



## Advocates Demands GM Pull Ad Of Children Driving Corvettes

### NEWS RELEASE

KidsAndCars.org

<http://www.kidsandcars.org/>

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### USE OF CHILDREN DRIVING CORVETTE IN LATEST GM AD CAMPAIGN OUTRAGES AUTO SAFETY GROUPS WHO URGE ITS WITHDRAWAL

*Car company stoops to new low showing young children behind the wheel, speeding, and using illegal, aggressive driving maneuvers to promote Corvette during Olympics*

**August 25, 2004, Washington, D.C.--** Several leading highway and auto safety groups sent a letter yesterday to G. Richard Wagoner, Chairman, General Motors Corporation (GM), protesting the widespread, primetime airing during the Olympic Games on network television of an advertisement for the company's 2005 Corvette.

"We write as highway safety professionals offended by General Motors' recent advertisement for the new Corvette ("A Boy's Dream") shown repeatedly during the Olympics this month," the attached letter said. "This ad is certainly among the most dangerous, anti-safety messages to be aired on national television in recent years."

The television ad shows what appears to be a 10- or 11-year-old boy, barely able to see over the steering wheel, driving wildly throughout a city, sometimes while airborne. Voiceover at the end of the ad calls it, "the official car of your dreams," as the young boy, holding his skateboard, stares at the parked Corvette. The ad can be viewed on Chevrolet's web page at <http://www.chevrolet.com/pop/corvette/commercial.jsp>.

"Ads glorifying speed and high performance are common enough these days, but this is one of the worst and most reprehensible produced by the auto industry," the letter continued. "Auto industry ads promoting these illegal behaviors, especially in sports and other muscle-type cars, are suspect because they target young people, and this ad unabashedly sinks to a new low. What was GM's motive to show underage children actually driving, on the one hand, and successfully attempting maneuvers through construction pipes and surreal, unrealistic, unsafe situations on the other?"

"No one in their right mind would condone the use of children in any ad promoting alcohol or tobacco products," said Judie Stone, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety. "Underage kids driving cars is equally outrageous."

"This dream is a nightmare," said Janette Fennell, founder and president of Kids And Cars. "Kids And Cars' safety messages are very clear-never leave children alone in or around vehicles; and this commercial goes against everything we are trying to do to educate the public about these dangers. Our database is filled with incidents where young children think it is 'okay' to take an automobile for a drive and the outcome results in serious injuries and even death.

"As recently as today," she said, "The St. Louis Post Dispatch reported that a 5-year-old boy in East St. Louis, Illinois drove his uncle's Cadillac by himself for four blocks before he pulled over and hit a fence. A local police officer said, "we hear of 14- and 15-year olds taking off in cars, but it's getting younger and younger. Kids are watching television and when they're riding with you, they're watching everything you do."

The safety advocates urged GM to withdraw the ad immediately. They said that GM, in the past, was the only auto company to adopt specific, internal guidelines barring irresponsible advertising. They advised the GM chairman to "reinstate those waylaid principles and refrain from producing and showing similar advertisements. Lives literally depend upon it."

The latest Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) data released August 10, 2004, shows that crashes continue to kill over 42,500 people every year, as well as injuring and disabling 2.5 million more. Speeding has been shown to be a factor in at least one-third of all fatal crashes and costs society \$40 billion a year.

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August 24, 2004

G. Richard Wagoner, Jr.  
Chairman and CEO  
General Motors Corporation Global Headquarters  
300 Renaissance Center 482-C39-B50  
Detroit, Michigan 48265-3000

Cc: **Jeff Runge**, Administrator  
NHTSA  
U.S. Department of Transportation

Dear Mr. Wagoner:

We write as highway safety professionals offended by General Motors' recent advertisement for the new Corvette ("A Boy's Dream") shown repeatedly during the Olympic Games this month. This ad is certainly among the most dangerous, anti-safety messages to be aired on national television in recent years.

Ads glorifying speed and high performance are common enough these days, but this is one of the worst and most reprehensible examples produced by the auto industry. The use of child actors to promote dangerous and reckless driving, in a high-performance car going at rocket speeds, is preposterous and irresponsible on several levels. Auto industry ads promoting these illegal behaviors, especially in sports and other muscle-type cars are suspect because they target young people, and this ad unabashedly sinks to a new low. What was General Motors' motive to show young children actually driving, on the one hand, and successfully attempting life-threatening maneuvers through construction pipes and surreal, unrealistic, unsafe situations on the other?

This dream is a nightmare.

As you know, many children - as young as five or six years old -- actually take their parents' car keys and drive cars out the driveway because they think they can drive, mimicking others they have seen. Unfortunately, it happens regularly all across the nation and the sad result is often serious injury, even death. Promoting illegal and risky behavior in ads viewed by millions of families (especially young males) watching the Olympics is egregious corporate behavior. It is doubtful that General Motors would condone the beer industry showing a "dream sequence" of ten-year-old children having an after-school "kegger."

We urge you to withdraw this ad immediately. In past years, General Motors was the only auto company to adopt internal company guidelines barring such ads. We urge you to review and reinstate those waylaid principles and refrain from producing and showing similar advertisements. Lives literally depend upon it.

Sincerely,

**Judith Lee Stone**, President  
Advocates for Highway & Auto Safety

**Janette Fennell**, Founder & President  
KidsAndCars.org

**Jack Gillis**, Director of Public Affairs  
Consumer Federation of America

**Clarence Ditlow**, Executive Director  
Center for Auto Safety

**Andrew McGuire**, Executive Director  
Trauma Foundation

**Joan Claybrook**, President  
Public Citizen

**Sally Greenberg**, Senior Product  
Safety Counsel

Consumers Union