

## STREET RACING

It's Saturday night on the back streets of town. Hundreds of fans are milling around two cars. Inside each car, the driver is gripping the steering wheel and revving the engine. At a signal from a flashlight, they roar off in a screech of tires. With luck, they'll both make it to the end.

This is street racing. It's dangerous, it's illegal and it's going on in every major city.

The average street racer is a 17-24 year-old guy, driving a souped-up compact like a Honda Civic or Ford Mustang. But more and more girls are getting into the action. These racers spend thousands of dollars on their cars, dropping in powerful engines and adding fancy paint jobs. Some cars even have TV screens built into the visors.

Many cruisers use a nitrous oxide fuel system, otherwise known as *the juice*, *the squeeze* or *NOS*. It burns fuel at a higher rate than normal, which increases the engine's power. These cars regularly hit speeds of 200 km per hour.

In the U.S., over 100 people die every year from street racing accidents. Worst of all, these deaths are not always the drivers. Passengers, fans and even innocent bystanders are often the victims. In Toronto, a student was killed while he was crossing the street wearing his earphones. He never even heard the car coming. In Philadelphia, a toddler was killed when the car she was riding in was struck by an out-of-control racer.

Experienced street racers say that accidents like these are caused by "morons" who don't know what they're doing. But even "real" racers sometimes take chances on streets they don't know. In organized races, lookouts with cell phones and scanners warn of hazards and, of course, the police.

The police are watching for them. In most places, there are strict penalties for street racing. Racers can lose their cars or even go to jail. If someone gets killed, the racer could be imprisoned for life.

So why do they do it? There's some money to be made, but not much. Movies like "The Fast and the Furious" add a touch of glamor to street racing. And there is a feeling of belonging to a group. But ask any street racer and he or she will tell you it's for the thrill. There's a rush that comes with the speed, the power of the machine, and the risk of getting caught. As one racer said, "It's not just a sport. It's a way of life."

