

**THE  
AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET'S  
“LETHAL ASSAULT”  
On  
AMERICAN COMMUNITIES**



**By Mark J. Huber**

*“The men whose labors brought forth the Constitution of the United States had the street outside Independence Hall covered with earth so that their deliberations might not be disturbed by passing traffic. Our democracy presupposes the deliberative process as a condition of thought and of responsible choice by the electorate.”*

--Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter (1882-1965)

*"Interference with speech communication by noise is among the most significant adverse effects of noise on people. Free and easy speech communication is probably essential for full development of individuals and social relations, and freedom of speech is but an empty phrase if one cannot be heard or understood because of noise."*

-Environmental Protection Agency (1978).

*“A corporation, essentially, is a pile of money to which a number of people have sold their moral allegiance.”*

--Wendell Berry of Kentucky

*“How cool is it to find a high school faculty member who cares more about your car than your grades?”*

*“We often receive letters from various students across the country who complain about their teachers who have taken away their copies of Super Street. We’ve been told that “We’re a distraction, we’re risqué, that there*

*are too many girls in Super Street and that studying is more important.”  
“Our goal is to corrupt the minds of the youth, and what good are we if  
we’re stashed away somewhere in the principal’s office along with the  
confiscated pagers, baggy pants, and banned NWA cassettes and not in the  
hands of some young boy who’s just starting to grow funny hairs in those  
funny areas?”*

*“If there were really such a thing as a weeklong bacchanal, it probably  
happened in Las Vegas during the Specialty Equipment Market  
Association (SEMA) show.....Super Street editors were there to witness  
and participate in the events. In that one glorious week, midgets flew,  
racers hurled, virgins got deflowered, bras were unstrapped, industry  
geeks got maimed, and marriages floundered because the SEMA after-  
hours extravaganza took its wrath on the weak.”*

--Super Street Magazine <sup>i</sup>

*“Hate your neighbors.”*

--HARMAN KARDON INTERNATIONAL

*“Disturb the Peace.”*

--SONY Mobile Entertainment

## PROLOGUE

This work chronicles the Automotive Aftermarket (speed, specialty equipment, or hot rod industry) in the United States from its emergence in the 1930’s, through the golden age of hot rodding in the 1950’s & 60’s, its dramatic growth into a \$29 BILLION a year transnational industry in the 1990’s and its ongoing convergence with the car audio (Boom Car) industry. In the early 1930’s the small independent “speed shops” of southern California provided high-performance auto parts to hobbyists who raced on the dry lakes of the high desert and on the public roads of that state. As the speed shops thrived, filling neighborhoods with the deafening roar of hopped-up rods, street racing took an ever increasing toll in human lives. The central thesis of this work is that the speed merchant’s proposed solution to the problems which they helped create functioned more successfully as a public relations strategy to further their enterprise and expand their markets than as a cure to those problems.

Beginning in the late 1940’s, Petersen Publishing (Hot Rod, Guns & Ammo...) the NHRA (National Hot Rod Association), various speed shops, and later SEMA (Specialty <sup>ii</sup> Equipment Market Association) successfully pitched the idea of building commercial drag strips (often with public funds) for sanctioned drag races to the leaders of a growing

number of communities and to law enforcement agencies as a solution to the epidemic of street racing deaths related to the products they sold. From its beginning the industry's business practice was to sell high-performance auto racing parts to all comers with no regard of the fact that of there being hardly any established legal venues where their customers could compete. The cost of providing safe-legal venues for the use of their products had somehow been left out of speed-merchant's business plans. It can be said that they *put the cart before the horse or the hot rod before the track*. Since the lion's share of the industry's revenue came from the sale of highly specialized racing equipment to owners of regular passenger autos, speed-merchants had become addicted to a lucrative but illegitimate business model. A broad-based pyramid-like economic dynamic emerged, which set in motion a cycle of interdependency between the Speed Equipment industry, drag strip owners and the consumer-enthusiast which continues till this day. Each party reinforced an inappropriate sense of entitlement in the other resulting in an intergenerational delinquent drift fueled by the industry's perceived *right* to profit from the sale of noisy (and illegal) speed equipment with no regard as to the cost to communities and by the fostering of the consumer-enthusiast's "need for speed" and *right* to aggressive noisemaking.

As street racers of all ages were lured into car clubs and onto NHRA drag strips (not necessarily off of the streets) the sanctioning organization would present itself as socially beneficial and promoted the notion that "working on cars was a natural and an American thing for young men to do but it could lead to traffic situations hazardous to others." These young men "had to be educated and controlled." The sport of Drag racing was also presented as healthy way to channel the energies of young men and of keeping them away from the "real" dangers of drugs, alcohol and crime. The characterization of the situation in this manner carried the implication that young enthusiasts would spin out of control and become a danger to society but for the presence of mature experienced strip owners and speed merchants to *make straight their paths*. The high-performance auto parts industry continued to grow from its corrupt foundations and while at first, the number of street racing deaths declined briefly. But over the years, there occurred peaks and valleys in the number of street racing deaths and in 2002, street racing deaths in San Diego was declared to be an 'epidemic.'

Some speed merchants and drag strip owners, while unable to comprehend the part they played in the tragic carnage on public roads, may truly have believed that they were providing an essential *safety* net to prevent youngsters from *slipping through the cracks*, or worse, killing themselves and others. Some community leaders may have considered the speed merchant's plan to be practical, cost effective and even *good for the local economy*. But surely, someone must have pointed out that the greatest force in play here was the profit motive of speed merchants and track owners (or would be track owners since so few tracks existed and almost none that were built by speed-merchants) which was likely to lead to even more irresponsible selling of the noisy speed equipment that set the wheels death and confusion in motion in the first place. Besides this obvious conflict of interest, it must have occurred to some that rather than aspiring to a greater good within the overall social framework, the NHRA plan trended downward justifying the *bad* of the irresponsible promotion and sales of noisy speed equipment by means of a

plethora of *greater bads*. Ironically the motorsports industry and related publications are traditional promoters of other vices that most parents hope that their children will avoid, namely tobacco and alcohol.

In the early 1980's Pioneer Electronics and other audio equipment manufacturers began promoting their products by sponsoring NHRA champion Drag racers. Around the same time various car audio retailers featured car stereo loudness competitions with titles such as 'Car Wars' to attract business. Straight away Car Audio manufacturers and retailers, using the NHRA's irresponsible model, established sanctioning organizations to market their products. Marketing wars emerged between the manufacturers behind the various sanctioning organizations such as Car Audio Nationals (CAN), the National Autosound Challenge Association (NACA), the International Auto Sound Challenge Association (IASCA), and dB Drag Racing. Just as the NHRA was an arena for speed-merchants to compete for market share, these organizations served as venues for manufacturer's to vie for customers based on the loudness of their products. By the 1990's the promotion of doing violence to innocent people with high-powered audio and automotive performance products became widespread in industry magazines that targeted young consumer-enthusiasts. In recent years automotive enthusiast publications began carry full page advertisements for steroids and drugs that claim to enlarge male genitalia. The United States Armed Forces Recruiting Command advertises heavily in PRIMEDIA Automotive Enthusiasts<sup>iii</sup> publications and gains access to elementary school children through the NHRA's Youth Education Services (YES).<sup>iv</sup> Discovery, the Learning Channel, the History Channel and other Telemedia produce many *educational* Programs that are nothing more than infomercials for the Automotive Aftermarket and the Mobile Electronics industries. Some examples are 'Pimp My Ride,'<sup>v</sup> and 'American Chopper.' PRIMEDIA's "Channel One News is the highest rated teen television program, reaching nearly 8 million teens daily in over 350,000 classrooms across America on an average school day. Channel One News is watched by a teen audience that is ten times larger than the nightly newscast of ABC, NBC, CBS and the cable networks combined."<sup>vi</sup> And through all this, the Speed Equipment Market Association and friends are still masquerading as guardians of the children the prey upon. One example is SEMA's new youth ministry "***Take a Kid to a Car Show***" which offers these words of wisdom: "***Life is full of choices for kids. You can help them make the right ones...***"

It has yet to have been demonstrated that any of the speed industry's programs have in any way abated the many problems that have accompanied its ascendancy; and it is not unreasonable to suspect that a correlation exists between business cycles in the Automotive Aftermarket and street racing deaths and the unhealthy increase of ambient noise in American neighborhoods. Furthermore, it might be, either by design or by happenstance that programs like SEMA's Racer's Against Street Racing (RASR) function as a growth engine for the Automotive Aftermarket. These "safety" programs seem to come into play late in the sales-boom cycle after the streets have been flooded with racing products and the number of related deaths have risen to the point of gaining the public's attention. Programs such as RASR draw consumer-enthusiasts off the streets and on to drags strips for a few hours—drag strips sponsored by speed merchants.

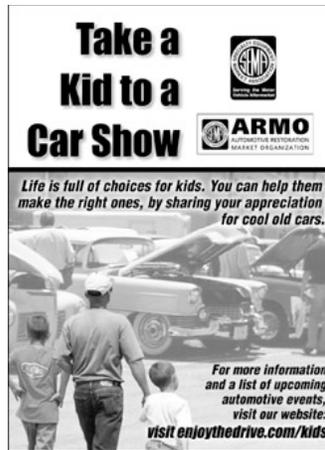
Sophisticated “Automotive Lifestyle” market surveys are frequently the centerpiece of industry sponsored education/public safety programs.<sup>vii</sup>

### *A Declaration of Entitlement*

The speed industry is represented by armies of lobbyists on Capitol Hill; there is even a **Congressional Automotive Performance and Motorsports Caucus**. Perhaps the speed industry’s most potent political weapon is an *Astroturfs Movement* (faux grass roots) composed of over 2000 car clubs (many having been organized into a coalition by the NHRA since the 1950s) under the SEMA Action Network (SAN).<sup>viii</sup>

The speed industry, a non-human corporate entity, uses SAN to declare its entitlement to cash—with no regard to the community at large—expressed (falsely) as a right of human-beings through its network of consumer-enthusiasts who have been indoctrinated with the *politically correct* fallacy that they are victims of unfair treatment and that it is their right to disrupt the lives of others—even to violate the sanctity of neighborhoods and private homes with roaring, booming noise. The industry goes as far as to don a cloak of humanity, whispering to its consumer-enthusiasts of a great conspiracy in which “regular folks like you and me” are forced into a defensive battle against “heinous regulations and laws” imposed on them by the “government.” The speed industry insists “vehicle clubs and individual enthusiasts need to become more active politically, join the SEMA Action Network...protect the hobby from government threats” and “ensure legislators understand that we are a united and organized group that will fight for our rights.” The Automotive Aftermarket stifles public, health, safety, and noise legislation in all 50 states and in Washington D.C. by keeping members of SAN and other industry-consumer-enthusiast organizations abreast of legislation via newsletters and urging them to pressure legislators, flooding them with letters, faxes, phone calls and personal visits. Essentially, using its consumer-enthusiasts as proxies, the Automotive Aftermarket has declared the right of *eminent domain* over the Constitutional rights of individual citizens to own and use property.

As a social force in the United States, the speed merchants of the Automotive Aftermarket consistently have been on the leading edge of *Defining Deviancy Down* since—at least—the late 1940’s and somehow or another they have managed to evade proper scrutiny. The ongoing relationship between politicians, civic leaders, and law enforcement officials with the speed industry clearly resemble the failed policy of *appeasement* towards Nazi Germany. Now, after five decades of accommodating anti-social behavior and rewarding corporate malfeasance, petty tyrants under the protection of multi-billion dollar industries, terrorize neighborhoods from their “trunk thumping” boom cars and muscle cars equipped with “American Thunder” *mufflers*.



#### A NOTE TO READERS:

The intent of this work is not to disparage racing fans or to take away the right of a person to listen to music as loud as he or she wishes. The author is merely reminding readers that all of us ought to be mindful of the rights of others—this restraint alone insures “liberty and justice for all.”

The following pages is the first installment in a series of essays regarding the intrusive noise industry and its destructive impact upon individuals, communities, and upon the Constitution of the United States of America. **Color-highlighted** text refers, for the most part, to full-page advertisements that frequent the pages of automotive-enthusiasts magazines. At some time in the future, the author intends to hyperlink the colored text to images of the advertisements (perhaps at another venue). However, many of these images are on display at: <http://www.noiseoff.org> The endnotes included in this work not only cite sources but also contain a significant amount of supporting material as well as commentary. Following this prologue, installments will be released on a regular basis. A complete bibliography will be presented with the final installment.

In times past, after exercising the right of free speech under the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment regarding this topic, the author has been subjected to many threats of violence and death along with various other harassments. The author requests that differing opinions be expressed in a legitimate manner.

**Mark J. Huber,**

August 2005.

**Post Script:** The author urges all who wish to bring civility back to America and who truly care about *Liberty and Justice for all* to join NoiseOFF, The Citizen’s Coalition Against Noise Pollution: <http://www.noiseoff.org> .

Chapter one coming soon:

## Madvertising Rage

**“Upright citizens are hiding their children. Closing their windows.  
And running for cover. Because SONY MOBILE presents the 2001 XPLOD line.  
New XPLOD Subwoofers will shake local buildings off their foundations.  
New XPLOD Amps will recombine your DNA. A new MP3 player that gives you  
a fresh opportunity to upset your elders. So go ahead.  
Disturb the Peace with SONY MOBILE.”**

SONY

ix

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<sup>i</sup> **Teacher’s Pet:** Super Street magazine..... on line version:

[http://www.superstreetonline.com/featuredvehicles/130\\_0302\\_supr/](http://www.superstreetonline.com/featuredvehicles/130_0302_supr/)

<sup>ii</sup> **SEMA** changed its name from ‘speed to specialty’ in 1970 saying ‘a name change would assist greatly in our representation. Elderly bureaucrats are not likely to appreciate the swinging generation’s preoccupation with speed.’ <http://www.sema.org/images/pdf/32521.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> **PRIMEDIA Enthusiast media** <http://www.primedia.com/divisions/enthusiastmedia/>

<sup>iv</sup> **NHRA Youth Education Services:**

<http://www.nhra.com/apcm/templates/about.asp?articleid=3274&zoneid=101>

<sup>v</sup> **MTV Pimp My Ride:** [http://www.mtv.com/onair/dyn/pimp\\_my\\_ride/series.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/onair/dyn/pimp_my_ride/series.jhtml)

<sup>vi</sup> <http://www.primedia.com/divisions/educationandtraining/>

<sup>vii</sup> **RASR:** <http://www.rasr.info/>

<sup>viii</sup> **SEMA Action Network**

<http://www.semasan.com/main/main.aspx?ID=/content/SEMASANcom/HomePage>

<sup>ix</sup> **SONY Mobile Entertainment** “Disturb the Peace” campaign. From Noise Pollution Clearinghouse Quiet

Zone. <http://www.nonoise.org>

**SONY XPLOD – “Disturb the Peace” Campaign. 2002 Effie Award Winner.** (Silver) Category: Automotive Aftermarket Products and Services. Agency: Young & Rubicam New York.

“Xplod burst onto the aftermarket car audio scene in 1999- and by mid-2000 the brand had built a strong reputation for itself in high-cool, high design head units, but remained underdeveloped in the key Speaker and Amplifier sub-categories. In order to establish itself as a player and forget its long-term path of

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overtaking the industry's established leaders, Xplod needed to steal share across the category, yet continue to justify a higher average selling price in line with Sony's premium position. The **Disturb the Peace** campaign with its distinct, irreverent attitude leveraged the equities brand had begun to form in its early successes, and translated them into a distinct identity the target would embrace and help push Xplod to a #2 position in the overall aftermarket car audio category."

[http://www.affie.org/award\\_winners/winner.fxp?C024](http://www.affie.org/award_winners/winner.fxp?C024)