

Hamilton

Police see a spike in speeding and stunt driving during COVID-19 pandemic

Premier Ford said he supports increasing licence suspension to 30 days

[Dan Taekema](#) · CBC News · Posted: May 14, 2020 4:11 PM ET | Last Updated: May 14



Provincial police are reporting a rise in street racing and dangerous driving charges compared to 2019. (OPP_WR/Twitter)

COVID-19 has lessened traffic, prompting more drivers to take Ontario's open roads as an invitation to put their foot down.

Provincial and municipal police are reporting a spike in speeding and street racing during the pandemic. With no federal limit on the maximum speed cars can be built to reach, some are pushing their vehicles to the edge, including an 18-year-old who OPP say hit 308 km/h.

It's an incident that raises questions about how speed is regulated in Canada and was described by one road safety advocate as a "very, very strong" example of why the province needs to adopt more automated speed enforcement measures such as speeding and red light cameras.

While the provincial government is responsible for the rules of the road, Transportation Canada establishes the safety requirements for all new and imported vehicles.

The [Canada Motor Vehicle Safety Standards](#) cover brakes, lighting and tires, but they do not dictate a maximum speed for vehicles, according to Transport Canada spokesperson Alexandre Desjardins. Instead, it leaves that to the manufacturers and relies on drivers following posted speed limits.

The Mercedes C 63 AMG with an 18-year-old behind the wheel and 19-year-old in the passenger seat was clocked doing 308 km/h along the Queen Elizabeth Way on May 9.

- [18-year-old clocked doing 308 km/h on QEW told OPP he was 'comfortable' at that speed](#)
- ['Unbelievable speeds': 18-year-old charged after Mercedes clocked doing 308 km/h on QEW](#)

OPP Sgt. Kerry Schmidt previously said it was the fastest speed he'd ever heard of and could have "turned into the most devastating, fatal crash ever."

The Etobicoke teen only had his G2 licence and was driving his parents' car, according to provincial police.

His licence was suspended, the car impounded and he was charged with stunt and dangerous driving.

Schmidt, a veteran Ontario Provincial Police officer said he was "pretty much speechless" when he heard how fast the car was driving and compared it to the type of speed planes reach while taking off.

But Graham Larkin, executive director of [Vision Zero Canada](#), said he wasn't surprised.

"Speed is largely unregulated and the car industry promotes speed, especially for some of these luxury cars like a Mercedes," he explained.

The 2020 model of the AMG C 63 S Coupe is listed for \$86,000 on Mercedes-Benz's website, which boasts the car has 503 horsepower and can go from 0-100 km/h in 3.9 seconds.



A 19-year-old has been charged with stunt driving after the OPP say he was clocked driving 308 km/h on the QEW Saturday. (OPP_HSD/Twitter)

A spokesperson for the car maker did not directly answers questions about the top speed of the C63 AMG and whether or not the company believed any aftermarket modifications would

be necessary for the car to hit 308 kilometres an hour.

"Mercedes-Benz Canada does not in any way condone the illegal or dangerous operation of any road vehicle and expects drivers to comply with local laws and regulations at all times," wrote Zak Paget.

In the days after the car was stopped, some, including Ontario's Premier, spoke out in support of tougher penalties for extreme speeds.

'You've got to throw the book at these people'

Doug Ford described driving 308 km/h as "reckless" and said he agrees with calls to increase the current roadside licence suspension and vehicle impound of seven days to a month or more.

"Especially [for] that young gentleman and it should even be longer than 30 days of suspension, someone going 200 kilometres over the speed limit," he said. "That's staggering."

The premier added he was thankful no one was hurt and hoped the driver would never make the same mistake again.

"You've got to throw the book at these people because they're putting everyone's lives in jeopardy when they do something that reckless and careless."

Ontario's Ministry of Transportation (MTO) said it's continuing to review its policies, but a spokesperson argued the province "already has some of the toughest penalties for extreme speeding and aggressive driving in the world."

The escalating penalties for drivers caught driving more than 50 km/h over the speed limit include that seven-day licence suspension and immediate roadside impoundment of the vehicle involved in order to immediately stop the risk they pose, said Lee Alderson, a senior issues advisor with the ministry.

Those roadside measures are backed up by a maximum fine of \$10,000, which the MTO pointed out happens to be the highest fine for that offence in Canada.

A driver's licence can also be suspended for up to two years following a first conviction and that jumps to 10 years for a second conviction within a decade. Punishments also include six demerit points and up to six months in jail.

Police also have the option of laying criminal charges for "excessive speed or high-risk behaviours" that end with someone getting injured or dying, Allderson added.

"We are sending a clear message that this behaviour has no place on Ontario's roads."



speed limit," he added.

It's an option Larkin says would make a difference by creating safe speed "pace cars," but hearing the government is considering it doesn't exactly fill him with optimism.

"They're interested in all kinds of things. It doesn't mean it comes into legislation."

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The OPP shared this photo of a radar gun showing how fast the teen was allegedly driving. (OPP_HSD/Twitter)

Still, some people seem to be missing that message, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

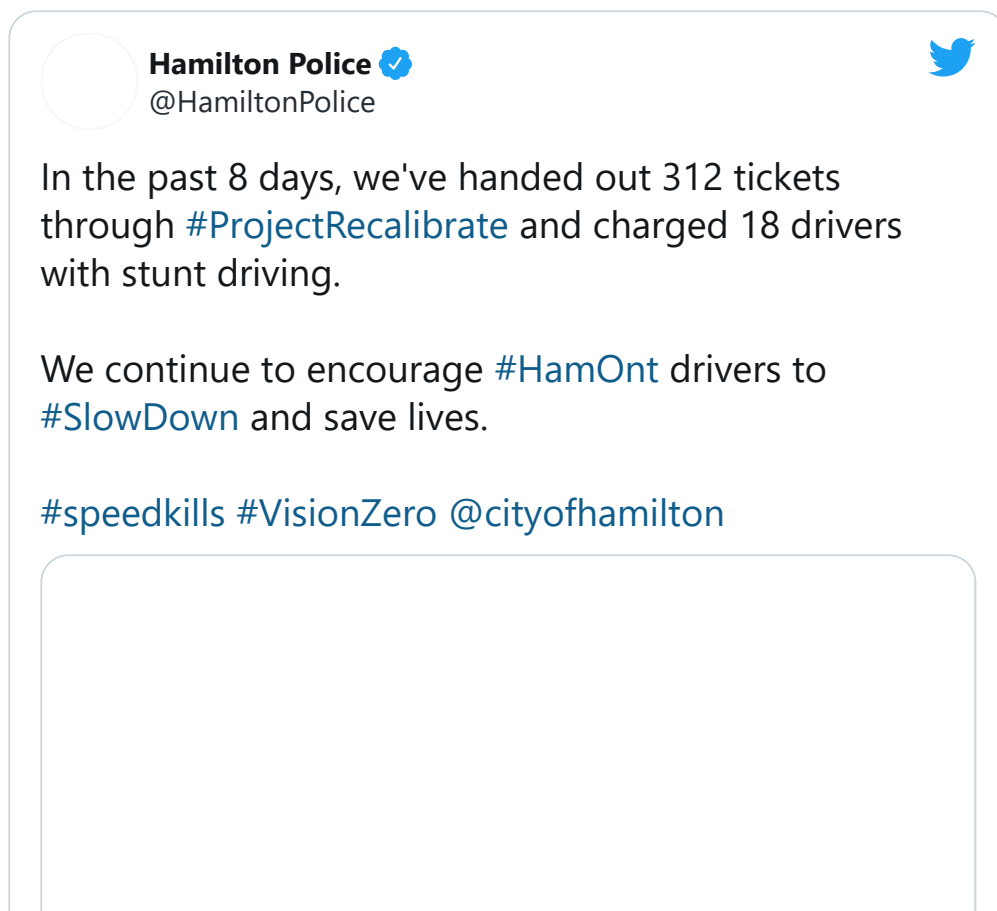
The MTO acknowledged street racing and aggressive driving has surged in recent weeks as the province's roads have opened up.

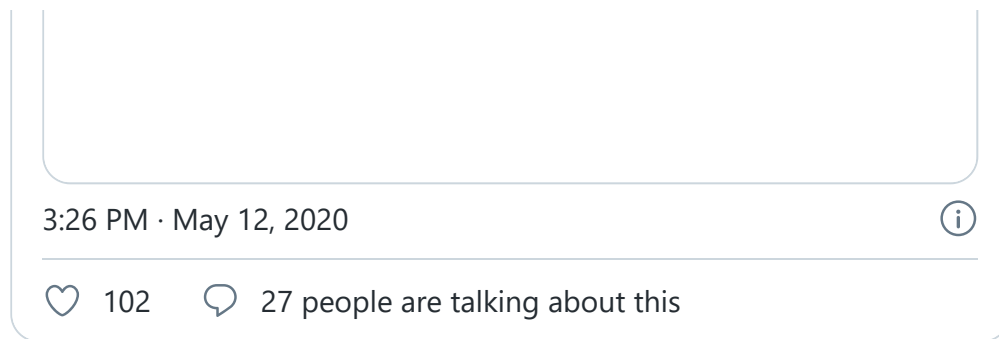
Provincial police say street racing and dangerous driving charges are on the rise and collision fatalities are up.

"When you're comparing what happened last year to this year, we've seen an increase in every category of high-risk driving behaviour," said Schmidt in a video posted to Twitter.

Hamilton police are also cracking down through an effort called Project Recalibrate, launched after the service noticed drivers were treating area roads like raceways, including a 23 per cent increase in stunt driving.

A tweet shared by the service Tuesday reported 312 tickets had been handed in just eight days.





Toronto police have observed an increase in speeding since March 15 as well.

A posting on the service's website states it's too early to determine any possible trends, but notes the service laid [150 stunt driving charges between April 1 and April 20](#), compared to 23 in 2019 — a 550 per cent increase.

Speeding needs to cost more than money

While cars are getting safer and safer for the people inside, features such as touch screens, reduced cabin noise and even ride comfort and better handling all desensitize drivers to speed and can act as distractions, according to Larkin.

"All of these things basically allow you to be very comfortable rocketing along at speeds which are incredibly dangerous, not only to yourself, but I think even more importantly to other people."

It's also key that the consequences for speeding include more than just money, said Larkin.

"Someone with a very expensive sports car, that might mean nothing to them," he noted, suggesting demerit points or [linking fines to income](#) as officials do in Finland, would make a difference.

Transport Canada said it is "actively engaged" as a part of a United Nations' [World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations](#) and "monitoring and assessing new technology that could strengthen road safety in Canada, including measures to address the serious issue of speeding," stated spokesperson Desjardins in an email to CBC.

One of those measures is [intelligent speed assistance technology](#), which "offers an effective means of controlling vehicle maximum speeds by preventing drivers to exceed the posted