

GEORGIA MOTORISTS NEED TO SLOW DOWN

What will it take to get you to slow down on Georgia's highways? Try this. Stop what you are doing for a second and look at someone you love. It could be your spouse, your significant other, your child, a parent or your best friend. Now, imagine that person has just learned that you have been killed in a motor vehicle crash, or you find out they have been killed. Sound far-fetched? It will happen more than one thousand times this year in Georgia. One thousand living, breathing human beings who had hopes and dreams, who brought joy to other human beings and who won't see New Year's Day.

Most traffic deaths occur because we take driving a motor vehicle so casually. We drive too fast jeopardizing other people's lives while we rush mostly to go nowhere important. We tailgate, ignoring the fact that we could never control our vehicle should someone stop suddenly in front of us. A few of us — pickup truck drivers, in particular — don't wear seatbelts because it infringes on our "freedoms." (The dumbest argument on the face of the earth. I'm not sure even the pointy-heads at the ACLU could swallow that one.) Far too many people drink and drive. Highway safety officials say 564 motor vehicle deaths this year in Georgia will happen because of an impaired driver — a polite way of saying a blithering drunk or someone hopped up on drugs.

None of us think a serious automobile accident will ever happen to us.

As Georgia State Trooper Larry Schnall says, "We always assume an automobile accident is going to happen to the other fellow, not us." Trooper Schnall recently invited me to attend a ceremony at the Georgia-Tennessee state line called "Hands Across the Border," a highway safety enforcement program that Georgia has entered into with every state on its border.

The program is a part of the "One Hundred Days of Summer HEAT" campaign sponsored by the Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety. HEAT — Highway Enforcement of Aggressive Traffic — is a coordinated effort by Georgia law enforcement agencies to crack down on speeding, drunk driving, failure to wear safety belts and use child restraints, and other stupid tricks we perform on the highways. I wrote about the kickoff of the program back in June and have had several people tell me they haven't noticed any additional presence of police on Georgia's highways since the campaign began.

Bob Dallas, director of the Governor's Office of Highway Safety, says don't let that perception lull you into a false sense of security. As I write this, participating law enforcement agencies in Georgia have issued some 183,000 speeding tickets, over 52,000 safety belt violations and made nearly 13,000 DUI arrests during the HEAT campaign. If we had had more police available during the campaign, those numbers might have been even better. A large number of law enforcement personnel were sent to the G-8 Summit at Sea Island, to protect the world's poobahs from a bunch of irrelevant protestors who, in retrospect, couldn't have organized a billy goat race. In my opinion, Georgia would have been better served if the poobahs had gone to some exotic location, like Goose Hollow, Arkansas, and our police could have devoted more time getting idiot drivers off the state's highways.

According to my calculations, in the One Hundred Days of Summer HEAT campaign, police averaged slightly more than one speeding ticket every minute of every hour of every day, almost 22 seat belt violations every hour of every day and a DUI citation at the rate of one every ten minutes all day, every day. As impressive as those numbers are, Bob Dallas says Georgia can and will do better. While the HEAT program is winding down, the crackdown on reckless driving will continue. Dallas swears the state is committed to making our highways safer. It is like a diet, he says. It won't happen in one day, but it will happen. Until then, take another look at your loved ones and think what their lives would be like without you or your life without them. Maybe that will slow you down.