mechanical condition of any vehicle upon a public street shall be guilty of an offence under this act". So that's the bare minimum of what somebody could be guilty of. Certainly they could be guilty of breaching the speed limit as well. They may be guilty of menacing driving, under section 4AA of that act, if they can prove that the person was driving in a manner which was "intended to menace another person". Most certainly, they could be convicted under section 4 of negligent driving, which is the most likely section under which they would be laying the charge.

Now, if anything resulted - for example, death or injury - especially of an innocent bystander - death would absolutely be a murder charge. There is no doubt at all that the person causing the death would be charged with murder.

The offences of bystanders? That's actually covered under section 4B. So there's section 4, which is negligent driving. There's section 4AA, which is menacing driving, then there's section 4B (which I referred to initially), which is racing, attempting to race, or involving yourself in any whatsoever.

So what penalties would the drivers face?

Well, depending on their record, depending on the result of their driving - that is, if anyone was injured or killed, they could be facing jail sentences. Even if somebody is injured, they would be guilty of an assault occasioning grievous bodily harm, which carries a penalty of 25 years' hard labour, so the penalties could be extremely serious.

But it does seem to me that if drag racing is as popular as it appears to be, that the government should, rather than just penalising people, recognise the fact that there is a need for areas where this sort of activity can be conducted in an organised manner, whereby the public would be safe. It's my experience in life that just by telling people that something's illegal; if they really want to do it, it's not going to stop them doing it. So obviously it's a very dangerous thing to be doing, in terms of the public and general bystanders, children, animals and whatever that may get in the way. If people are so keen to do it, the government should be putting aside areas where it can be done, and supervised and controlled so that it is safe.

One of the complaints that the racers often make is that the police will repeatedly defect their cars, even when they are only parked in a McDonald's car park. Do they have any claims for police harassment?

Well, they've got a complaint for harassment if they're being harassed. But if the police come through and they see that a car is able to be defected, and legitimately defected, then I don't think they would have a complaint.

A HUGE RANGE OF MAGAZINES EXIST FOR STREET RACERS - YOU MIGHT WANT TO PAN ACROSS A SELECTION OF THE FOLLOWING:

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Best Dressed Holdens
Best Falcons
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Hey Charger!
Holdens Rule Supreme
Horsepower Heroes
Hot Car Wild Streeters
Hot Fours and Wild Rotaries
Hottest Falcons
Modifying Your Holden
Motor
Motor Sport
National Drag Racer (Gerard Norsa)
Nine Second Street Club
Performance Street Car
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Street Machine
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