

Speed kills, just ask the fun police

By: John Connelly - December 07, 2013

HAPPY Hanukkah, late Thanksgiving and early Christmas. Here's a festive thought: does speed kill?

Wheels magazine clearly doesn't think so because it's been running a campaign to raise the speed limit to 130km/h. While the official line from the real police and the fun police has been to accuse the magazine of encouraging genocide, former highway patrol officers have backed the campaign.

In 1995 the US government repealed the 88km/h speed limit. That limit wasn't about saving lives but saving petrol. And it didn't do a great job of that.

The fun police predicted 6400 extra US deaths and a million extra injuries once people started driving faster. Ralph Nader said: "History will never forgive Congress for this assault on the sanctity of human life."

A study by the right-wing Cato Institute found differently. "In 1997 there were 66,000 fewer road injuries than in 1995, the injury rate per 100 million vehicle-miles-travelled fell to its lowest level ever recorded in 1997," its report said. "If the injury rate on the roads had been as high in 1997 as it had been in 1995, approximately 17,000 more Americans would have been injured on the roads.

"Americans have saved some 200 million manhours in terms of less time spent on the road. The net economic benefit of raising the speed limit has been between \$2 billion and \$3bn a year."

From 1995 to 2012, 35 US states set speed limits of 112km/h or higher. In December, Texas opened a toll road with a 136km/h speed limit, the highest in the US. From March this year four more states have increased the speed limit.

Proponents of higher speeds use Germany, where many autobahns have no speed limits, as an example of speed not killing. The reality is that the European Traffic Safety Council concluded in a 2008 report: "Empirical evidence indicates that all instances of introduced speed limits on German motorways have caused very large casualty reductions."

In a *Guardian* article, "Do speed limits reduce the number of road deaths?", journalist Ami Sedghi wrote: "For many countries rural road fatalities account for the highest proportion of road deaths. Rural roads killed five times more people than motorways in Germany between 2007-09, accounting for 60 per cent for road deaths, versus 12 per cent for motorways."

Jim Baxter, former president of the US-based National Motorists Association, says, "Speed limits have virtually no influence on regulating general traffic speeds. The only legitimate function of speed limits is to delineate at what point reasonably competent drivers exceed the safe speed for a given roadway.

"If the speed limit is properly set, it can serve as a useful form of information as well as a 'trigger' for enforcement action. We have just concluded a 22-year-long experiment that has unequivocally proven that speed limits do not determine traffic speeds.

"The overwhelming cause of the tremendous reduction in the highway fatality rate is better vehicles and better highways.

"Speed limits should be based on the highest travel speeds of the vast majority of safe and reasonable motorists. The reverse, attempting to dictate travel speeds through the use of speed limits, has not and will not work, and will, in all likelihood, diminish traffic safety." Well done, Jim.

OK, enough of the do-gooder stuff.

I'm still searching for a historic car to race at just under the speed limit.

At RM/Sotheby's auction a 1964 Scaglietti Ferrari 250 LM went for close to \$15 million. That's why I've been in London trying to buy the Georges Filipinetti 1964 Porsche 904 GTS for a bit under \$3m. Not a bad buy when you think a few years ago you could have bought one of these for about \$800k.