

DISCUSSION PAPER ON DRAG RACING
FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Background

Drag racing is a type of motor racing in which automobiles or motorcycles (usually specially prepared for the purpose) compete, usually two at a time, to be first to cross a set finish line. The race follows a short, straight course from a standing start over a measured distance, most commonly a quarter ($\frac{1}{4}$) mile. It is claimed that drag racing was born in the dry lake beds in the California deserts. In the 1930s popularity grew steadily but drag racing still remained largely an underground pastime. After World War II, drag racing turned into a more serious sport and has since existed in both street racing and regulated motorsport forms.

Street racing is an unsanctioned and illegal form of drag racing that occurs on a public road. Street racing can either be spontaneous or well-planned and coordinated. This normally occurs when there is a lack of proper, sanctioned racing venues. Generally, street racing is conducted in a less rigorously controlled environment than sanctioned racing. It provides the simple excitement of racing without the entry fees, rules and politics, typical of the sport. Interestingly, a community generally springs up around the street racing "scene", providing social interaction among the participants and cliques therein.

Vehicles used in street racing competitions generally lack professional racing safety equipment such as roll cages and racing fuel cells. Drivers seldom wear fire suits and are not usually trained in high-performance driving. Injuries and fatalities are therefore common results from accidents. Furthermore, street racers put ordinary drivers at risk because they race on public roads rather than closed-course, purpose-built facilities. Because racing occurs in areas where it is not sanctioned, property damage (to other vehicles, buildings, fences, signs, poles etc) can occur.

However, the view has been held by many proponents of drag racing that the modern drag race, conducted under supervision and controlled conditions guaranteeing a maximum of safety, is one way of giving an outlet to those racers who are seriously interested in automobiles, who want to build their own cars, race and test them under safe conditions.

The Local Context

In Anguilla, street racing is the only form of drag racing. The Anguilla Drag Racing Association (now Anguilla Motorsports Inc) has been lobbying for the development of a purpose built facility for racing. Racers travel to neighbouring islands to compete in sanctioned events. However they are unable to race in Anguilla without fear of prosecution, because there are no sanctioned venues. Additionally, public roads were not designed nor are they suitable for drag racing. This has not dampened the enthusiasm of many young persons for the sport and many racing clubs already exist despite the prohibition. Since it appears that drag racing is here to stay, there is a need for Government to determine its policy position in relation to the sport.

In other countries which have faced this same issue, it appears that there has been a three stage process in moving towards acceptance of drag racing as a legitimate sport:

1. Little attention was paid to drag racing and racers were dealt with as any other traffic violator would be. This proved unrealistic and the number of racers increased to the extent that streets were used for organised racing events.
2. Special measures designed to control or eliminate drag racing were passed, and the enforcement agencies attempted to stop the sport. This only provided temporary control of the situation and has been largely ineffective.
3. Finally, programmes were devised whose purpose was to encourage drag racing so long as it is carried on at specially maintained and supervised drag strips. These programmes promoted races supervised by the police. It seems that where this method has been used, the police have found racers to be cooperative, conscientious and serious about the responsibility of automobile driving.

Anguilla has been at stage 1 of this process for some time. Government is considering moving to stage 3 but it is constrained by its inability to develop a purpose built facility. In the absence of such a facility, Government is prepared to give consideration to designating a public road for drag racing. The Government of Anguilla is not unique in this. In most cases around the world, drag strips have been developed at abandoned airports or on private roads where the expenses of

improving and fencing the site are not too high. Local clubs or club sponsors have usually been willing to lease sites so long as the rentals are not excessive. Unless a local sponsor is willing to spend the money needed to build a drag strip, drag racing must be confined to existing facilities that can be adapted to the sport. In some countries where no other suitable site can be found, drag races have been conducted on public streets which have been blocked off by the police. This is the course the Government of Anguilla wishes to consider.

Question 1: Should Government give consideration to designating particular public roads as drag racing strips during particular times?

The Use of Public Roads for Drag Racing

The opponents of street racing cite a lack of safety relative to sanctioned racing events, as well as legal repercussions arising from incidents, among street racing's drawbacks. If Government wishes to authorise street racing, these will have to be primary considerations.

Firstly, legislative change will be required to empower an authority to designate a public road as a drag racing strip for a specified period of time and to issue a licence to an organization to conduct races on the road. Alternatively or additionally, the legislation may give immunity from prosecution to racers and spectators participating in drag racing on a particular public road at a particular time.

Government will have to decide whether it wishes to assume full responsibility for the safety of the racers and the public or whether this responsibility should be passed on to the organisers of a race. In the latter case, when a licence is issued to a race organiser, the conditions of the licence should be such as to place the responsibility on the organisers to ensure that certain minimum standards are met. This puts Government in the position of regulator but may not protect Government from all liability in the event of accidents, because by sanctioning the races, Government will still in effect be confirming that it is satisfied that all the necessary measures are in place for the protection of racers and the public.

Question 2: Should Government put in place all the safety measures for the holding of drag races, or should this be the responsibility of the race organiser?

Whether Government is itself responsible for implementing safety measures or monitoring whether an organiser implements such measures, in order to ensure the safety of racers and the public and to curtail the legal repercussions from accidents, consideration will have to be given to the following standards, which accord with minimum standards for sanctioned races. Where licences to conduct races are given, these standards should be included in the licence conditions.

Area

1. Paved Strip measuring a minimum of 60ft x 3,000ft with a smooth surface is required. Any road selected may require some upgrade to meet this requirement.
2. Parking Area is needed to accommodate spectators' vehicles and race cars.
3. Pit Area fenced or isolated from general public is also necessary.
4. Inspection Area to ensure compliance of cars with safety requirements.

Location

In selecting a site, consideration has to be given to the impact (particularly of noise and crowd congestion) on surrounding areas and streets. Only those streets with limited access and removed from residential areas are appropriate. The amenability of the proposed site to crowd control and spectator parking must be considered. If the width of the road is less than the recommended sixty-feet (60ft) minimum, timing should be limited to one car at a time instead of two.

Question 3: *Where do you think would be a suitable site for drag racing?*

Question 4: *How often do you think drag races should be allowed there?*

Facilities:

1. Barriers must be adequate to protect close spectators or to isolate spectators at a minimum distance of fifty feet (50ft) from course.
2. Ambulance, First Aid and Police should be on duty at all times during races. (Fire Services may also be advisable). This not only requires the presence of personnel but all the requisite emergency equipment. This impacts the availability of these

resources for other areas at these times. There may also be cost implications for these extra duties. Government may give consideration to passing on this cost to the organiser or meeting this cost as its contribution to the event.

3. The control stand is normally elevated, at edge of strip, one hundred feet (100ft) from start.
4. Timing equipment is needed to clock top speed, elapsed time, or both.
5. Public Address system is necessary so that spectators can be cautioned when races are about to begin and to announce any other public safety measures.
6. Scales for weighing cars should be available.

Question 5: *Which of the above facilities do you think should be the responsibility of Government?*

Safety requirements for racers

Drivers should all be of legal driving age and be required to wear fire proof clothing, approved helmets and safety belts. The consumption of alcoholic beverages by drivers on racing day should also be prohibited. All vehicles must meet a rigorous safety inspection and be properly outfitted with the requisite safety equipment. There may be a need to require all participants in drag races to have a valid operator's licence and an amateur competitor's licence which can be obtained after undergoing a period of training approved by Government. This may also require legislative amendment. However what is critical is that both car and driver meet some minimum safety standard.

Question 6: *What minimum standards do you think should be put in place for the safety of racers and the public?*

Question 7: *Should racers be required to obtain a special licence to race after undergoing some training?*

Insurance

To limit the potential liability of Government in the event of a serious incident at a race, an entity organizing a race may be required as a condition of the licence to use the public road for drag racing, to ensure that the following insurance is provided:

1. Adequate Public Liability and Property Damage coverage.
2. Hospital, Medical and Disability coverage for all Participants.

This may prove to be costly as one of the main threats facing drag racing has been obtaining insurance at reasonable rates. If Government was to assume this responsibility, the cost factor will have to be seriously considered.

Question 8: *Do you think the provision of insurance coverage should be the responsibility of Government or the race organiser?*

Personnel

Personnel will be required for the following functions. It anticipated that the associated costs will be met by the race organisers:

- Inspection
- Weighing
- Classifying
- Number Painting
- Pit Operators
- Control Stand
- Starting Line
- Finish Line
- Track Manager
- Police Officers

Conclusion

Ideally, drag racing should take place in purpose built facilities. However, in the absence of such a facility in Anguilla, consideration will have to be given to implementing a legal regime that permits races to take place on public roads within specified times. In adopting this course, Government must ensure that:

- appropriate amendments are made to legislation;
- the road(s) to be used is/are upgraded if necessary to accommodate the races;
- minimum standards to protect the safety of racers and the public (as outlined above) are maintained and strictly enforced at races;
- the requisite personnel are in place who can properly monitor adherence to the safety standards;
- in determining a race location, consideration is given to the impact on surrounding areas;
- appropriate insurance coverage is provided in the event of accidents;
- emergency services are available and sufficiently resourced and equipped to handle multiple casualty incidents;
- the support of the police force will be forthcoming at race events.

Government must be mindful that while there are many drag racing enthusiasts, there is likely to be some public opposition to accommodating drag racing in the manner proposed. Many persons in the community view this sport as reckless and one that ought to be discouraged. The public will be concerned as to whether this action by Government signals a further compromise or breakdown in respect for law, as the law currently prohibits this sport from taking place. In fact, many do not consider drag racing a sport, but a dangerous and unnecessary pastime.

It is anticipated that there will also be concern about whether by authorizing drag racing on public roads (even if closed and for specified times), Government is indirectly condoning the use of public roads generally for racing. The public would be entitled to know the proposed frequency of the authorised races (for eg, will these be weekly events for practice purposes, or only major events, and if the latter case, where are the practice races taking place?). The

question then becomes how much of Government's human and financial resources will be spent on these races.

The safety of spectators, racers and the impact on neighbouring communities of crowd and noise congestion will also be of concern. The general public will want to be assured that Government is in a position to make this kind of investment in this venture to ensure the optimum safety and will be concerned that their tax payer's money may have to be spent to address issues of personal injury or property damage.

Question 9: If a public road is designated for drag racing, should it be used for competitive drag racing events or for practice for racers who are to travel overseas? If the use of the public roads is restricted to practice races only, should the same safety standards be required as if the roads are being used for competitive events?

Question 10: Should Government commit resources to ensure that drag racing is safely facilitated on public roads?

The ultimate question for Government is whether this is a priority at this time when weighed against competing interests and if so, whether the level of investment required can be made.