

Burned rubber, doughnuts and smoke. Unruly car meets, street racing disrupt roads and mobilize police.

By [Jasmine Hilton](#) and [Donovan J. Thomas](#)

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Hundreds of cars and dozens of spectators packed the parking lots of the Kingstowne Towne Center in Northern Virginia on a Saturday night in November, leaving behind rubber tire marks burned onto the pavement and scattered trash. A week later in downtown Silver Spring, crowds outside a movie theater watched as a band of cars blocking an intersection spun doughnuts, filling the air with clouds of smoke and the roars of engine revs. And in the Baltimore area in March, police said an illegal street race caused a crash that sent at least two people to shock trauma.

Over the past year, neighbors and law enforcement across the Washington region and the United States have raised alarms over what they say is an uptick of unruly car events or street racing that have disrupted traffic, resulted in crashes or ended with fatalities. The concerns have been so severe that at least one state [changed the law](#) to make burnouts and doughnuts illegal, and police departments nationwide have launched new enforcement initiatives to crack down on the activity.

Locally, law enforcement has seen an increase in such car meetups since the start of the pandemic, Montgomery County Capt. Nicholas Picerno said. His department recently responded to more than 100 cars — including some coming from as far away as New Jersey, Delaware and southern Virginia — converged in a Target parking lot in Silver Spring.

“A lot of time, these could be pretty benign events. ... It was kind of a covid-friendly pastime where you could meet in the parking lot and kind of show your cars off, be outside and still interact,” Picerno said. The concern, however, is “it wouldn’t take much for an instance like this to go from a kind of unified rally ... to a violent episode.”

Rhena Tantisunthorn @LandGoose · Nov 21, 2021
Replying to @CordellTraffic

They all end up coming up Georgia to Wheaton. Easily hunc them up here now.

Cordell

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VIDEO from TONIGHT at Fenton Street and Ellswor Drive/the Ellsworth Plaza (Downtown Silver Spring, Video taken looking towards/down what would be Ellsworth Pedestrian Plaza. 🎥 borrowed from Instagram.

Watch on Tw

12:13 AM · Nov 21, 2021

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Earlier this year, Maryland State Police announced initiatives to address street racing concerns after a crash involving several cars along Interstate 70 around Baltimore.

Ten days after Maryland State Police announced the initiative, which included partnerships with other local law enforcement and troopers focused on speeding and aggressive driving, police said they issued more than 300 traffic citations and warnings during a four-day period. Police said 82 citations and 22 warnings were speeding related and one crash was believed to be related to an illegal street race.

Regional agencies are developing similar initiatives.

On Nov. 13, Fairfax County police said the department responded to several locations, including the 4200 block of John Marr Drive, the 6500 block of Edsall Road and Kingstowne Towne Center starting just before midnight to reports of 100 to 200 cars “driving recklessly” as a large crowd gathered and watched.

Alan Henney

@alanhenney

STREET RACERS CLASH w/ POLICE, AGAIN--- For 2
time this evening, Fx Co police are attempting to
disperse 100-200 street racers. This time they were
Cinder Bed Rd off Backlick Rd. Around 9 p.m. they
at Kingstowne Shopping Ctr. H/T @RealTimeNews
@ffxnow @ARLnowDOTcom

12:24 AM · Nov 14, 2021

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The racers were doing burnouts — spinning cars' wheels in place — and doughnuts — spinning cars in a circle — and kicking up clouds of smoke in parking lots. Drivers were also racing down the street, with much of the footage captured on video on social media, police said.

Using a helicopter to monitor where the cars below were going, officers worked to get the crowds moving along, police said. By the time the night was over, about 90 minutes after the gathering started, two minor crashes occurred but there were no injuries, police said.

So far, no arrests have been made but the department said officers are “reviewing video and photo evidence.”

The event drew complaints from neighbors who live nearby and frequent the shopping center.

“I’m more concerned that our shopping centers are starting to look like drag strips when they leave,” one woman said during a community meeting hosted by the Franconia District police station on Nov. 17.

“They’re literally defacing it with the rubber burn marks all over the parking lines and also they’re leaving trash behind. ... These are shopping centers that are privately owned. And the owners of these shopping centers shouldn’t have to deal with that.”

Commander of the Franconia District Station, Capt. James Krause, said police are monitoring the groups to get ahead of them if they plan future events. Police are also talking to property managers to help keep parking lots clear.

“They did go to some parking lots and kind of having some reckless behavior where they’re peeling out in the parking lot or doing doughnuts. Obviously, that’s dangerous, it’s reckless driving, and, puts people’s safety at risk,” Krause said at the community meeting. “Not to mention the other disturbances, like the fact that it affects the quality of life, the loud, you hear people kind of racing up and down the street. So, it’s disruptive, especially late at night, but this behavior is unacceptable any time.”

On public roads, police will enforce traffic laws to address the racing, Krause said.

DC REALTIME NEWS

@RealTimeNews10

Video coming in for more than 200 street racers that gathered in Northern Virginia at various locations.

Skyflyer Channel 8 News @skyflyer81

Replying to @RealTimeNews10

Seems like alot of car hooligans out in nova tonight

12:55 AM · Nov 14, 2021

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Jacques Mathieu, a Northern Virginia resident who regularly attends sanctioned car meets in which groups have permission to gather, said he knows the kind of “friendship and warmth” that comes out of the camaraderie of bonding over cars and coming together. Mathieu considers himself a “car enthusiast” and has had a love for automobile history for years.

But the recent racing events have been “insulting,” Mathieu said, because of the potentially dangerous behavior exhibited in the streets. He said younger people who attend the racing events should have more outlets to show off their cars, such as a car club or show, instead of racing in the parking lots and downtown.

“Maybe if they had a place to go like they’ve done in certain states ... and encourage them to go somewhere,” Mathieu, 69, said. “There’s nothing out there for these kids.”

Neighbors believe the car meets are indicative of a larger speeding issue and said this is not the first time they have heard of these incidents. In a Fairfax County Nextdoor app thread, residents expressed their frustrations over the racers’ loud mufflers and “lawless behavior.”

Diane Lundin, 46, a Fairfax County resident near Kingstowne, said she tried to get speed humps installed on her street due to “a speed problem” but didn’t get enough votes to pass the measure, which is part of the county’s process for traffic calming measures.

Lundin, who’s lived in various places throughout Alexandria for the last 15 years, said she didn’t start hearing about speed racing until she moved to the area. Lundin said the wide-open lot is likely what made the Kingstowne shopping center appealing for the recent gathering of cars.

“There’s no barriers or medians, it’s basically like an open circle, if you will, where there is nothing to stop you,” Lundin said. “Until somebody actually does something about [speeding], nothing’s gonna happen. ... What are the action items?”

Miles away, in Montgomery County, police said more than 100 cars met up in a Target parking lot in the 12000 block of Cherry Hill Road on Nov. 20 in an incident that spread into Prince George’s County. Officers responded to the scene around 8:45 p.m., “which quickly dissipated the event,” police said.

The cars “fled the scene” toward downtown Silver Spring, where officers cleared out the blocked intersections and gave traffic-related citations, police said. Videos on social media showed people with camera equipment taking videos of the cars as they did tricks in the streets downtown.

“It definitely gave impressions like a Fast and Furious movie,” said Picerno, the Montgomery County captain.

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SILVER SPRING CHAOS: Several hundred drivers blocking roads, doing donuts, and setting off fireworks between the US-29 corridor, including Downtown Spring, and the College Park Park & Ride off of I-49. One person in custody for fighting officers 495W @ US #MDTraffic

11:40 PM · Nov 20, 2021

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There was one vehicle collision and one arrest for DUI and no injuries were reported, police said.

Picerno said police had been tracking the group through the day and coordinating with other law enforcement throughout the region. For the next several hours following their arrival, the group relocated to different locations in Montgomery County and then to Prince George's County as multiple agencies partnered together to coordinate a response, including Prince George's police and Virginia State police, Picerno said.

"We were able to have such a swift response to a lot of the locations. We were able to actually be ahead of them at certain points and be able to prevent them from entering places they wanted to go," Picerno said.

Police have been monitoring racing, especially throughout the nearly two years of the pandemic, which left roadways emptier than usual, Picerno said.

The consequences racers can face are case-specific, Picerno said, but can range from a traffic citation, which costs and could lead to points on a driver's license and impact their insurance, to an arrest.

Going forward, Picerno said police are focused on being proactive and working in collaboration with regional partners, "both from an enforcement and intelligence" sharing capacity.

Prince George's County police said several area law enforcement agencies recently partnered to target illegal street racing and car meets. Police said the Dec. 17 operation resulted in four arrests and 169 traffic citations. They said 17 vehicles were impounded.

“I don’t want, and I don’t think the community wants, nor does the department want Montgomery County or the D.C. region to become the epicenter of these sort of events,” Picerno said. “I think maintaining a proactive and visible presence in all sorts of enforcement is critical to determine effectiveness and to give people that sense of security.”

