

# FAST TRACK to Nowhere



By Ltjg. Marc Henderson

While assisting with a maintenance evolution aboard one of our squadron's aircraft, I overheard a disturbing conversation between two enlisted personnel. One said, "Hey I got my car back from the shop the other day... It's running really great... I took it out on the highway and had it up to 135 mph... "

I was frozen—I had absolutely no idea what to say, or even if I should say anything. After all, anything I said surely would "go in one ear and out the other." Thoughts danced in my head about being labeled as the "un-cool" guy whom junior folks couldn't share things with because they feared my lecturing them. On the other hand, I recently had been appointed as our squad-

ron's ground-safety officer. It now was my job to make sure our people stayed safe. How could I do my job without losing the trust of those I'm responsible for—or worse, being "un-cool"?

In the split second it took me to mull over the options in my head, the young Sailor telling his story added, "...It was only for about five minutes."

At that point, I chose to walk away—yes, I took the easy way out. As I turned and stepped off, one of them asked, "What's wrong, sir?"

I didn't answer him, but I thought to myself, "If I pretend I didn't hear, and I don't hear anymore, I can pretend it never happened." I assured myself he must have been exaggerating, and I figured that, either way,

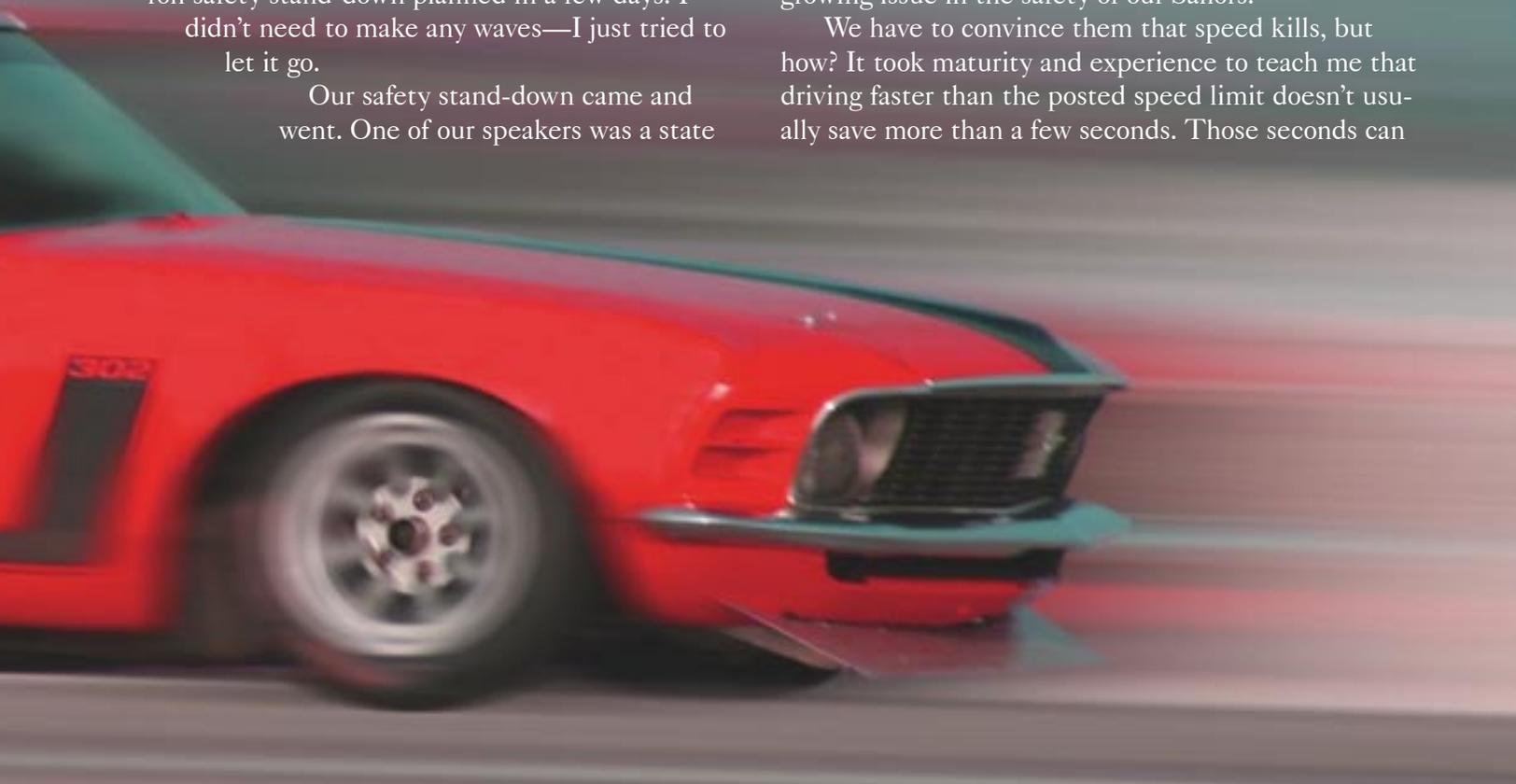
“Hey I got my car back from the shop the other day... It’s running really great... I took it out on the highway and had it up to 135 mph... .”

the Sailors were sure to become safer after our squadron safety stand-down planned in a few days. I didn’t need to make any waves—I just tried to let it go.

Our safety stand-down came and went. One of our speakers was a state

racer cars I’ve seen around base, I know that speed is a growing issue in the safety of our Sailors.

We have to convince them that speed kills, but how? It took maturity and experience to teach me that driving faster than the posted speed limit doesn’t usually save more than a few seconds. Those seconds can



trooper who lectured about driving safety and road rage. In my mind, I let the issue go.

Not even a week later, I received a call, saying that two of our Sailors had been in a car crash. It had been estimated their car was traveling 100 mph when it left the road. The car stopped when it hit a telephone pole—wrapped in barbed wire and chain-link fence. “Was my storyteller involved in the accident?” I wondered. “If he was, could I have prevented it by saying something to him before I walked away? Was I in some way responsible for the accident?”

I found out the victim wasn’t my storytelling Sailor, but that fact didn’t clear my conscience. From the scuttlebutt I’ve heard and the number of flashy street-

make the difference between having a costly or deadly accident and arriving safely.

“Everyone is a safety officer” is something I’ve heard for years. What I haven’t heard too often is that it applies off duty, too. It’s up to each of us to remind our friends, our peers, our subordinates, and our leadership whenever we think they are being careless. For many, it takes repetition. If we hear something often enough, we eventually begin to believe.

My experience reminded me that it’s wrong to turn your back on issues you know are dangerous. Your voice may be the only link between a shipmate returning home safely or colliding with a telephone pole at 100 mph. ✈️

Ltjg. Henderson flies with VP-46.