



'Bring it to the track' RCMP officer tells would-be speeders

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Have you ever wanted to race a police car while driving over 200 km/h? In Alberta you're encouraged to — kind of.

The challenge is part of the YIELD program — officially the Youth Initiatives and Education in Lifestyles and Driving Association — which hopes to steer young, would-be street racers off public roads and onto official race tracks.

"Your car can launch pretty good on the street, but it can't ever match what it can do on a track," RCMP Const. Lee Watt, who works with the YIELD program

Street racing, the RCMP says, kills one Canadian each week. And while there's still danger at the track, it's far safer for racers and the public alike. So, if you've spent big to boost your car's performance, police are advising you test it out on a closed course.

Plus, on a night of races at the Castrol Raceway in Leduc, Alta. you can drag race against off-duty RCMP Const. Lee Watt, who drives a 1979 Pontiac Lemans muscle car painted like a retro police cruiser. The RCMP doesn't run the YIELD program, but does support it.

"Your car can launch pretty good on the street, but it can't ever match what it can do on a track," Const. Watt told the CBC's Carolyn Dunn.

That's just part of Watt's sales pitch as to why the track is an ideal alternative to racing on roads. You also don't risk losing your license. You pay \$30 for track fees, but don't risk huge fines and insurance hikes. And when the race is done — most last just 12 seconds during which good drivers can top 225 km/h — there's a printout declaring the winner.

"You got a beef? Bring it to the track," Watt said, addressing the über-competitive car racing crowd. He said many of the driving enthusiasts he's brought to the speedway wind up "hooked."

Car enthusiasts enjoy program

That happened to Forest Ohneck, who was busted by the police while doing 165 km/h in an 80 kilometre zone during his first street race. Ohneck, a sheetmetal worker, still has the ticket as a reminder never to repeat his mistake.





Forest Ohneck started volunteering with the YIELD program after being busted for street racing, and has been working with the program since. (CBC)

"I kind of thought I had the world in the palm of my hand, hadn't really thought about the consequence," he said.

But instead of losing six demerit points and paying thousands of dollars in fines, Ohneck was sentenced to work for two years in the YIELD program. Today, he still volunteers.

In addition to the races, Watt also brings his suped-up Mountie-mobile to informal car shows and meet-ups, taking the opportunities to recruit people to the YIELD program. The car also creates a cool way to speak about road safety with students, he said.

At the Leduc racetrack, even experienced drivers are interested in racing the cops.

"Why not? It's the only place you can beat them and get away with it," said Larry Beck, an experienced driver who has been building and racing cars for years.

Beck's classic Dodge Dart powers past Const. Watt's car on this night, but for the police officer the loss doesn't sting too much. Every car racing on the track, he says, is one that's not on the streets.



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