

I've always been a car nut, having owned over thirty cars since the day I got my license. I'm also a pedestrian and cyclist for my transport.

On Friday's visit to Palmerston North, our new head of the NZ Police spoke about the blights that are affecting NZ society during his visit to Palmerston North, saying let's drive down the road toll and crime, control drugs and alcohol abuse.

However, there is a far more insidious and costly behaviour, one which most of us feel powerless to defend against except by fleeing. Many people ask, why has the number of houses increased 4% versus a 1% rise in population? Why it that rents is have not matched the run-up in property values? What is pressure is behind "lifestyle" subdivision development?

It is simply because people are tired of being awoken by boy racers and choose to move as far away from The Square as possible. These young motorists blow thousands of dollars on noisemaker modifications at stores with names like "Auto Mayhem". On weekend nights, thousands of citizens are unwillingly subjected to the infernal buzzing of big bore exhausts, the "phwoosh" of turbo blow off valves, and the screeching of tyres on residential street intersections. It's all the more disturbing for the otherwise stillness of the night. The steady din of a major city like New York or LA would be easier to cope with.

The Police dispatchers say that they have more pressing things to chase up than an illegal exhaust. Waiting on a side street for the one bumout every fifteen minutes is not the exciting policing that officers signed up for.

The use of the urban residential street as a racetrack and burnout strip is steadily resulting in thousands of individual decisions to give up and join the bandwagon of car-dependent suburban cul-de-sac sprawl. The health costs of lost sleep notwithstanding, it is the environmental damage caused by sprawl which will haunt us as we cannot all drive one person to a car without someday condemning vast swaths of character homes for defacto motorways linking our new suburbs. Palmerston North is sprawling over farmland at an inexorable rate that emulates on a New Zealand scale the greenfield development of Atlanta, Las Vegas, or Phoenix, USA.

A study by GHD has predicted that by 2025, New Zealanders will drive 47% more kilometers than today. The first generation of Kiwi parents who were driven to school is extremely unlikely to allow their children to walk or cycle to school, and the largest traffic generator of all are these parents "protecting" their children by perpetuating this growing transport crisis. Palmerston North's future will include the gradual loss of student rolls at established inner-city schools as their hallowed buildings and infrastructure were not designed to cope with the onslaught of parent pickup and drop-offs. When many of today's kids get their driver's license they think it's fun to terrorise the few remaining people who walk or cycle during the day. These same kids drink heavily at parties and pubs, and then do burnouts and 6000 rpm accelerations all the way home with no regard for everyone else who is trying to sleep.

Our hard working and under-resourced Police are not the ones who should bear the responsibility for enforcing weak legislation. The city makes an effort by spending \$100,000 a year on traffic calming devices, partially to fight late night hoonery. Neither organisation can effectively control the root problem.

**My solution: ban the manufacture, importation, and sale of noisemaker big bore exhausts and turbo bypass valves. Strengthen the existing legislation on noise limits, and then use undercover operations to penalise WOF issuers who do not enforce these regulations.**

Anytime between 1 and 3 am this weekend, step outside your house and listen to your city. Hear the street racers accelerating from The Square down your fellow citizen's residential streets and past the hoteliers who must placate disgruntled and shocked visitors. Then, please call your MPs and demand strong legislation.