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EMOTIONAL END TO HAWKS' JOURNEY

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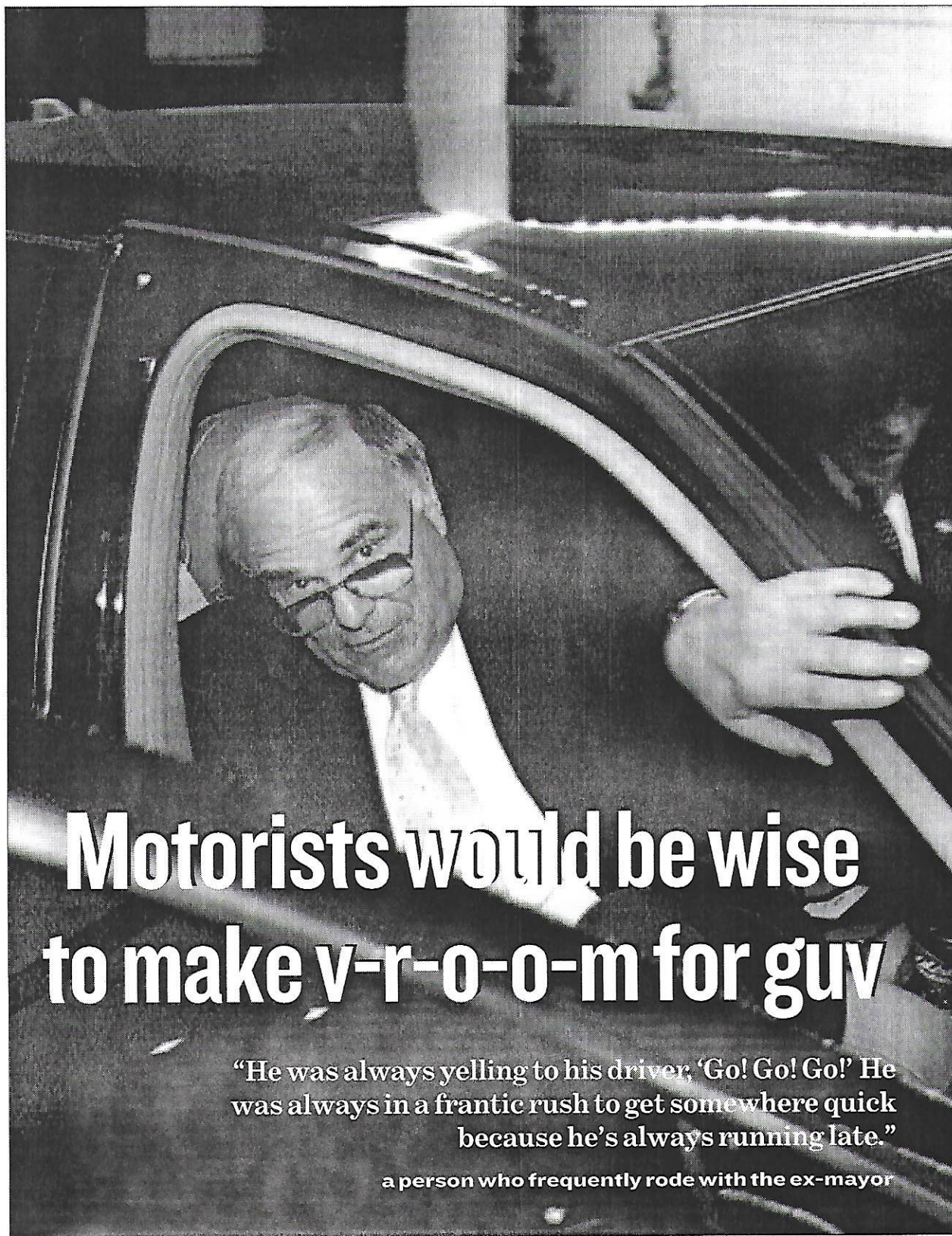


TOO FAST EDDIE

WITH STATE TROOPER AT THE WHEEL,
GOVERNOR RACES ALONG TURNPIKE
AT BREAKNECK SPEED

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STEVEN M. FALK/Daily News



Motorists would be wise to make v-r-o-o-m for guv

“He was always yelling to his driver, ‘Go! Go! Go!’ He was always in a frantic rush to get somewhere quick because he’s always running late.”

a person who frequently rode with the ex-mayor

By **NICOLE WEISENSEE EGAN**
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STATE TROOPERS on the Pennsylvania Turnpike have clocked Gov. Rendell's Cadillac limo at more than 100 mph at least nine times since November, according to sources.

Turnpike cops running radar say they've repeatedly caught the governor's limo cruising at the extraordinary speeds in the left lane, with its emergency lights flashing and siren wailing to shoo other motorists out of the way, the sources said.

Rendell's state-owned Cadillac DeVille DHS is driven by state troopers assigned to his security detail. Turnpike cops have never ticketed the governor's drivers.

Sources said a turnpike trooper clocking traffic with a window-mounted radar unit first reported Rendell's zooming Cadillac in November. After the radar registered the Caddy's speed in the triple digits, the turnpike trooper gave chase, according to the sources.

The chase quickly ended when Rendell's driver picked up the limo's police radio and broadcast, "This is Executive One," the sources said.

Troopers running radar clocked the Caddy at triple-digit speeds eight more times, according to sources.

Now that the turnpike troopers recognize the car, they no longer give chase.

"They don't want to know," one source said.

The turnpike cops worry what would happen if the governor's car crashes at high speed, the sources said.

"It's just outright dangerous," one source said. "It only takes someone else to do something stupid, and it's going to cause a very severe accident. There's no reason they need to be zooming up the road in triple digits with the lights flashing. I don't care who you are. It's against the law. This is just transporting the governor to and from Philly. There is

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STEVEN M. FALK/Daily News file photo

Gov. Rendell, shown at left exiting his state-leased Caddy at Franklin Plaza hotel March 18, likes to sit in the front seat.

RENDELL
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no emergency."

The state troopers who work for the governor's executive detail insist that their boss, who usually sits in the front passenger seat, orders them to drive fast, sources said.

High-ranking state police officials are aware of the speeding and have decided to take no action, sources said. Several state police officials declined to comment and referred comments to Rendell's press office.

Rendell declined to be interviewed for this story. His spokeswoman, Kate Philips, denied that the governor orders his drivers to go fast.

"The governor would never ask someone to break the law," she said, adding that Rendell has no idea how fast his car is going.

"He's typically working in the car or on the phone or reading and writing, and he doesn't pay attention to the speedometer," Philips said. "It's not his job. But he does depend on the troopers to get him to and from where he needs to go safely and on time, and they do a stellar job. He's confident and secure in his passenger seat."

Rendell always wears his seat

belt, she said. The governor has a fleet of cars, two airplanes and a bus at his disposal for travel, she said.

The speed limit on rural sections of the turnpike is 65 mph. Under the state's motor vehicle code, emergency lights and sirens are to be used by cops, sheriffs and deputy sheriffs in enforcement of the law only during an emergency or in the interest of public safety. Civilian drivers are allowed to travel in the left lane only for two miles at a time.

Samuel Walker, author of 11 books on policing, criminal-justice history and policy, and civil liberties, said the speeding reports indicate the governor thinks he's above the law.

"He's saying, 'The laws don't apply to me' and that's wrong," Walker said. "The governor shouldn't do that. All of our elected officials should set an example for obeying the law, especially if it's something that's endangering people's safety."

"His conduct sets a particularly bad example in the context of all the recent problems surrounding the state patrol," Walker added, referring to the sex-misconduct scandal that has plagued the state police since last summer.

Jim Baxter, president of the National Motorists Association, al-



Inquirer file photo

With his apparent love of speed, Rendell (right) must have enjoyed this trip: aboard a Learjet transporting him from Pittsburgh to Johnstown on last full day of gubernatorial campaign in 2002.

so took issue with Rendell's behavior.

"He's asking those people to violate the law so there should be some consequence for that, as there would be for anyone else," Baxter said.

Steve Oesch, senior vice president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, said high speed contributes to severe injuries and fatalities in car crashes.

"It is well-known that speeding increases both the frequency, as

well as the severity of crashes," he said.

"At these higher speeds it's going to be very difficult for the vehicle structure to hold up and for

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Don't deny it, Ed, I lived through it

A H, EDDIE! Don't even try that "My-driver-speeds-I-don't" routine.

Do not for a second suggest you're an innocent passenger on the road of life or on the road between Philly and the Burg.

I been there, pal. Been in the car with you at 105 mph on the turnpike or, as perhaps it should now be known, "The Eddiebahn."

Remember? It was the '02 campaign and you were, as always, running late and so urged, in fact, I'd say vigorously urged, campaign driver/sidekick Charlie Breslin, aka Chaz Braz, to go, go, go. And go he did.

I remember leaning forward for a gander at the ol' speedome-



JOHN M. BAER

ter and thinking, geez, 105 seems a tad extreme to get to an endorsement by the mayor of Steelton, a borough of 5,000 some 85 miles west of Philly.

But, hey, such is life in the fast lane.

And it wasn't the only time I was in your car when traffic safety took a backseat.

I zipped through South Philly and Center City with you as you bounced up and down in the front passenger seat, offering

words of encouragement such as "faster, faster!"

And the only thing, as I recall, diverting your attention from a need for speed was a street corner Dunkin' Donuts.

"Mmmm," you said at a red light, "dunky doughnuts."

"We don't have time for dunky doughnuts!" barked the Chaz as he punched the big black Chrysler through the intersection.

Then there was the City of the Angels, where I thought I'd become one.

I remember experiencing G-forces on separate L.A. freeways — Beverly Hills and Laurel Canyon, if memory serves — during the 2000 convention, when you were national Democratic chairman.

(Remember limo driver Mark Holmes, whom you made crazy?)

I felt like an extra in a Hollywood cop-chase scene.

Face it, Ed. You like to go fast. You got lots to do, time's a-wasting, so you go fast.

It's no surprise to me that my colleague Nicole Weisensee

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A sign of the times: Get outta the left lane!

By **NICOLE WEISENSEE EGAN**
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Gov. Rendell apparently does not like left-lane drivers getting in the way of his speeding limo.

He instructed an aide to have the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission install signs warning motorists out of the fast lane, sources said.

Now, there are 25 signs on the turnpike warning, "Keep Right, Pass Left. It's the law." A dozen of the signs are between Harrisburg and Philadelphia, said Carl DeFebo, a turnpike commission spokesman, and more are scheduled to be installed on other parts of the turnpike.

The signs have appeared since last summer, DeFebo said. Rendell was sworn in as governor in January 2003. Neither DeFebo nor Kate Philips, Rendell's spokeswoman, would confirm

that the signs were put up a Rendell's request.

"I couldn't comment on if he did or didn't have that done," Philips said. "I would say that it's typical that signs enforcing the law would be displayed."

The 8-by-5-foot signs cost \$670 each, DeFebo said. Turnpike tolls pay for them.

Another Philadelphia politician pushed the law that bans left-lane driving. That law, repealed in the late-1970s, was reinstated in June 1999 thanks to state Sen. Vince Fumo.

Fumo, a South Philadelphia Democrat, noticed from his turnpike travels how many motorists linger in the left lane. The law bans left-lane driving for more than two miles at a time.

The penalty for breaking the law is a \$25 fine, plus court costs, said a state transportation spokesman. ★

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Egan reports today that you were clocked at least nine times busting a hondo in your trooper-driven Edmobile.

I especially like that you got more signs put up to clear the left lane.

Hey, why not just add an "executive" lane? Or contract Cadillac for a hovercraft? Or amend the new state slogan: Pennsylvania, the State of Independence e From Traffic Laws If You Happen to Be Its Governor.

All this, of course, will lead to

jokes. A friend suggests: How many state troopers does it take to transport Ed Rendell? All of them: one to drive and 4,999 to look the other way.

But seriously. You might want consider slowing things down.

Even if we put aside questions of leadership by example, feelings of entitlement, abuse of power and things of that nature, there's a more basic question of safety, including your own.

Driving with flashing lights and sirens? What could be the "emergency"? Tipoff of a Penn game? Opening of a new Taco Bell?

Whatever it is, it isn't worth endangering lives.

And, remember, if you go, we get Gov. Catherine Baker Knoll.

Nice lady. But, you know, a little loopy.

Just last week she told the Wilkes-Barré *Citizens' Voice*, "We expect to be here for eight more years." And capitolwire.com reports that while presenting a proclamation, she read your name as "Edward G. Robinson."

I'm just sayin'. So fess up, slow down, don't be Too Fast Eddie. ★

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 Continued from Page 4

the airbag and the seat belts to provide protection," he said. "That's for the vehicle traveling at that speed, as well as any vehicle that gets struck by that speeding vehicle."

Rendell enjoys a reputation for chronic lateness and traveling fast.

In May 2002, during the campaign for governor, *Daily News* columnist John M. Baer was in Rendell's car as the candidate urged his driver to 105 mph on the turnpike.

When he was Philadelphia's mayor, Rendell was notorious for pressuring his drivers to get him to appointments on time.

"He was always yelling to his driver, 'Go! Go! Go!'" said one person who frequently rode with the ex-mayor but who didn't want to be identified. "He was always in a frantic rush to get somewhere quick because he's always running late."

On the evening of Dec. 22, 1998, Rendell, late as usual, was on his way to a funeral for a city worker when his car rammed a 1990 Nissan at Henry Avenue and Port Royal Street in Roxborough, police said.

Rendell's driver, Joseph Rima-

to, ran a red light on Henry Avenue and hit the other car, a witness told police. Rima to said he had been using the emergency lights and siren, and had paused at the red light before entering the intersection, according to city records.

Kathleen Blum, a passenger in the Nissan, told police that Rendell hopped out of his car and told them, "This is my fault. This is my driver. We'll take care of you," police said.

Blum, then 18, injured her right knee in the accident. The driver, then-18-year-old Monica Borthwick, hurt her neck, back and knee, according to city records. Rendell had minor injuries from his car's airbag.

Blum and Borthwick sued the city. The city settled the case before trial for \$131,000 in January 2002. City solicitors noted in the settlement recommendation that, under state law, lights and sirens are supposed to be used only for emergencies and that going to a funeral is not considered an emergency.

Rendell isn't the only public official who has been caught speeding.

In a November report, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety chastised politicians for their cavalier attitude about speeding.

"With little or no stigma attached to this particular brand of law-breaking, even image-conscious politicians joke about their lead-footed tendencies," the report said.

The most notorious example in recent years is former Congressman Bill Janklow of South Dakota. Janklow collected 12 speeding tickets during a four-year period in the 1990s. When a police officer gave him a warning instead of a ticket for speeding in June 2003, he thanked the "polite gentleman who cut me a little bit of slack," the report said.

Two months later, Janklow ran a stop sign at 71 mph and killed a motorcyclist. He reportedly told a trooper he had seen the sign, but had been going too fast to stop. He was convicted of felony manslaughter and reckless driving and resigned from office in January. He began serving a 100-day sentence in jail in February while he appeals his convictions.

Pennsylvania's penalty for driving at high speed can be severe. Philadelphia defense attorney Charles Peruto Jr., who frequently defends traffic violators, said motorists caught exceeding the speed limit by 40 mph can lose their license, even for a first offense. ★

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