



On The Road: Fast and ... Safe



Using a 2000 Camaro tricked out with all the go-fast goodies, the Youth Initiatives & Education in Lifestyles & Driv Association warns young people about the dangers of inappropriate choices while behind the wheel and in day-to living.

Handout

Alberta not-for-profit association teaches youth about the perils of street racing, and the joys of legal drag racing



By *Greg Williams*

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Street racing is dangerous.

In the heat of the moment it might be exciting to see which car is fastest, but public roads aren't the safest venue for a shootout – there are just too many uncontrolled variables.

And, with films such as *Fast and Furious* and games including *Need for Speed* glorifying the practice, some education is in order.

In Alberta, there is the not-for-profit Y.I.E.L.D. Association – or the Youth Initiatives & Education in Lifestyles & Driving Association — to warn young people about the dangers of inappropriate choices while behind the wheel and in day-to-day living.

Using a drag race car to capture the attention of youth between the ages of 14 and 24, a group of volunteers consisting of law enforcement, fire and ambulance personnel visit schools, community events and legal drag race gatherings.

They hope their specially marked Chevrolet Camaro and Pontiac LeMans racecars will help pique interest and hook kids into a deeper conversation.

“We formed YIELD in 2003, and we’ve been going around to different events in Western Canada – anywhere we can talk to kids about safe choices,” says constable Gord Buck of the R.C.M.P. in Stony Plain/Spruce Grove.

Buck is president of the YIELD Association, and he is quick to point out that YIELD is not under the auspices of the R.C.M.P., but has partnered with the policing organization to educate youth and the general public about the dangers of high risk driving – and the consequences of their choices.

When the program started, Buck says YIELD was running an ex-police 1995 Chevrolet Caprice. They ran the car so hard during racing events that the frame became twisted.



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At that point, YIELD picked up a 2000 Chevrolet Camaro, also a retired highway patrol car. All of the go-fast goodies were stripped from the Caprice and stuffed into the Camaro, which had been modified into a full-blown racecar with custom rear suspension and specially-built front end. Now equipped with a 454 Chevy engine bored and stroked to 489, the Camaro will run 11.2 seconds in the quarter mile at 198 km/h.

“We get a lot of requests to show up at events in central and southern Alberta,” Buck says.

In 2013 YIELD was very busy, and attended 64 events. In fact, they had to turn down several invitations.

That’s where R.C.M.P. constable Lee Watt of Red Deer picks up the story.

“There’s such a call for us to go to these different events that we had to get a second car,” Watt says.

Watt will look after YIELD in central and southern Alberta, and will campaign a 1979 Pontiac

LeMans racecar that was formerly used by the Saanich police force in a similar drag race program.

Equipped with a 425 horsepower small block Chevy engine, the LeMans is capable of turning a 12.5 second quarter mile at 160.9 km/h.

YIELD drag racing takes place at Castrol Raceway in Edmonton during Friday night Street Legal events, at other tracks around the province, or on airport runways or closed streets in small towns.

“It’s not necessarily on a track,” Watt says, “but it’s done in a safe and organized environment, and it’s legal.

“Instead of illegal street racing, (hopefully) young drivers will get a taste of legal drag racing and realize the challenge and the skill that’s required.”

At any of these race events an individual can lay down a challenge to race the YIELD car. Win or lose, a t-shirt is given as a reward.

“If they win, they get a shirt that says ‘I raced the law, and I won’,” Watt says. “If they lose, they get a shirt that says ‘I raced the law, and the law won’.”

No tax dollars are used to run YIELD – the association operates on funds, services and equipment provided by a variety of partners. Recently, the group aligned with the University of Alberta senior engineering class in the design of an all-electric 2006 Mini Cooper drag race car.

“It’s got a full race suspension and tube chassis, and we’ve changed it from front-wheel drive to rear-wheel drive,” Buck says. “It will be faster than our Camaro, and should see 130 mp/h in 10 seconds on the quarter mile.”

The Mini is close to completion, however, YIELD is waiting for a few more donations to help fund the purchase of two 11” DC motors and a two-speed race transmission button everything up.

“When we show up at a school with the Camaro it’s loud and it’s all muscle,” Buck says, and adds, “it really helps break down barriers when we talk to kids about lifestyle choices and safe driving.”

Buck says the Mini, although completely the opposite of the Camaro, “Will be just priceless

as we reach out to educate youth.”

Greg Williams is a member of the Automobile Journalists Association of Canada (AJAC). Have an auto related item to share for the column or What’s Next? Contact him at 403-287-1067 or gregwilliams@shaw.ca. Visit his website at gregwilliams.ca

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