

Sunday

OCTOBER 15, 2000

Delray Beach News

THE LEADER IN LOCAL NEWS

45th Year / Issue 302

5 Sections / 58 Pages / 75 Cents

Mauz accelerates drive for motorists' rights

Maybe you've read one of Greg Mauz's newspaper opinion pieces on traffic safety. Perhaps you've seen him handing out "Stop Big Brother" fliers at test intersections for traffic-monitoring cameras.

Or there is an outside chance that you've heard him fight for speaking time at public meetings. Mauz, a Delray Beach resident and professional driver, says he spends about 30 hours a week watching out for the rights of other drivers as a Florida activist for the Wisconsin-based National Motorists' Association.

The grassroots, member-based organization, which promoted federal legislation that eliminated the 55-mph national maximum speed limit in 1995, "advocates, represents and protects the interest of North American motorists,"

according to its policy statement.

Like the organization, Mauz believes that traffic laws should be based on sound engineering criteria and public consensus and opposes traffic-enforcement measures designed to generate revenue for governments.

Staff Writer Jeff Sielke recently sat down with Mauz to talk about a few issues facing drivers – and the officials who make the laws that govern the state's streets.

Q At the very least, you can be described as passionate about motorists' issues. Why is that?

south county Voices

A Because I care about people. I care about truth, freedom and real safety.

Because a lot of what you are getting from the insurance-funded safety groups, the government, police and public officials is false, myths or misconceptions.

Q What sort of misconceptions?

A They say most red-light runners are deliberate or people with behavioral problems. That's not true. The majority of red-light running is a result of (traffic engineers) mist-

iming the yellow light or a problem with the traffic signal itself. In my research, which is still ongoing, I have identified 15 things that can go wrong with traffic signals and cause someone to disobey them – including improper timing of the yellow light or the incorrect timing of lights that are in a row. Hitting all the red lights in a row can cause a person to become angry. By not engineering things properly, you are manipulating driving behavior.

Q You often talk about the "85th percentile" speed guideline, a traffic-engineering rule that requires the speed limit on any given road to reflect the

See Mauz/

12A

LOCAL NEWS

SHARPTON SPEAKS

Members of the black community say Lionel Tate's case sets a double standard.

STORY, 4B

An unusual approach to traffic safety

A Delray man wants optional seat-belt use, higher speed limits and a moratorium on stop-light cameras.

By **Chuck McGinness**
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Greg Mauz is obsessed with traffic safety, but don't expect him to recite the "Speed Kills" slogan.

Mauz, a 43-year-old Delray Beach resident and Florida spokesman for the National Motorists Association, said speed limits on many roads are set too low.

Drivers should be able to go 75 mph on Interstate 95 and 80 mph on rural state highways, he said.

He thinks drivers should have the choice of using seat belts and buying new cars without air bags.

He also supports tougher drunken driving laws and mandatory driver's education classes for teens.

Now Mauz is getting ready to

fight a proposed state law that would let cities and counties use cameras to ticket red-light runners.

He says he quit his job as an auto parts deliveryman and spent the past year putting together a 96-page report that he said shows cameras do not prevent crashes or save lives.

For the seventh consecutive year, the state legislature will consider a law that would let unmanned cameras be used to fine red-light violators. Past bills have been rejected.

Supporters cite statistics from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety that red-light runners cause 22 percent of crashes in the nation's urban areas.

The July 2000 study revealed that between 1992 and 1998 more than 800 people were killed and 200,000 injured each year in such crashes.

But Mauz said the institute's study is "full of misinformation." With no formal training or education in traffic engineering, Mauz



Mauz

said his knowledge comes from 20 years of "practical experience" as a truck driver and reading "tons and tons" of books, reports and studies on traffic safety.

His review of Federal Highway Administration statistics says that red-light violators cause only 2 percent of crashes.

The institute's study fails to take into account other factors, he said,

Please see SAFETY, 5B

Bill's sponsor says it will save lives

SAFETY

From 1B

such as signals with short caution lights that he believes don't give drivers enough time to safely pass through the intersection.

In Florida, the percentage of red-light violation crashes decreased each year from 1996 to 1999, according to the state Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

"Camera enforcement is about money," Mauz said, referring to the camera vendors and government agencies that profit from motorist fines.

The Arlington, Va.-based institute, which is backed by auto insurers, stands behind its findings, said senior transportation engineer Richard Retting, who performed the camera study.

Other groups that support the use of cameras at "high-risk" intersections are the American Automobile Association, the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

"As a research institute, we realize some people may not like our findings," Retting said. "The facts are facts, whether people choose to agree with them or not."

Red-light photo enforcement is used in more than 40 cities around the country.

In San Diego, a group of angry motorists have hired a pair of lawyers, who call themselves the "Red Light Camera Defense Team" to fight the system, saying the technology is unfair, unproven and an invasion of privacy.

State Sen. Ron Klein, D-Boca Raton, one of the sponsors of the proposed state law, said he believes it has a reasonable chance of passing this year.

It would not obligate communities to use the cameras, he said.

"There's a bipartisan group in the House and Senate supporting it," Klein said. "If we can save lives and change peoples' driving habits by not going through red lights, that's good public policy."

The Waunakee, Wis.-based National Motorists Association takes stands that appear to run contrary to traditional traffic safety philosophy, but members said that's because the association is devoted to protecting the individual rights and interests of motorists.

They are against laws that

For more information

For information on the National Motorists Association, call Greg Mauz in Delray Beach at 243-0920, the group's national headquarters at (608) 849-6000, or visit the group's Web site at www.motorists.org.

are not based on "sound engineering criteria and public consensus."

Founded in 1982, the association operates on the contributions of its 8,000 members. Members pay either an individual membership fee of \$29 a year or a family membership of \$39 a year.

The association lobbied for increasing the the 55 mph national speed limit five years ago.

And the group offers advice on how to fight traffic tickets and members exchange information on speed traps.

Mauz joined the National Motorists Association in 1995 because of his dislike for the 55 mph speed limit and participated in the group's lobbying to repeal it.

"In my mind, I felt something wasn't right with the speed limit and the country's predominant preoccupation with traffic enforcement," he said.

Mauz said he plans to send his report to lawmakers and is trying to scrape together enough money to go to Tallahassee to lobby against the proposed camera bill.

Last year Mauz accused the county of violating the state law that requires speed limits to be based on the average speed of 85 percent of the traffic on a particular road.

County officials said they follow policies — based on state law — set by the county commission.

Running for office has crossed his mind, but Mauz said he likes his role as traffic safety activist.

"My integrity means more to me than money," he said.

► chuck_mcginness@pbpost.com