



FEATURE

Driven to save lives

When it comes to road safety, there is one man who is more driven than most.

Driver trainer and award-winning road safety advocate Russell White is not the type of man who relishes the role of passenger.

With a family of his own and an insiders knowledge of the horrors of abilities and limitations of the nation's road users, Russell is a driver - both on the road and behind the scenes.

His passion for driving has turned into a career that's taken him around the world as a performance driver with Holden, BMW, Saab and Mercedes Benz.

Russell's precision behind the wheel makes him a preferred driver for the exacting task of filming vehicles for television commercials and documentaries while his ability to lead is sought after by many in the automotive industry.

But it's not just behind the wheel where Russell's skill as a driver is evident.

He has spearheaded world-first research into Driver Biomechanics, Mobile Phone Use and Human-Vehicle Interface, addressed state and federal government committees on driver safety, developed education programs and accepted roles as professional speaker and media commentator.

Russell has also found time to become an author with his first book, Drive Ability released 2008 at Queensland's Parliament House.

And now his latest vehicle is a national road safety campaign called Fatality Free Friday and it came about almost by accident.

"Late in 2006 I became aware that the United Nations was going to hold a world first Global Road Safety Week in April 2007 and I wanted to become involved," he says.

"I phoned the Australian contact at the Australian Transportation Safety Board to ask how I could help and was told, 'We don't have anything planned. Would you like to do something?'"

After brainstorming with friends, the concept of Fatality Free Friday was born.

Fatality Free
FRIDAY
MAKE THE ROAD TOLL ZERO

28 May 2010
Take The Pledge
ZERO DEATHS ON
AUSTRALIA'S ROADS FOR
JUST ONE DAY

SUNCORP Insurance
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“The one thing that I see constantly is a fatalism whenever discussion is raised about how to reduce the road toll,” he says.

“We make vehicles and roads safe while police and governments nag us constantly but obviously the message isn’t getting through because about 1500 people are killed each year and countless thousands others seriously injured.

“The biggest frustration I experience is people will all agree that the road toll is shocking and every conversation will end with a variation on the same theme: ‘someone should do something about it’.

“Frankly, that’s not good enough. The responsibility for the road toll belongs to everyone who has anything to do with motor vehicles whether as a driver, passenger or pedestrian.”

Fatality Free Friday centres on one simple premise: That if drivers consciously think about road safety and safe driving for just one Friday in the year, that day’s toll could be reduced to zero.

To encourage accountability, people sign a pledge that they are then encouraged to post on the fridge at home and at their workplaces.

“That’s our aim,” says Russell. “Not a single road death in Australia for just one day. Just one Fatality Free Friday.

“I believe that by making people think about staying alive on the road, they’ll drive safer for the next few days too and reduce the traditionally high weekend fatality rate.

“If people can do that on one Friday and one weekend, we can create a change in driving culture so they do it every Friday and every weekend - and ultimately every day of the year.”

The innovative approach to encouraging personal responsibility on the roads with a focused event has attracted the support of major sponsors and involvement of road safety advocate Bev Brock as the event’s patron.

“What is outstanding was the number of people and organisations who threw their support behind the day – governments, sporting organisations, businesses as well as individuals, said Russell.

“Local councils put large pledge forms in the chamber foyer for everyone to sign, V8 Super Car drivers signed pledges at a press conference and drove a round with their lights and we received e-mails of support from Africa, the UK and the US.

