

Abuja's smooth highways turn death

In the Federal Capital Territory, the trend of motorsports and street racing have resulted in a significantly increase in the severity of accidents, NATHANIEL SHAIKU reports

FOR many users, motorsports and street racing come with certain thrills; from high-speed competition, adrenaline-pumping overtakes, and the precision required to navigate sharp corners. Drivers and fans alike enjoy the intense rivalries, strategic maneuvers, and the roar of powerful engines.

In Abuja, these activities have been on the rise and have significantly contributed to the severity of accidents.

Recently, on February 16, a video posted by an X user, @supercarsnigeria showed the moment the driver of a 2017 Honda Accord crashed into a 2022 Lexus IS350 on a highway in Abuja during a car meet.

While there is scarce data about road crashes and fatalities resulting from street racing and general motorsport in Abuja, *Sunday PUNCH* gathered that some of these races were held during the weekends to minimise collisions with pedestrians and motorists.

In September 2024, an X user, @Trammania, sought the help of well-meaning Nigerians, to pay off a debt, which he incurred after wrecking a rented sports car, precisely a 2022 Corvette Stingray valued at N100.3m.

He reportedly crashed into a Dodge Challenger during an illegal drag race in Lagos.

The crash, which involved multiple high-performance vehicles, resulted in severe injuries and extensive property damage. Fortunately, all those involved in the accident survived.

A dangerous pattern

In a report published in February 2025, the Federal Road Safety Corps disclosed that no fewer than 55,015 lives had been lost to road crashes across the country, over the past 10 years, with records also showing that 108,369 road crashes occurred within the same period.

Between December 15, 2024, and January 15, 2025, the FRSC reported 531 road traffic crashes nationwide, a 16.2 per cent decrease from the 634 crashes recorded during the same period in the previous year.

However, the fatalities during this time frame rose to 402, compared to 335 in the previous year, marking a 20 per cent increase.

Road fatalities are largely attributed to human factors such as poor road networks and reckless driving behaviour including overloading, excessive speeding, and driver fatigue.

As of Q2 2024, the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, in a road traffic report, recorded 292 total cases of road accidents in the FCT. Of those, 47 were fatal, 191 were serious, while 54 were minor, involving a total of 1,837 persons and resulting in a total casualty of 766.

According to the report, the leading causes of road crashes in the North Central are speed violations, 503; followed closely by mechanically deficient vehicles (182), route violations (57); tyre bursts (54); overloading,



49 and sleeping on the wheel (40), among other causes.

These statistics show a pattern of dangerous driving practices, majorly speed violations.

'Why we go on car racing'

A sports car enthusiast and former street racer, who declined to be named in this report, told our correspondent that some of the spots for car race include the Idu Industrial Area, off the Lugbe-Airport Junction Expressway, and behind the Grand Square mall in the Central Area.

"You can check around the Idu Industrial Area on Sundays. We also meet behind Grand Square in town. We meet during weekends; Saturday and Sunday evenings between 4 pm and 7 pm.

There are no set days and meet-up locations change too. We have a group, and whenever we are bored, we mobilise for that weekend and set up a time and location."

"For official car shows with sponsorship and gate fees, we usually put out ads on Instagram and other social media platforms informing interested persons about the date and time. These are usually during festive periods like Sallah and Christmas. We have a car group, so whenever we are bored, we mobilise for that weekend and set up a time and location," he said.

He, however, explained that the car meets and events had reduced after a set of twins, who were among the founders of the group, died in an accident during a car race.

"The last accident that happened claimed two boys - twins. They were not drifting though, but they were in a sports car. They both died. They were the founders of the group," he added.

The President of the Automobile Racing



Team of Nigeria, who gave his name only as Damisa, noted that some "bad eggs" in the sports car racing community have turned car meets into competitive races, adding that despite efforts to control the practice, it had become impossible to stop.

"It all started as us just hanging out on Sundays. We all brought our cars and we would just drive to a certain location. Idu drift location where we used to drift before. And then, we were just like let us do a convoy, let's drive there.

"But some people decided to make it competitive, they will just start saying 'My car is finer than yours', 'I am a better driver than you', that is how it started. We always try to control it, but it gets out of hand. That is how it started, and then it somehow became a bad tradition.

"We do not like it, but it is something that can't be stopped, I think. It is a bad thing, and we are trying to regulate it now, but there are always those bad eggs that will try to spoil something good," Damisa said.

He further explained that he would prefer that street racing be scrapped totally, and expressed concerns about casualties and fatalities that have resulted from the activity.

"We all know the risks involved in street racing. Left to me, let us scrap it. We should have a space and safety for all of that. We should not be doing it on public roads. First, we don't wish accidents on anyone.

"The first question I ask when I hear there is an accident is, I hope they did not hit any random person, or no one died because that will be a big problem for us. Then I will say to myself, if we have a space to do all this,

we will not be having these problems. I made a post about this once.

"We want the community to be safe, but we all have those bad eggs that sabotage it. That is the problem we are facing. You want to plan something safely but then some people decide to act mad and spoil it. Once I hear no one was hurt, we do not care about the cars because they can always be fixed or bought again. It is the lives that matter most," he noted.

Violation of safety rules

Similarly, the president and founder of Auto League Nigeria Automobile and Motorsport Media, Tamuno Lawson, also blamed the accidents from drag racing and street racing, on bad eggs who disobeyed safety rules set by the ARTN.

Lawson stated, "I want to correct something; the people having accidents are not the drag racers. Back then when it was a thing, it was not the drag racers that were having or getting into accidents. Those guys had nothing to do with drag racing because they were well-organised.

"The ARTN then made it well organised, well arranged and well safeguarded. It is the bad eggs that don't listen to safety advice, and when we tell them don't race on public roads or don't do this or that; that is when you hear of accidents.

"And it is normally after the drag race has been done before you start hearing of accidents. So I would like to correct that, it is not the drag racing that causes the accidents, just the few bad eggs that refuse to listen."

Asked about what measures were put in place to prevent accidents resulting from the racing events, Lawson stated, "First, we try our best not to do it on public roads and try to do it on empty street roads without traffic. But it has been stopped for a while because nobody has been doing drag races again because of the many accidents, and the bad eggs that refused to stop.

Photo: Nairaland/DarknightAbj

racetracks for exotic car owners



"Then, we also used to make sure no kids were driving. Safety precautions, fire extinguishers, seatbelts, all those things have to be available before you start the drag race. And we always have an end point where you stop, and you must stop," he explained.

FRSC speaks

Speaking on the issue, the FCT Sector Commander of the Federal Road Safety Corps, Muta'a Chorie, lamented the racing practice in Nigeria, adding that many of the racers claim to be harassed when they were arrested for reckless driving.

"The major issue is attitudinal, which we have been dealing with. We have been going around, we have been on the radio, talking about this with passion. I do not know how we behave.

"We go out of this country, we obey rules and regulations, we obey simple laws, and when we come back to the country, it's a different ball game entirely.

"When you start enforcement, they start telling you it's harassment. That is the kind of country we find ourselves in. No enforcement isn't called harassment because it is not palatable to anybody."

Chorie narrated an instance in which an incident occurred and then the agency received a report.

"I immediately had to call the security agencies, and we had to go and disturb because they wanted to have a car race somewhere around this Nizamiye Hospital, which we had to stop," he said.

He also faulted the racing practice, adding that they were mostly done by the children of the rich and there was no place for such races in the FCT owing to the lack of sufficient infrastructure.

"But since then, honestly, I haven't heard of any such thing again. It's like it died a natural death. There's no place for this kind of thing here, in this part of the world. How are we dealing with the infrastructure that is not sufficient, and then we are coming to do these kinds of things?

"And mostly it is with the high in the society. People are hungry, people are dying and some are allowing their children to be doing very funny things in town. It is laughable, but that is what we do. It is not done in any place," Chorie added.

Introduction of speed limits

Speaking with our correspondent in an interview, the Corps Spokesperson,

Olusegun Ogungbemi, highlighted the various measures that had been implemented to enhance road safety, including the introduction of mandatory speed limiters for commercial vehicles, which he said has contributed to a decline in highway fatalities.

"The introduction of speed limiters for commercial vehicles has helped reduce crashes caused by speeding. Available data shows a decline in fatalities on highways following this enforcement.

"FRSC visits motor parks and works with transport unions to promote road safety awareness among commercial drivers.

"Despite these efforts and effective enforcement put in place by the corps, some recalcitrant drivers still pose heavy challenges to the corps due to their habitual violation of established laws," Ogungbemi explained.

A road safety expert and Chief Executive Officer of Professional Driving and Safety Academy, Jide Owatunmise, highlighted the complexities of "performance driving", stating that many of the cars used by the racers in Abuja were not designed for performance racing.

"Let's start from the road itself. Roads for racing, the construction, and the texture are usually different from the normal roads that we ply daily. That is one. Two, the tyres of the car being used for racing are different.

"We have different types of tyres. The type of tread of the tyres differs; the depth of the tyres differs; the mechanism also differs. Those vehicles have been designed to overcome the vehicle dynamics and to overcome the forces that operate on the

vehicles in motion. Three major forces operate on the vehicle in motion.

"The three major forces are kinetic energy, which has to do with your speed and the load. The second force that operates on the vehicle in motion is the centrifugal force, which has to do with how your car reacts to a turn, maybe at a bend. And the third one is the inertia, the force of inertia."

Explaining further, the road safety expert, pointed out that how a vehicle owner moves uphill and descends from it is important.

"Now, when you look at those people that are doing this racing, these factors are not taken into consideration. Number one, many of the cars they are using, they are not performance cars," he added.

Owatunmise also explained that the drivers lacked the experience to drive vehicles at such high speeds, and were equally unaware of the consequences of driving at such high speeds, including accidents and the risk of death.

"Driving is a very complex task that involves the simultaneous use

of your eyes, your ears, your nose, your hands, your legs, your neck, your brain. It requires full concentration, 100 per cent concentration.

"And you know that when you are speeding, when you are racing, your speed is very high. You are talking of a speed of 140-200 kmph. It means that as you are speeding at the rate of 150, 160-180 kph, the time you have, the time your eyes have to gather information on the road becomes very short.

"And before your brain can interpret the information you have gathered, it's very short. And for your leg, your hand and your leg to take action becomes an emergency. And so they have the casualties. So the drivers themselves, are not trained in that act. They are not trained.

"They need to have good training on the road itself, and the nature of the road. They need to have knowledge of their tyre, have knowledge of the capacity of their vehicle, know how to manage speed," Owatunmise stated.

As a solution, he urged drivers to involve government authorities such as the Federal

Road Safety Commission, the Federal Commission of Transportation, the Vehicle Inspection Office, otherwise known as the Department of Road Traffic Services, and the Driving School Administration, to sanction any racing events before they are held.

"So when these things are done, it will help to minimise the casualties, it will help to minimise the hazards, it will minimise the accidents on the road, there will be no crashes, it will be reduced or be eliminated," he said.

Traffic rules broken

On his part, Programme Manager at Kwapda's Road Safety Demand Foundation, Ayomide Akinpelu, noted that the car racers break multiple traffic rules by engaging in the races, even while other road users are on the road.

He added that the races pose risks to road users and pedestrians and also contribute to the problem of climate change which confronts the country.

Akinpelu recommended that the racers partner with the government to fund the

design and construction of car racing tracks, in order to protect lives and safeguard against the destruction of government infrastructure.

"What is obtained in developed countries, you know, this race car racing is a sport. We have formula 1; we have all others from other countries like that. There are guidelines given to them by the government of that country, or they have an organised body that is regulating the activities.

"If you notice how it is being done in developed countries, they have designated lanes or designated tracks, that are good for car racing. But if you look at what is happening in Abuja, they are using the existing roads that are designed for road users, other road users.

"They are not designed for car racing, which is not right, from my perspective. So, you can say they are breaking so many traffic rules. From what I have seen, they race when other vehicles are still on the road, which is very dangerous. So, if they are using a road designed for other cars, which means they have to abide by the rules and regulations, including the speed limits of that particular road."

Akinpelu emphasised that pedestrians and government infrastructure were at risk as a result of the car racing.

He pointed out that the races also contribute to environmental pollution.

"The carbon emission of a vehicle at top speed, will be higher than a vehicle that is at a lower speed, according to research. So, they are adding to the greenhouse effect, and they are causing environmental pollution also.

"The only thing the government can do to curb such practices is to invest. Anybody that wants to do car racing can invest in building their trucks. By partnering with the government, by looking for other investors to carry out such practices. But as far as road safety is concerned, it's very wrong," he stated.



Photo: Legendary photograph