



HEY SPEED RACER

How a pink ticket changed a would-be street racer's life for the better

BY ANNALISE KLINGBEIL

Forest Ohneck holds a heavily creased slip of pink paper in his hands. It's a speeding ticket from five years ago. He keeps it in an old ski-goggle box in his bedroom, along with coins, keys and memorabilia. Sitting in the living room of the southwest Edmonton home that he shares with his cousins, the 27-year-old slowly unfolds the paper and, extending a tattoo-covered forearm, lays it on the coffee table. "I've been meaning to get it laminated and I've actually been thinking about getting it framed," he says.

Ohneck is a volunteer speaker and race-car driver for the Youth Initiatives & Education in Lifestyles & Driving Association (YIELD), a not-for-profit group of RCMP and civilians dedicated to road-safety education. He speaks about the dangers of speeding and street racing at high schools, car shows and community events around Alberta and spends his summers at Alberta

tracks – often Castrol Raceway in Edmonton – driving a tricked-out 2000 Chevy Camaro owned by YIELD.

But he's proud of what that ticket represents.

He got it on a Thursday night back in November 2008. Ohneck, then 22, and a buddy had been driving from Spruce Grove to Stony Plain for a weekly game of pool with friends – Ohneck in his Honda Civic sedan and his friend in a Chevy pickup. They'd pulled up, side by side, at the last set of lights in Spruce Grove, on Parkland Highway, and decided to do something Ohneck had never done before.

"Just like out of the movies, we looked over at each other and we decided on green we were going to go," he says.

And go they did, ripping along five kilometres of two-lane rural highway. At one point, Ohneck remembers looking at his speedometer – it read 165 km/h. The limit was 80 km/h. They didn't stop until

iPad readers:
watch an
interview with
Forest Ohneck.



Volunteer driver Forest Ohneck poses at Edmonton's Castrol Raceway with the Youth Initiatives & Education in Lifestyles & Driving Association (YIELD) Camaro.

At one point, Ohneck remembers looking at his speedometer – it read 165 km/h. The speed limit was 80 km/h.

the next set of lights, in Stony Plain. When they were revving up to race again, Ohneck suddenly saw red and blue lights flashing in his rear-view mirror. It was a police cruiser. He froze. A voice – the provincial traffic sheriff – boomed out over a megaphone, ordering them to pull over.

After that, he had to go to court. The potential penalties were stiff: he could have had his vehicle impounded, his licence suspended or a fine of more than \$2,600. In the end, he got lucky: he was sentenced to 250 hours of community service working for YIELD. It was the first time such an agreement had been made with Alberta Justice, says RCMP Const. Gord Buck, who runs YIELD.

So Ohneck began taking time off from his job as a sheet metal worker to travel around the province. Through his story, and photos of a friend who was injured in a high-speed collision, he tried

to convince the kids to make better decisions than he had. And they listened.

“At schools, he’s able to break down barriers because he’s not some old crusty policeman,” says Buck. “Having Forest along, it’s almost peer to peer. They listen to him because he’s got tattoos, he’s a young fellow and he speaks very well.”

Ohneck says he came to enjoy the positive influence he had on the kids. But the work changed him, too. He started to follow speed limits and think before acting – something he says he wasn’t doing on that November evening in 2008 when he got his ticket.

“I wasn’t thinking of the ‘what ifs’ down the road, I was thinking of the here and now,” Ohneck says. “I firmly believe that I might have ended up in the ditch or [hit] a power pole; the possibilities

Knock three points off your licence by passing AMA's online Demerit Reduction Defensive Driver Course. AMADriverEducation.ca

Want to Lose Your Licence? Just Add Demerits

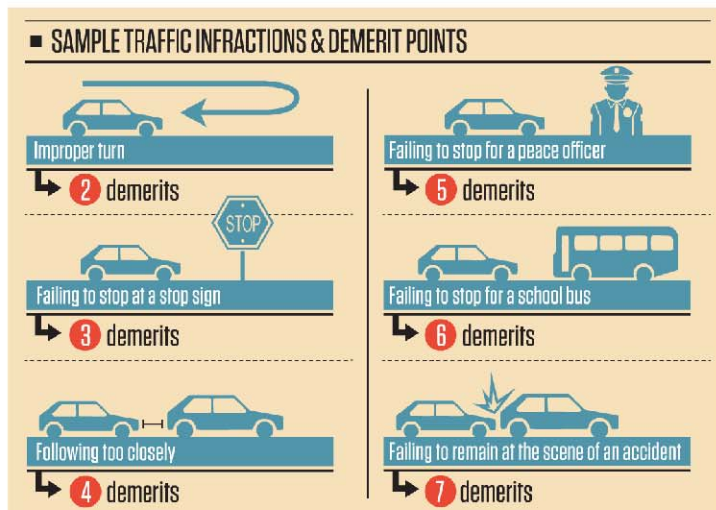
Every time you're convicted of a traffic-safety infraction, you 'earn' demerit points

8-14: You receive a notice from the government notifying you of your demerit count. If you're a new driver, your licence is automatically suspended at eight demerits.

15: Your licence is suspended for one month. Add a second demerit suspension in the same year and you can say goodbye to driving for three months.

A third, and you lose your licence for six months, and you may have to appear before the Alberta Transportation Safety Board.

Ouch: Once a demerit-point suspension has been served, your licence is reinstated with seven points. These “left-over” points remain on your record for a full two years.



1 in 3

Alberta drivers involved in fatality collisions were driving at unsafe speeds.

1 in 10

Alberta drivers involved in injury-causing collisions were driving at unsafe speeds.

Source: Alberta Transportation Traffic Collision Statistics, 2012

are endless. I definitely hold firm to the belief that the YIELD Association saved my life.” And the lives of anyone he might have crashed into.

It took Ohneck two years to complete his 250 community service hours. At the end, he asked if he could stay on as a volunteer with YIELD, and Buck gladly said yes.

After many more hours with the organization, Ohneck earned a spot behind the wheel of the association’s Camaro. He attended more than 63 events with YIELD during the 2013 racing season alone – many of them street-legal races, in which drivers can race street vehicles safely, under the watchful eye of RCMP and emergency officials. He says he’ll continue volunteering as long as he’s able.

He marvels at how a bad decision and a ticket changed his life for the better: “What started off as a nasty pink piece of paper has actually started a whole whirlwind of good in my life.” **w**



Bad Habit #1: SPEEDING

Most drivers admit to speeding at least occasionally: seven in 10, according to Transport Canada. It may seem like it isn’t such a big deal – dropping a little lead onto the pedal to clear an intersection, or “just” exceeding the limit by 15 km/h to pass another vehicle on the highway. But speeding is still a major factor in collisions on Alberta roads.

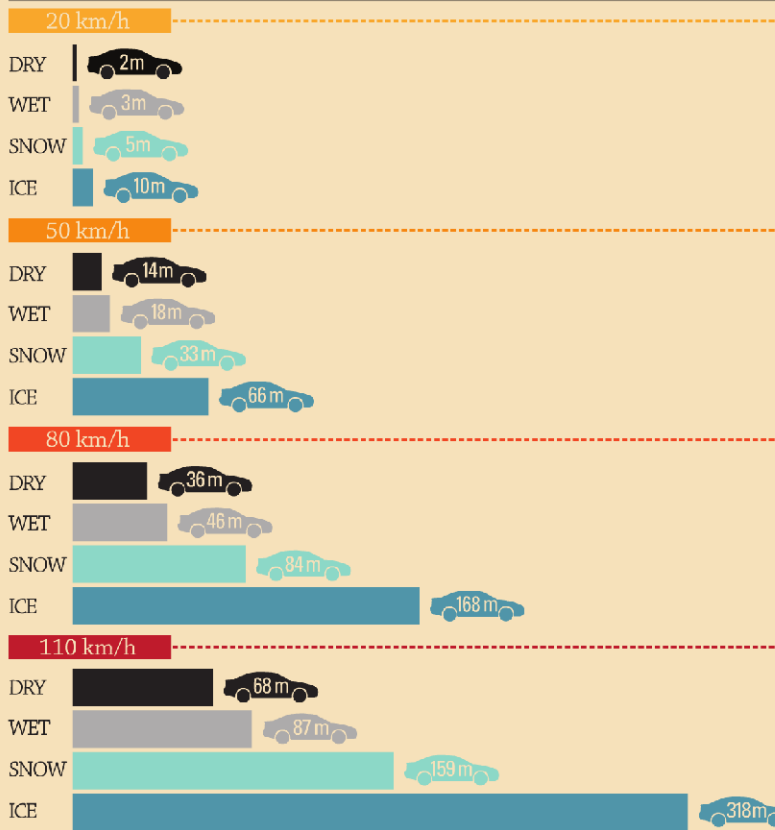
Speeding Gives You Less Time to React

The faster you’re driving, the longer it takes to stop (see the graphic on the right). Speeding also gives you less time to react to and avoid hazards, such as a vehicle ahead of you losing control on black ice or a mule deer bounding across the centreline.

Speed Makes Collisions Worse

The faster you’re going, the greater the force of a collision, and the less effectively safety features such as seat belts and airbags perform. Why? If you go from a high velocity to a standstill – say, from 100 km/h to wrapped around a tree – in just seconds, all of that kinetic energy has to go somewhere. Speed turns a broken leg into a shattered body. Or worse.

STOPPING DISTANCE BASED ON SPEED & ASPHALT CONDITIONS



Source: Forensic Dynamics