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Street racers face few consequences when caught in Albuquerque



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Investigative Producer

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Since the pandemic started, street racing has claimed the lives of three people in Albuquerque and police have been cracking down.

But, those who are caught are facing few consequences and it is has police saying there is little they can do to keep the streets safe at night.

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"The roadways are not meant to be traveled at speeds that these guys are going," said Albuquerque Police Department Lt. Nick Wheeler, who oversees traffic enforcement. "They could care less if you stop them, give them a ticket."

Deacon James Owens lost his best friend last year when police say someone who was racing crashed into Father Graham Golden's car.

"The abbot knocked on each of our doors at 12:20, and I knew immediately that something had happened to Graham," he said. "The next thing I remember is we were here for the funeral and

his body was laid out in front of the altar. And, you know, then it just kind of all became one kind of big thing."

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Golden's death is one of several that forced police in the metro to crack down on street racers.

They have stepped up patrols, used helicopters and went as far as taking out an advertisement showing pictures of victims and pleading with people to stop the racing.

"Street racing is not just stupid, it's deadly," Albuquerque police Chief Harold Medina said in the ad. "We see it every day. Innocent lives destroyed by reckless speeding on our streets."

Target 7 combed through court records and found in 2021 law enforcement in Bernalillo County issued 57 citations for drag racing, street racing or what is called exhibition driving.

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For the most part, police are catching what they call 'street racers' on major corridors like Montgomery — similar to where Golden was killed

Lt. Wheeler said his officers write a lot of tickets, but don't see anything changing.

"Nothing that we're doing is making them change their behavior," Wheeler said.

Target 7 looked at the outcomes of all of those 57 tickets issued by APD, the sheriff's office and state police.

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Under the city code, it's a maximum of three months in jail and a maximum \$500 fine. Under state law, if it's on a state highway, the penalty could be up to a year in jail.

Target 7 found not once did someone do that time.

Of the 57 cases:

- 38 percent of the time officers did not show up to court and the ticket was thrown out.
- 16 percent of the time the alleged street racer didn't show up and a warrant was issued for their arrest.
- 12 cases are still pending
- In the 19 cases in which the alleged street racer was found guilty most of the time they received a \$77 fine and were forced to take driving school

"If a law doesn't have teeth in it, what's the point of enforcing that law," Day asked.

[Mother of two identified as victim in possible drag racing crash](#)

Charlie Fegan says serious and safe drivers are racing on one of two tracks in town and he has an idea that he thinks will save lives.

"We're not going to stop kids from street racing. There is no law that will do that," Fegan said. "We need to educate them on the dangers of the vehicles they have with these high horsepower machines."

Fegan, who owns Sandia Speedway, is suggesting that instead of judges sending alleged street racers to the usual road safety classes when they get a ticket for street racing, they send him to a professional driving class for racers

"They teach you how to read stop signs, what a yield sign means, you know, left, turn right, turn that kind of thing," Fegan said. "But it really doesn't address the power of the machines."

Traffic stops are not going to go away

Wheeler says his officers will not stop trying.

As far as not showing up for court he says officers from most departments get punished if they have an unexcused absence

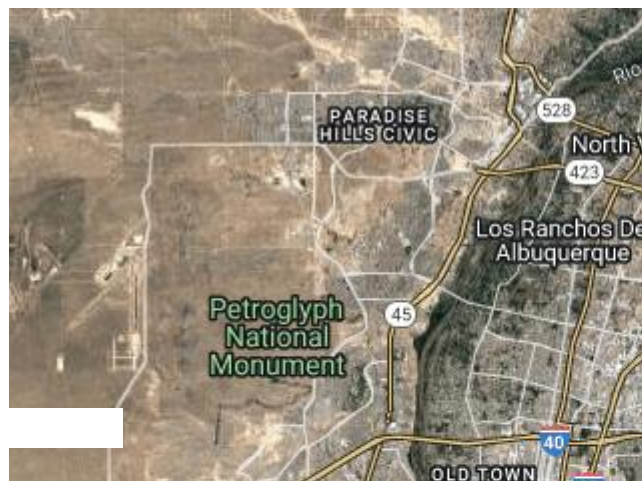
“It's frustrating ... I understand they're inundated with calls for service, they're inundated with work there and they with the court trying to balance over time with family life,” Wheeler said. “But the only way that we're going to make the streets safer is if we start holding these people accountable.”

Deacon Owens says he doesn't want the man who police say killed his friend to go to jail. He says he knows he made a mistake like many young people with a fast car

"You know, I guess we're all speeders in some way," he said.

Albuquerque Street Racing ☆

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